

A Future Worth Waiting For

Revelation 21:1-27

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



This spring, Danielle and I made an offer to our three older kids. However much money they managed to save through the end of the year, we would double it. We made this offer to them, wanting to help them learn to build habits of saving money and not just spending it as soon as they got it. Now, to be very honest with you, this is money that they earn by doing above and beyond chores (they have normal chores and do not get an allowance), from their birthdays, or from earning it by doing jobs and chores for others. So, we are not talking about a lot of money here, but the principle is the same, save it, and we'll double it or choose to spend it now... but make sure the juice is worth the squeeze. Here's how that conversation usually goes, we will be in a store, and one of our kids sees something that they really want and usually just can't live without, and they tell us they want to buy it. We then say, "You have \$40 saved right now, that item is \$20, so it would take half of your savings. And that would mean instead of getting \$40 doubled at the end of the year, you would only get \$20 doubled. Is this worth that?" So far, it has caused each of them to pause and really consider if they want to spend their money on whatever has caught their eye. Then, if they choose to buy it, they have really weighed it out, or as it has most often gone, they choose not to buy it all, instead opting to wait for the much bigger payday that is still over four months away... an eternity for a kid.

See, the point of why we're doing this is to, yes, help our kids learn the discipline of saving money, but more than that, we want them to become disciplined people that don't simply chase whatever desirous thing that catches their eyes, instead keeping their eyes fixed on what is truly valuable. And, I am so sympathetic to them in this struggle. Why? It is one that I know first-hand. Want something you probably can't or shouldn't afford? Charge it to the credit card. Know that a hard conversation is better for your friendship or marriage, but don't want to have it? Just avoid it and kick it down the road. So often, we exchange what is best, that is, what is often down the road or requiring hard work, for what is immediate or easy. As we close out our study in the book of Revelation, we are going to find that John gives us a glimpse of our future glory so that we would not be swindled by the false luxuries of Babylon (this temporal age). What lies ahead for the believer is so much better than anything this age can offer. And, by God's grace we get to taste it now in part what we will know in full. In other words, John is telling us, **don't exchange what is best for what is immediate.**

1. A glorious future.

a. Is the eternal state of the believer just some ethereal plain?

i. Thankfully, no.

1. Too often what idea we have of heaven or the eternal state of the believer is this ethereal, non-descript, and even bland idea of existence. It is a place where monotony of doing the same thing over and over again reigns supreme, but at least there's no more pain or suffering. In other words, it is not necessarily exciting but at least it isn't bad.
2. John gives us such a better and more compelling vision of the future state of the believer. It is one where we truly flourish in the fullness of our created purpose while enjoying God completely.

- a. **Then they are taken into the city, where the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, and the tree of life bears fruit and produces leaves for the healing of the nations. When the vision comes to its end, it comes to God and the Lamb, where the redeemed gather around the throne in worship. At last they see the face of God and reign in his light forever.**¹
- b. **The city had *the glory of God*. This is not elaborated, but it is surely the most striking thing about the city.** John proceeds to tell us that *its brilliance was like that of ... precious stone*, further defined as *jasper* and *clear as crystal* (an expression here only in the New Testament).²

ii. I.e., We will live in a totally redeemed and renewed state. (v.1)

1. Renewal does not mean that there will be no literal destruction of the old cosmos, just as the renewed resurrection body does not exclude a similar destruction of the old. That the new creation follows the pattern of Christ's resurrection is demonstrated by the exegetical link between new creation and resurrection, also in allusion to Isa. 65:16–17, in 2 Cor. 5:14–17 and Col. 1:15–18 (cf. Eph. 1:20 with Eph. 2:6–15) and in the Apocalypse itself (see above on 1:5 and 3:14). Strikingly, Paul likewise sees in Rom. 8:18–23 the renovation of the corrupted creation as inextricably linked to the resurrection of the “children of God.” Indeed, *καὶνός* (“new”), as we have seen, refers predominantly to a change in quality or essence rather than something new that has never previously been in existence. This usage of *καὶνός* is especially found in NT contexts describing eschatological or redemptive-historical transitions. **The part of the new creation that John focuses on is the redeemed saints. The vision in 21:2–22:5 is thus dominated by various figurative portrayals of the glorified community of believers.**³

b. What is promised then → Peace and presence.

- i. **Shalom (Peace)** – Not just an absence of conflict, but a complete and total restoration.
 1. **To be brought into a state of completeness or wholeness.**

¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 187–188.

² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 237.

³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1040–1041.

2. This can be used as a verb, i.e., to bring Shalom (wholeness).
 - a. **²³ If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.** (Ex. 18:23)
 - b. Moses' father-in-law to him – If Moses would let able men help him in hearing the people's cases, Moses will be able to endure as a leader and the people with experience **shalom**.
 3. **²⁴ Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.** (Ju. 6:24)
 - a. Gideon declares the Lord is shalom when he receives his call to Judge Israel's enemies.
 - b. Here the Lord is the one who will rescue his people through Gideon and bring them back into wholeness.
 4. **³³ So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever. But for David and for his descendants and for his house and for his throne there shall be peace from the LORD forevermore.** (1 Kings 2:33)
 - a. In the moment of a transfer of power, Joab has ulterior motives and never intended to keep his promise of peace with Solomon.
 - b. **We know that wholeness (shalom) will not always mark the house of David (consider Ahaz), but the "Prince of Peace" will come from David's line and rule forever on David's throne.** (Isa. 9)
 - c. **Jesus is the only one who brings us into an unending and increasing state of wholeness (peace / shalom).**
- ii. **Chicken Soup for the Soul and our desire for peace.**
1. In 1993, the first edition of Chick Soup For The Soul was published.
 - a. It was initially rejected by 30 some publishers.
 2. To date: IN the US & Canada, over 110 million copies of this book have been sold. → At \$12.95 a copy is over \$1.5 billion in revenue.
 3. Worldwide, over 500 million copies have been published if you include all of the spin-off versions.
 - a. That increases revenue to over \$6.5 billion!⁴
 4. **The simple reality of this generational bestseller is that we deeply yearn to live in a state of peace, but something perpetually robs us of peace and wholeness.**
 - a. **The present thief is sin.**
 - b. Then → There will be no sin and no thief.
- iii. **Presence – Actively being with God. → The inexhaustible presence of God. → "He will dwell with them and they will be his people..."**
1. Therefore, in the new creation there is an absence of death, mourning, crying, and pain, for all those marks of the former, fallen world have passed away, together with the sea from which the beast arose (21:1, 4; compare 13:1). **At the same time, the new creation is characterized by the *presence* of the God who gives life. The anguished cry, "Where is your God?" will no longer be heard (Ps. 42:3), for in quick succession, a voice from the throne declares that God's dwelling will be "with humankind"; he will dwell "with them," and "God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3).** Instead of the toxic waters of judgment

⁴ <https://www.metro.us/its-chicken-soup-for-the-soul-day-10-facts-about-the-best-selling-seriesyouve-probably-never-read/>

(8:11; 16:3–4), God will invite them to drink freely from “the spring of the water of life” that flows from his throne (21:6; 22:1).⁵

2. Actively being with God is not being a “drone” in his presence but is the abiding relationship of praising him and him comforting his people.
 - a. **None less than God will be the consoler of his people. He will wipe away every tear. His concern is infinite.** John gives a little catalog of evils which will cease to be. *Death* is first with a certain emphasis. Death has no final triumph and it is well that God’s people see that ultimately it will cease to be. This is the reversal of the curse of Genesis 3 (cf. also 1 Cor. 15:54). So also sorrow and wailing and pain will cease. John sees a reason for this, namely ‘the first things (niv *the old order of things*)’, the things pertaining to the first heaven and earth, will have been completely done away. Life as we know it is completely replaced by the new order. John had wept at the thought that there was no one worthy to open the seals (5:4). Is there no answer to the problem of earth’s evil? His visions have answered that question. The Lamb has conquered. Now he finds that tears, too, have gone forever.⁶
 - b. **V. 7 → He who overcomes** takes us back to the messages to the seven churches (chs. 2 and 3). **The victor is now assured that in the final triumph he will inherit all things. He will have no lack.** Moreover God *will be his God* and he will be God’s *son* (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14). He will have a special relationship to the supreme Ruler of all.⁷
 - c. Peace that makes our trials into things of joy.
 - d. What is promised then → Peace that eliminates any ounce of suffering.

2. Tastes of the future now.

- a. **What is promised now? → Peace and presence.**
 - i. **Peace – Makes our struggles a thing of joy.**
 1. We now get to experience a peace that passes all understanding that will guard our hearts in this present age. (Phil. 4:7)
 2. **²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.** – James 1:2-4
 - ii. **Presence – Abiding connection despite my sin.**
 1. The abiding presence of God – We are not waiting for some future time to connect with the Lord and know his presence. We are waiting for a time where there is no sin to block or cause confusion in our relationship with the Lord.
 2. **⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you**

⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 188–189.

⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 234.

⁷ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 235.

are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. – John 15:4-5

- iii. **One of the realities of Revelation is that it prompts us to consider now how we are experiencing in part what we will one day experience in full.**
 - 1. **This is a gracious gift of God to us.** → He does not ask us to hold on for something down the road that is so foreign, different, and disconnected from our current experience that we cannot fathom it. Even in this, God does not ask us to operate on blind faith. He allows us to experience (even in part) the life that is ahead now. Why? So that we might live faithfully in the days that we are in.
- iv. How do we experience the abiding presence and abundant life of Jesus now?
 - 1. The fruit of the Spirit – Gal. 5:22-24
 - 2. **²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**
- v. This is the list of measurables that we are to look to when it comes to remembering what God has done in our lives and what we are waiting for.
 - 1. **Let us ask – How has God helped me increase in the fruit of the Spirit?**
- vi. The *fruit* of the Spirit, by contrast, give a sure sign of transformed *character*. When our deepest attitudes and dispositions are those of Jesus, it is because we have learned to let the Spirit foster his life in us. Paul confessed: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). The outcome of Christ living within us through the Spirit is fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). ... Both gifts and fruit are the result, not the reality of the Spirit’s presence in our lives. **What brings about our transformation into Christlikeness is our direct, personal interaction with Christ through the Spirit.** The Spirit makes Christ present to us and draws us toward his likeness. It is as we thus “behold the glory of the Lord” that we are constantly “transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18, NASB). – Dallas Willard
- b. A significant factor in our faithfulness is that we get to experience the Lord’s goodness and presence here and now.
 - i. “But is it possible to be like Jesus? Can we actually have the character of the heavenly Father? We know God shows sincere love for everyone and is consistently kind to even the ungrateful. Jesus likewise showed himself to be merciful, freely forgave injuries, and was glad simply to give, expecting nothing back. It is possible, I now believe, to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14). Ordinary people in common surroundings can live from the abundance of God’s kingdom, letting the spirit and the actions of Jesus be the natural outflow from their lives. The “tree” can be made good, and the fruit will then be good as a matter of course (Matt. 12:33). This new life God imparts involves both a goal and a method.” – Dallas Willard
 - ii. **If we are being transformed now into what we will experience in full in the age to come, God is reminding us to hold on and not to exchange what is best for what is immediate.** Lord, let us be found faithful!