

## **Sermon** Heaven is not out of this world

**Reading:** Revelation 22: 6-12

### **Introduction**

When I started the teaching series on the book of Revelation I asked a question, 'If you could read a future newspaper today, would you?'

Reading a future newspaper and reading the book of Revelation may hold a certain amount of intrigue and curiosity as we ponder the events and wonder how all of these things have happened and where will it all end? Reading an ordinary newspaper today and without faith will probably produce a certain amount of stress and anxiety. Imagine reading today's newspaper two years ago, wondering why everyone is wearing masks and mass vaccination programmes and lockdowns, it all sounds terrifying!

What we must remember when we read the book of Revelation is to read it with faith. Don't read with fear but ask God to open our eyes to see what John saw. We will begin to see a great and wondrous truth, which is hidden to the casual reader. The focus of the book of Revelation makes the future so glorious, this is the eyes and heart with which we need when we study this amazing book.

The book of Revelation is the persecuted Christians favourite book. Rather than being ushered into a dark place of fear and anxiety, we discover they are lifted up and enthralled to a place of light and hope. John says when this book is read aloud and we take it to heart, we are promised a blessing. We only discover the hidden treasure and pearl of great price, when we read it in faith and take it to heart.

Many think this book is a strange book about the end times, but the gem of this book is it's a book about Jesus, gloriously resurrected, King of Heaven, the Lamb who was slain and the only one worthy to break open the seals on the scroll (**Rev 5**). Jesus is seen as the mighty warrior who destroys all of His enemies with the double edged sword of His mouth. When our eyes are fixed on Jesus, our Eternal, Sovereign and Reigning King, the news in this book is wondrous and amazing.

### **Context**

The angel has shown John so much in these visions. He has heard the heavenly counsel in the throne room of God and has watched the cataclysmic events happening in the world. He has listened to the saints in heaven crying out to God and witnessed the lamb breaking open the seals on the scroll which unleashed the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse. John has seen empires come to naught and the armies amassing against God's people and the City God loves (Jerusalem) being destroyed. The angel tells John, 'Write these words down for they are trustworthy and true' (**Rev 22:6**). For God has revealed these events and John records all he sees.

Then the voice of the one speaking to John changes. It's the angel who is speaking in verse 6 but then in verse seven the voice changes. It's a voice John has heard before and hears the One who speaks with authority and power, it's Jesus and He says, "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll" (**Rev 22:7**).

### **Heaven is not out of this world!**

I have titled this sermon, 'Heaven is not out of this world!' It's a thought provoking statement because many of us believe Heaven is out of this world. I thought when our life

is over we will leave this world to enter heaven for all eternity. Is that what you thought? Your not alone. This is not what the early church taught, nor what the Scriptures speak of. The great hope in the message of the gospel of Jesus has been neglecting to preach and teach about the Kingdom of Heaven with any clarity which has unfortunately created a vacuum which has left people to fill in the gaps with their own ideas and imaginations.

If you were to speak to your friends or family members and ask them about heaven, what do you think they may say? Other faiths will have their own ideas and belief systems which are based in nothing more than mans imaginations, without any evidence or substance. Many in the West seem to hold to a fairytale fantasy which is a strange belief of a world continuing where everything was left off! For the non religious they may believe there is only darkness, nothing, everything is lost, for this is all there is!

One of the most common things I hear at funerals gatherings sounds something like this, 'Uncle Jack will now be down the pub with his mates and his wife Freda will be waiting for him'. This may be great for uncle Jack and his mates, but what puzzled me was this thinking for many years was this - are there are people who have died whose eternal ambition and heavenly goal is to spend their eternal life serving pints to uncle Jack and his friends!! If we were to chat with uncle Jack's wife Freda, is she really wanting to spend eternity waiting for her inebriated husband to come home for his tea and fall asleep in front of the TV while she does the dishes? Even the blessed Martha complained to Jesus when she was left to deal with all of the duties, I doubt heaven would be heaven if this is all it is!!!

When the church remains silent on these questions, a vacuum is created and sadly the gaps will be filled in with strange ideas, wishful thinking.

### **What is our eternal soul?**

When our body dies, our soul leaves. We are not a body with a soul, we are in fact a living soul that has a body. We will return to God who has given us life. We will either be in the place Jesus has prepared for us (**John 14**), a paradise which Jesus promises the thief on the cross (**Luke 23:43**). Or we will spend our time waiting in a place called Hades, like the rich man Jesus spoke about when He told us about the beggar called Lazarus, (**Luke 16:19-31**). Many wonder and ask what is the soul, the simple answer is 'You are!' The soul is you. Our bodies are just the vehicle in which our soul interacts with the physical and material environment around us. But more than that when we are born again, our bodies become a Temple for the Holy Spirit. When the body dies our soul temporarily separates from the body. We are not destined to float around eternity in a spiritual realm as a disembodied spirit, for Jesus speaks of resurrection when bodies and souls unite, but this time prepared for eternity. We will no longer age, grow weary, become ill, there will be no more death.

What is fascinating is not everyone will die, for Jesus says, 'Look I am coming soon' (**Rev 22:7**). The most neglected doctrine of the church is Jesus return. Jesus is not planning to spend an eternity dwelling in a spiritual realm, but is in fact returning back in the flesh, to this world, to reclaim it back for His own and those faithful servants who have died will return with Him.

Its worth noting at this point, we are not going to leave this world and spend an eternity living in a world that resembles this one, so uncle Jack and his mates can fulfil the eternal ambitions of a barmaid!! Now I'm sure this will disappoint some who are reading this, but when we think about what the Scriptures actually say, we find something far more amazing and beautiful. Why the church does not speak on these matters is bemusing. The evangelists of the early church spoke of a resurrection of the body.

Jesus says, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he dies' (**Jn 11:25**). We will be like Jesus at the resurrection, we will be restored to bodies which will be physical and eternal, and listen to this, we will reign with Christ in His New Creation. If that doesn't excite you I've no idea what will!

### **What and how we worship!**

When we reach verse eight, John is filled with awe and wonder of what he has seen and heard and falls to the floor at the angels feet who has shown him these great things, and John worships. I imagine John was embarrassed when he wrote these words, because the angelic being rebukes John, God alone is only to be worshipped. The bible is an honest book and John an honest writer. The bible shows us the mistakes even the saints make. Think about king David's indiscretion, Davids disaffected children, Peter's denial of Jesus, Thomas doubted, John worships in the wrong way. Its truly an honest book, this is what shows us its real. Our hero's of faith were not perfect!

So why did John worship an angel? Have you ever watched a child who has become so excited that they just run around wanting to hug everyone as their joy pours out from them, with an unrestrained exuberance filled with excitement. John was overwhelmed and enthralled in his excitement, simply falls to the floor in worship, John is unaware of what he is doing and so the angel challenges him, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God' (**Rev 22:9**). John is showing us through his own error, we must be careful how we worship and to whom our worship is directed.

Worship and obedience go hand in hand. Our acts of obedience should flow out of a heart of worship. We should want to love others, be generous, showing hospitality, building each other up because of what Jesus has done for us. But our relationships with one another as wonderful as they may be, must not usurp God. The Greatest Commandment is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength (**Mark 12:30**). We may wonder how can I demonstrate my love to God, well thats easy, firstly we direct our worship to Him, making nothing else our god, and secondly we demonstrate our love is not just words and emotions, doing so when we feel like it, but our love flows out of obedience to His word and decrees. John writes these words, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love' (**2 John 1:6**). As worship and obedience go hand in hand, John shows us what follows on obedience and worship has to be proclamation!

Have you noticed we always talk about those things which we are excited about. It may be our grandchildren, our hobbies, holidays, interests etc. All these are good things to speak of and we do so because they bring us joy. So why is it then that we never speak of worship, the joy of the Lord and what it means to be a Christian? John wants us to see in his final chapter of writings, our proclamation, sharing faith and telling the good news is not only a command in the great commission (Matt 28) but its important for our personal faith.

We have good news to share to a lost and dying world who are on the way to hell without it. So the angel tells John, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near' (**Rev 22:10**). We must share what we know.

As I have already spoken earlier, the early church has a message which is so amazing, so divine, so wonderful, it's a message of hope. It may sound unbelievable and yet all of the facts demonstrated this is in fact true. This was the early churches testimony, and the words of this prophecy were given for the suffering church.

## Seek and save the lost

It was said when revival preachers went into new towns and cities they would ask the prayer teams to focus their prayers on the towns biggest scoundrels, drunkard and most notorious, so when this person was converted, their transformed life became a living testimony to the transformational power of God through the Holy Spirits outpouring with the sharing of the gospel. To see a life on a road to destruction, lost in drunkenness, darkness and debauchery and other evils, to a life filled with light and a living hope in Jesus is extraordinary. Why has the church lost sight of this?

A casual reading of verse eleven of this book appears to be encouraging people to continue to live in their sins. But this is not what John is saying. Look again at what it says, 'Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile, let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy' (**Rev 22:11**). To give you a practical example, remember when children are acting up and they are really pushing the boundaries, we may give them a warning which may sound like this, 'Keep that up (name) and see what will happen!' The parent is not asking the child to continue with their bad behaviour, instead they are providing them with a warning, an opportunity to think about the consequences, if they persist in this behaviour, it's not going to end well for them. The words here are intended to give a final warning, a wake up call before the judgment comes. Jesus has already told us once and will tell us again later in this chapter, 'I am coming soon!' (**Rev 22:7; 12**)

John has provided a list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God in **Rev 21:8** saying, 'But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the murderous, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolators and all liars - they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death' (**Rev 21:8**). This list is not exhaustive for John also adds, the vile. Who or what is the vile? Simply those who are extremely unpleasant, foul mouthed, coarse, nasty, those whose hearts are filled with wickedness, jealousy, gossipers, the disagreeable, horrid and horrible, basically it's the morally bad. Which of us will not fit into one of these categories at some point in our lives? There is bad news if we continue, but saving grace when we turn to Jesus in repentance and belief.

So now John contrasts the wicked and vile behaviours with those which are good and commendable, saying those who do good should continue doing good and maintain their good behaviour, attitude, not to give up, lose heart and be discouraged. And concludes the holy ones to continue in their holiness. Our lives should become sacred to God, saintly, devout and hallowed. Because we are reminded there is a time when everything will come to an abrupt end, as Jesus says, "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. (**Rev 22:12**). If there was ever a reason to repent and turn away from our wrong behaviours and vile attitudes it is because Jesus is coming. The warning is clear. For those who are righteous in Christ, those who do good and live a holy life should continue in these pursuits, even when persecution and dangers come. Why? for the same reason as stated above, because Jesus says, 'Look, I am coming soon'"

## Summary

This passage reminds us to be careful how we are to worship, be obedient to God's word and commands, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally live our lives in His service, doing all He asks of us. Loving each other and building one another up, all the more as we say the day approaching. And may we be found worthy on that day when He comes, for His praise and glory. **Amen**