

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "Revelation: A new heaven and earth"
 Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6 & 22:1-5

Rev. Steve Filyk

July 27, 2025

Opener: Come thou fount

Choruses: Revelation Song & Cornerstone

After sermon: There is a redeemer

Closer: Crown him with many crowns

Have you ever wondered, really wondered,
 what comes after this life?

What hopes or questions stir in your heart
 when you think about life beyond death?

Maybe you imagine reunion.
 Seeing the familiar smile,
 hearing the laugh or voice
 of someone you still carry in your heart.

Maybe you imagine a release from suffering.
 Being able to walk
 Without pain shooting down your legs
 and up your back.

Maybe you imagine justice.
 Seeing those who walked over others
 So freely, finally being called to account.

Maybe you imagine boredom.
 You've never been much of a singer
 But John's book describes heaven
 like an hymn-sing that never ends.

Today we are at the end
 Of our seven-week journey through the book of revelation.

As I mentioned at the beginning,
 Revelation is a vivid "apocalyptic prophecy
 In the form of a circular letter."

(Buist M Fanning "Revelation" Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 31)

While there are many ways to approach the book's structure,
 Include those chapter and verses found in our modern Bibles,
 One of the more recent approaches is to see it
 As a series of "four major visions
 Spread out between the prologue and epilogue"

(Buist M Fanning "Revelation" Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 59)

From that perspective,
 Today's readings show us the end of the third vision
 which describes a new heaven and earth
 and the beginning of the fourth vision
 which portrays the arrival of the new Jerusalem.

These visions depict the end of human history.
 These visions depict the end of our own earthly stories.
 They offer us insight into what to expect
 From life after life and death.

So what do these visions reveal???
 A lot less that what most of us would want...

There are hints about a different kind of cosmos: no more night.
 There are suggestions changes in geography: just land, no sea.
 We are given a description of the architecture
 of the new Jerusalem: one gigantic cube.
 And we are told that this world is lacking both internal and external afflictions:
 There is no more "death or mourning or crying or pain"

Of course there are a couple elements
 That are both portrayed and declared
 As if to say that among all the details
 These are the visions' main points.

First of all, we are told that this end of human history
Is marked by God's presence with his people.

We see this in a description of the arrival of the new Jerusalem.
Like science-fiction movies that show an enormous mothership
Appearing in the sky and landing on earth,
Jerusalem is described as an enormous cube descending from heaven.

In the passage that we skipped over (between our two readings)
We are told that the city is (1200 stadia) 2200 kilometers squared.
Just for comparison Mt. Everest is about 9 kilometers above sea level.

Beyond the sheer size,
This description has a symbolic presentation.
1200 stadia is a multiple of twelve.
[The city also has 12 foundations and 12 gates.]

As to the city's shape, in several ancient cultures
especially in the Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions
the cube was associated with perfection, stability, and divine order...

In the Old Testament, the Holy of Holies
the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem
was also perfect cube:

"The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long,
twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high..." (1 Kings 6:20)

What we are being shown is that at the end of human history,
God's presence is no longer confined to a limited area.

Just to be sure that we don't miss this,
What is described is also stated explicitly:
"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people,
and he will dwell with them.
They will be his people,
and God himself will be with them
and be their God." (Revelation 21:3)

This is the first item that is highlighted for us.

We are also shown
That humankind is in a restored relationship with their Creator.
People are described as having God's holy name
Stamped on their foreheads.
[a call-back to God's sealing of the 144,000
and the Devil's own marking of his own.]

That people would have God's very name on their foreheads is significant.

Observant Jews avoid writing the Lord's name out of reverence
and to avoid the risk of it being defaced, erased, or misused.
We have all been taught in the Ten Commandments
To not take the Lord's name in vain.

But here we see that people have God's name stamped on them.
As if to demonstrate that there are no concerns
That these people's words or behaviors
Will damage the reputation of their Creator.

What is depicted about this restored relationship
Is again made explicit in an astounding statement:
"They will see his face."

How does this strike you?
Having God look at you, seeing you,
And looking at God in the eyes?

If I'm honest, the thought feels overwhelming, even a little terrifying.
We spend so much of life managing
what others see in us: hiding flaws, polishing appearances.
And here we are told that we will be staring into the eyes
Of the one who knows everything about us.
This strikes me as terrifying.

But there is no description of screams of fear.
No descriptions of the people retreating in shame.

How can this be?
Well it comes down to the presence of the Lamb
Who shares the throne with God.

That sense of nakedness and shame
That we feel when put under the microscope of others,
A shame that first appeared
with the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden
Has now been eradicated.

Our very real fear of being destroyed
By proximity to a Holy God
(even a man like Moses was only able
To withstand seeing God's backside)
has been overcome.
The Lamb has broken the curse
And removed the shroud of sin and darkness.
Jesus lived the righteous life that God demanded.
And he offers that righteousness to us in exchange
For all our rebellion, sin, and shame.

Because of the Lamb, God's people
Are able to bear God's name of their foreheads,
They are able to see him face to face.

Jesus' righteousness covers them
From God's wrath against sin and injustice,
And elevates them to the exalted status
Of daughters and sons of God.

This is John's vision of heaven.
God dwells with God's people.
They live in restored relationship.

Right now "we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12)
We can barely grasp this vision
Of standing in God's perfect presence.
It is so far from our everyday lives.

But here's the beautiful truth:
we don't have to wait until the end of all things
to begin experiencing that relationship.
Even now, the invitation is open.

Did you hear it?
Did you catch that invitation made by the one
Who describes himself as the Alpha and Omega,
Both the beginning of human history and its good end?
"To the thirsty I will give water without cost
from the spring of the water of life."

Helen Keller—who was blind and deaf from infancy—once wrote:
"I believe that God is in me
as the sun is in the colour
and fragrance of a flower—
the Light in my darkness, the Voice in my silence."
(Helen Keller, Light in My Darkness (originally published as My Religion, 1927))

She spent her life without seeing a single face or hearing a single voice.
Yet she lived with an inner sense of God's nearness—
and longed for the day when that invisible presence
would become visible reality.

This is exactly what Revelation promises
Beyond all our hopes for seeing lost loved ones,
Or being released from our suffering,
Or knowing that the wicked will face judgement,

What Revelation promises is that
"[we] will see his face..."
Thanks be to God, amen.