

Apocalyptic Hope: Triumph of the New Kingdom Revelation 21-22

Today we are wrapping up the series Apocalyptic Hope. We have been working through the book of Revelation. Many associate it with fear, destruction, judgment, and the end of the world, but Revelation is actually an apocalypse or an unveiling. John is being shown a reality that we can't see with our natural eyes. When we look without spiritual eyes, we see that there is more hope than fear to be found in Revelation.

Quick Recap:

- Week 1 - Revelation unveils a hope we were never meant to fear
- Week 2 - Jesus is alive, present, and holds the future
- Week 3 - Jesus calls His Church to remain faithful
- Week 4 - God is on the throne, and the Lamb has conquered
- Week 5 - Evil will be judged, but grace is still being offered
- Week 6 - We finally see where all of this is going

New Heaven and New Earth:

Read Revelation 21:1-8. John sees a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and earth have passed away. The old order of things is gone.

Throughout Scripture, God has been working toward the resolution of what sin has corrupted. In Genesis, God creates and declares His creation as good. Humanity is made in His image and invited into relation with Him, but sin introduces brokenness, suffering, death, and separation.

Now at the end of Revelation, John sees the fulfillment of God's redemptive work. The things that John is being shown here is a direct connection to what the prophet Isaiah wrote about thousands of years before.

Read Isaiah 65:17-19. Think about what that means...no more families torn apart by death; no more people suffering from abuse, violence, or injustice; no more addiction destroying lives; no more grief over what has been lost. Everything that has corrupted the goodness of God's creation is finally defeated and everyone who has remained faithful will be the children of God.

What do you envision when you think about heaven? Pearly gates? Streets of gold? A mansion on a hill? These images have shaped the way generations of Christians imagine eternity. Some are connected to Scripture, but I can't help but think that we have spent so much time imagining what heaven will look like that we have missed what God is actually promising.

We tend to think of heaven as somewhere we go when we die...a beautiful place where we can finally escape everything that is wrong with the world. While Scripture absolutely gives us hope beyond death, the final chapters of Revelation show us something even greater. The story doesn't end with humanity escaping creation. It ends with God making creation new.

According to C.S. Lewis:

In *The Last Battle*, the final book in the The Chronicles of Narnia series, C.S. Lewis imagines his characters entering Aslan's Country. They discover a world that is more real, more beautiful, and more alive than the Narnia they had known. Everything good about the old world is there but somehow greater. As they explore, they keep calling to one another: "Further up and further in!"

Lewis imagines eternity as something full of discovery, life, and wonder: not an endless repetition of the same day, not a world that has lost everything good, but a reality in which goodness is experienced in a fullness we cannot yet comprehend. Of course, Lewis is writing fiction, but I think his imagination helps us consider what it means for God to make all things new.

New Jerusalem:

What if everything good that we experience in creation today is only a glimpse of what God ultimately intends? We don't know exactly what the new creation will look like, but we know the One who is making it new.

Read Revelation 21:9-11. If you keep reading, you will see many of the familiar images: pearly gates, streets of gold, precious stones. But remember how Revelation communicates. John is using apocalyptic imagery to reveal theological truth. The city is also described as the bride; the wife of the Lamb.

The vision is about more than buildings and streets. The city's beauty communicates the glory and holiness of God. The city has 12 gates bearing the names of Israel's tribes and 12 foundations bearing the names of the apostles. The imagery draws together God's covenant people across the biblical story.

Read Revelation 21:22-27. There is no temple in the city. Why? God and the Lamb are its temple. Through the Old Testament, the tabernacle and the temple represented God's presence among His people, but in the New Jerusalem, God's people dwell directly in His presence. There is no need for the sun or moon because God's glory gives it light.

The gates never need to close because there is no longer any threat. Think about the first time that a gate is ever mentioned in scripture: when God placed a cherubim and a flaming sword at the entrance into the garden of Eden. It was the symbolism of the separation between God and humanity. Now there is no need for separation because there is nothing left that can separate us from God! We can finally return to the garden!

Return to the Garden:

Read Revelation 22:1-5. This imagery should make you think about the first chapter of Genesis with the Tree of Life, the River, and humanity dwelling in God's presence. But this time there is no curse or even the risk of a curse. This is what God intended from the beginning. What was broken in Genesis is made whole in Revelation and the entire biblical story is the journey of God's faithfulness through all of human history.

Read Revelation 22:6-7. Remember, Revelation is telling of what is still to come; not what has already happened. That means that the invitation is still open.

Hope for the Future:

Read Revelation 22: 12-17. The final verses of Revelation return our attention to Jesus. He says that He is coming soon. He is the Alpha and the Omega; the Beginning and the End. He is both the Root of Jesse and the Offspring of David. The One who began the story is the One who will bring it to completion.

The challenge for the churches receiving this letter wasn't for them to try to figure out *when* He would return. It was whether they would remain faithful to Jesus in the meantime.

Hope should change how we live. In one of his nonfiction books, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis made an interesting observation about Christians who were deeply focused on heaven. He

argued that the Christians who accomplished the most good in the present world were often those who thought most seriously about the world to come. Their hope for eternity didn't make them less concerned about the suffering around them. It motivated them to participate in God's work here and now.

I think that's an important reminder for us. Revelation wasn't written so that Christians could escape responsibility for the present world. It was written to help them to remain faithful within it.

Revelation doesn't pretend that evil doesn't matter. God's judgement means that what destroys life will not be permitted to continue forever. But the same book that speaks so seriously about judgment ends with an invitation to receive life.

If we believe that God is making all things new: We should be people who participate in His work of restoration, who bring hope into suffering, who work toward healing rather than contributing to brokenness, and whose lives reflect the character of the Lamb. **Our hope for the future should shape our faithfulness in the present.**

For the past six weeks we have returned to the same promise: "I am making everything new!" Now we have seen where the story is going. Evil and death does not have the final word. God will dwell with His people. Creation will be restored.

From the Beginning:

There is something we need to remember as we finish this series. This promise didn't begin with John on the island of Patmos. It didn't begin with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. It reaches all the way back to the beginning of everything.

In Genesis, God creates a good world with humanity made in His image. We are created for relationship with God and with one another. But humanity turns away, sin enters the story, and creation is broken. And even in the midst of that rebellion...God begins revealing His promise to restore what has been lost.

Read Genesis 3:15. Christians have long understood that God's words about the offspring of the woman defeating the serpent as an early glimpse of the victory that would ultimately come through Jesus. From that moment forward, Scripture begins tracing God's faithfulness to that promise through generations of imperfect people; families marked by conflict, failure, and brokenness; and a nation that repeatedly turns away from Him. Humanity is unfaithful again and again but God remains faithful.

Reflection Questions:

- What stands out to you most about God's promise to make all things new? How does this give you hope in the midst of the brokenness we see in the world today?
- Revelation describes a future where God dwells with His people and nothing separates them from Him. How does this deepen your understanding of what eternity with God will be like?
- If our hope for the future should shape our faithfulness in the present, what might that look like in your everyday life?
- Revelation ends with an invitation to receive life through Jesus. What response is God calling you to make, and how can you remain faithful as you wait for His return?