

Heaven and earth shall flee away

Revelation 21:1-8

Sunday, 28th December 2014

Let me ask you a few questions. How's your body been during 2014? Any aches and pains? Any times when you didn't feel very well? During 2014 I've had a bit of a back problem and recently I've been seeing a chiropractor, I've also had a few colds and a few days when I had real man flu. Sadly all of us suffer to some extent with things going wrong with our bodies. Indeed some suffer in ways that the rest of us find hard to imagine. But whether we suffer a bit or a lot one thing is for certain – this life is temporary and death is inevitable. However, one of the wonderful things about being a Christian is we can reflect on the joys of heaven and the age to come in preparation for leaving this world.

Reflecting on heaven for a few minutes each day would probably be quite helpful as we seek to cope with the trials and tribulations of this life! As Advent reminds us – as followers of Jesus we are citizens of another age, we are called to look forward and prepare for his return. We are not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And that renewing means conformed to the newness of the age to come, because God says in our passage today, "I am making everything new" (Revelation 21:5).

In a few days we move from 2014 to 2015 – but today let's go a bit further and ponder the Greatness of the Age to Come. Let's see what's in store for us and for creation. A possible danger of doing this is we decide not to bother with this present time because we are so focussed on the age to come. But actually the opposite is more likely because the more we recognise our destiny is glorious and certain the more we'll be free to live the most radical life of love and sacrifice here on earth. Imagine somebody falls out of an airplane with no parachute on and you don't have one either, you're not going to jump out after them. It won't do any good. Two deaths aren't better than one. But if you have a parachute on, you just might try one of those awesome rescue attempts, and free fall like a bullet to catch the helpless and pull your cord. It's the hope of safety in the end that releases radical, sacrificial love now. Our assurance of the hope of heaven releases the radical, risk-taking love that makes people look at our lives...and sees us jumping out of an airplane to save another person. And they say, "Hey how can you jump out of the comfort and safety of this airplane?" And our answer is... "We have a parachute called the hope of glory."

Revelation is a book about the hope of glory. Jesus gives this revelation of himself to his apostle John some 2,000 years ago. Just as it was for Christians all those years ago, it still stands as a comfort and challenge to God's people today. We can take heart as we understand John's vision of hope – Jesus will return to rescue his people and settle accounts with all who defy him.

So in relation to our specific passage let's look again at verse 5 where God says, "I am making everything new!" Now notice how (CLICK) God is sitting on his throne when he says it—the throne of the universe. "He who is seated on the throne said, "I am making

everything new”...And then he adds, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." God wants us to read this and be sure of it. He wants us to have assurance - no matter how much evil and suffering and futility we see now, he will make all things new.

Earlier we sang a carol “In the Bleak Midwinter” – the title represents the world in a state of cold wintry hopelessness. But God had a plan to redeem it and in the second verse the author contrasts Jesus’ first and second coming as we sing “Heaven and earth shall flee away”. Because when Jesus comes again they’ll be the coming together of a new heaven and earth. Look at v1. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away”. As we delve deeper four distinct ways emerge in which God Will Make everything new...

1. God will make us spiritually new.
2. God will make us physically new
3. God will make a new creation
4. God will make our relationship with him new

1. So let's begin by looking at God making us spiritually new.

Let me ask you a question: “how many times do you think you sinned during the last year?” I’d need more than a calculator work out how much I’ve sinned!

As a Christian one of things I find really frustrating is that I still sin. I suspect it’s probably the same for all of us. Romans 7:23-24 says: I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

This war is the most frustrating thing about life in this age—as followers of Jesus we want to be holy but we fall short of the holiness we long for. We want to love but we say hurtful things. We want to worship but we feel cold. We want to walk in peace but we feel anxiety. We want to be pure in thought but impurity bombards our minds. There’s some progress as the Holy Spirit has now set up residence in our hearts to comfort, counsel, convict, lead, and teach us and helps us in our weakness. But what we long for is deliverance from this sinning we all continue to fall into. Here’s some really good news: God promises when he makes all things new we will be made spiritually and morally new—not just partially as now, but wholly.

Look at verse 2: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”. This is a picture of the church prepared and beautified for her husband, Jesus Christ. When God makes all things new, he makes the church—the people of God—spiritually and morally beautiful for his Son. In verses 9–11 that follow on from our reading we read: “One of the seven angels....came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal”.

When God makes the bride ready for the Son, the way he does it is by giving us his glory.

"It shone with the glory of God." This glory will purify us so deeply and so thoroughly - we will be like a rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. Don't you long for the day when you will be so good and so right and so pure that you will be like a clear jewel that people will look at and see straight through without seeing any impurity at all? Nothing hidden and nothing shameful. That's the first way God's newness is coming. God will make us spiritually and morally beautiful for our final marriage with his Son. And...

2. God is going to make us physically new.

As a child my image of heaven was floating around like some bodiless spirit. Well the Bible doesn't teach that the final state of glory is one of disembodied spirits. Instead it teaches a very different destiny for God's people. God will make all things new—including our bodies. Hooray – because at the moment playing 5-a-side football every week is getting harder and harder. V4 says: 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' No more death. No more pain. No more tears. The body we know now will be changed. At that moment we know one day the body will die. And sometimes it hurts. And sometimes it cries. If death is gone and pain is gone and tears are gone, then the body as we know it here is gone. Now the temptation is to think – hooray, good riddance to the body of pain. But Revelation is plain - the point is not good riddance to the body but that God will make all things new.

In Philippians 3:20–21 Paul says: Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

So...what do you think of your body at the moment. I'd always wanted to be a bit more muscular. Actually as we look at society today there seems to be only a few people who are satisfied with their body. In the age to come we can look forward to a new body: it will never die again, it will never hurt again, it will never cry again—except perhaps for joy. In this present age many people really suffer, some are deformed, some have lost limbs, some are paralyzed, some can't hear, some can't see, etc... But whatever your situation whether you just want to be a bit more muscular or you're actually really suffering - be assured – if we trust God and accept in Jesus His free gift of salvation then he has no intention of leaving anyone in pain. When Jesus comes again... – No more death. No more pain. No more tears. When God makes all things new, he makes our bodies new. And...

3. God is also going to make the creation new and glorious.

V1 says: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

What this seems to mean is this earth and heaven will be made new. God will restore everything—and everything futile, evil and painful will be done away with. In Romans 8:21 Paul says: "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."

The newness and the glory of the church, the children of God, is primary and first. But then God promises that the glory of his people will demand a glorious creation to live in. So the fallen creation will obtain the very freedom from futility and evil and pain that the church is given. When God makes all things new, he makes us new spiritually and morally, he makes us new physically, and then he makes the whole creation new so our environment fits our perfected spirits and bodies.

Remember God is the creator. The Bible begins with the majestic story of his creation of the universe, and it concludes with his creation of a new heaven and a new earth. But...that doesn't mean to say we can just wreck the world as it is now and don't worry about environmental damage just as in the same way we are still called to look after our current earthly bodies and strive to live lives that are becoming more and more like Christ. Earlier we said: it's the hope of safety in the end that releases radical, sacrificial love now. And that includes radical, sacrificial love for the care and stewardship of God's planet today. And so to our final point....

4. God will make our relationship with him new.

V3 says: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." It's true that God is with us now. His Spirit dwells in us (1 Corinthians 6:19). Jesus promised never to leave us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). But in 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 Paul said (CLICK) "As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight." So there is a deep and painful sense in which we are "away from the Lord"—we do not see as we will one day see. "Blessed are the pure in heart," Jesus said, "for they shall see God." It's a promise - something greater is coming for all of us in our relationship with God. Think of it like this. As a child did you ever have that early conversation about God and say: "But mummy, I can't see him"? Maybe a child has asked you that question. It's a cry from the heart we should never lose and Revelation 22:4 gives the answer to it: "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." But remember to get to this point each and every person must make a choice. Ian reminded us last week that when Jesus returns he will come in glory as King and judge. In the meantime God delays that day so that we might be ready, so that we might repent, recognising Jesus as our saviour, and live with Jesus as King in our lives.

So do we accept or reject Jesus. Because if we choose to reject him, if we are cowardly - by that it don't mean we are faint-hearted in our faith or sometimes doubt or question, but rather we turn back from following Jesus. In other words we reject him and refuse to accept his authority over our lives. If that is our choice then we condemn ourselves to be with the others listed in verse 8. A very self explanatory verse where those listed face permanent separation from God. Or we can choose to accept Jesus. What is the glorious consequence of that decision? Well... when God makes all things new - Heaven and earth shall flee away - the new Jerusalem is where God lives among his people. Instead of our going up to meet him, he comes down to be with us, just as God became man in Jesus Christ and lived among us. He will make us spiritually and morally as pure as flawless crystal, he will give us a body like the body of his glory, he will renovate all creation to take all futility, evil and pain out of

it, and finally he himself will come to us and let us see his face. And forever and ever we will live in the presence and the glory of our Heavenly Father.