

## **The Promise, Revelation 21:1-7**

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### **Introduction**

The season of advent celebrates the coming of the Lord, the Messiah, but there are at least four different arrivals of the Messiah that the Bible points to. The first occasion is the birth of the Lord in the world, as Jesus, to Joseph and Mary, at the manger among the animals. The second occasion is the preaching of John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The third occasion is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, when the children sang 'Hosanna to the son of David.' The fourth occasion is the return of Jesus to the world a second time, in power and glory, no longer to bear sin but to bring salvation.

This advent season Elgin Covenant has been focused on Jesus coming that second time to raise the dead and recreate the universe. The promises of heaven put the rest of life, and all its hopes and dreams, into a godly, spiritual perspective. God has shown us a better promise than that a human king will rule in righteousness over the earth. God has promised us something greater than the worldly glory of Israel. In fact, even if an earthly kingdom of righteous justice were to last a thousand years, that would pale in comparison to humankind's inheritance in the resurrection.

Today's text in Revelation 21 weaves together two promises: first, that everything will be made new, and second, that eternal life is life with God. These are two sides of the same coin.

**Let us pray:** Lord God, King of Glory, we thank you for all that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Help us to look forward to his return by living as though he already has. Amen.

### **1. Life With God**

For the believer, eternal life will be life with God. That is the good news. **“Now the dwelling of God is with humankind, and God will live with them.”**

God in fellowship with living human beings had always been the divine plan. When God created the earth he set apart a garden where he could walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. When sin entered the picture Adam and Eve could no longer endure the holiness of God, so God moved them out of Eden and then created a covenant people from among their descendants. Moses received instructions for creating a veiled space for the LORD among the people of Israel. They built the mercy seat, called the Ark of the Covenant, and set it in a cube-shaped room completely curtained off, with only the carrying poles of the ark poking through and visible. Once a year only the high priest could pass through the curtain into the holy of holies.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God desires to send his Spirit into our hearts as our guarantee of salvation. This is God making each of our lives, our bodies of flesh, a tent, or tabernacle, for himself, to live within us and among us. So this is three ways already that humankind experiences God dwelling among humankind: Eden, the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later the Temple, and now, our own lives born again in water and spirit by which we confess with our lips “Jesus is LORD” and believe in our hearts God raised him from the dead.

In Rev. 21 this fourth promise of God dwelling among humankind is the eternal, permanent fulfillment of what God has wanted all along. Scholars have pointed out that the dimensions of the New Jerusalem, as described to John in verse 15, describe a cube. Not only is the city itself a temple; the city itself is the Holy of Holies, the direct, unveiled, unmediated presence of God. The Spirit of Christ which you have received when you repented is your

deposit and guarantee of this inheritance. The reality already born within you will be fully and eternally revealed when you are raised from the dead with all the others and clothed in glory.

I am stumped on how to illustrate this point, because what human experience comes close to what John is describing? The Cubs won the World Series, fulfilling the minor hopes of over a century of fans. Have you been perpetually joyful and full of bliss the last six weeks? I doubt it. Our lives are still fraught with struggle and pain and hard choices and disappointment.

John offers an illustration that we can relate to from human experience, that the Holy City appears as a bride adorned for her husband. A wedding between two people who are happy about the decision they are making is a joyful thing, but even that falls far short of what John is seeing. In this world a marriage is a promise to struggle through life together. That is not what Revelation 21 is about. The struggle is over. The victory is permanent.

We together are the bride that John sees: hundreds of millions of believers from throughout history are God the Father's gift to his son, for we are all together the ransom of his blood. Like a bride going all out for her wedding, the New Jerusalem will be adorned in gold and precious jewels, and will shine with the light of God through each of our faces as we receive the Christ in glory, to dwell with him in a loving, nurturing, blissful relationship forever.

## **2. Everything New**

Such eternal bliss is only possible if everything is made new; that is, if creation itself is resurrected from its death and its curse and its sting. The promise that everything will be made new is woven together with the promise of life with God.

All creation had been subjected to the curse of death. The physics by which we are governed both sustain our lives and destroy them. Death and decay is built into the function, so that one physicist, an atheist, describes the direction of time from past into future as the direction

of entropy, the gradual unravelling of order into chaos. We see this principle in everything. Our bodies grow up, and then they grow out, and then they wear out. Some diseases attack us from outside, while other diseases are carried in our individual genetic codes and can be triggered by this or that. The sun makes all of life possible on this earth, yet its rays are poisonous and harmful.

That is not a physics that sustains eternal life. Part of this has already been described in Revelation 7 and that vision is expanded starting here and through the end of chapter 21. That John is describing a re-creation with a new physical order is shown by repeated statements that there will be no sun or moon, because God himself is our light; there will be no sea, because God himself is our source of life, shown as living water in heaven. Thanks to Newton and others, you and I know today that without a sun or a moon the new heavens and new earth will be in a relationship to each other no longer defined by gravity as we understand it. All of life will revolve around God directly, who will be our gravity, our life-source, and our light-source.

This glorious picture does not stand by itself. Verses 8 and 27 give us a vision of the lake of fire and those who disqualify themselves from life in the eternal City of God. At other times I have suggested that this may be a vision of the final state of a universe left to its entropy with Christ no longer sustaining it. It is a universe from which the Word, the *logos* of God, the very algorithm of the universe, is withdrawn, so that left on its own it unravels. One physicist defined the death of the universe as final proton decay. By contrast the universe of the resurrection, of the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth, is a universe without entropy because it is a universe without death, sustained by a divine energy that is infinite in the sense that no quantity expended ever depletes the fresh creative power of God.

Verses 8 and 27 are not meant to make some people smug and make other people feel shut out or pre-judged. These verses remind everyone that all of us are in the same condition before God: I'm NOT okay, You are NOT okay, *We together are NOT okay*, unless we each overcome in our lives of flesh and its curse of sin. And that is impossible for any of us to do by our own efforts at smug righteousness.

“I may be sexually immoral but at least I'm not a murderer.”

“Oh yeah? Well I'm only guilty of gossip, so God MUST approve of me.”

No. I'm not okay. You're not okay.

We overcome our flesh and have the victory over the curse of sin in one way, and one way alone, by repenting of our sins and asking God to be our source of life, to re-create us by the water and spirit of Christ. As a church we testify not that we are a company of the smug and the self-satisfied, but that we are a company of the redeemed, of sinners saved by grace. Our desire is to share God's invitation to mercy to everyone by our words and actions as God alone gives us power to do them and speak them. For it is our call as a church to invite into repentance and redemption every murderer – even terrorists; every fornicator – even gay ones; every coward – even fear-mongering bigots; every dabbler – be they psychic hot-line callers or readers of horoscopes; every hypocrite and gossip– even those that in our own bitterness and envy we would rather not forgive: because all of that describes who each one of us has been and would remain being but by the grace of God.

Live your faith in God as one who has overcome. Repent today of your sin and receive for yourself the mercies of God, which you can obtain no other way than by trusting that Jesus Christ is your ransom from sin, and letting his spirit be born in you for the renewing of your

mind and the redemption of your body. Then you are sealed for the new heaven, the new earth, which are your inheritance in the resurrection.

### **Conclusion**

We celebrate Christmas, his first coming, because Jesus Christ was born to bring all of this promise into reality. And though his coming as a baby in a manger happened quietly as far as the world was concerned, heaven could not contain itself. The New Jerusalem was already on display, when a host of angels woke up a company of shepherds, and when a star appeared and rested directly above the place where the Christ of God, the Word Made Flesh, lay sleeping.

All of us are invited to inherit life with God in the New Creation, a new heavens and a new earth. For the old creation is passing away. Entropy dictates the march of time toward an inevitable destiny of death. God, who is infinite in power as well as eternal in life, is the source of our new life in the resurrection. He offers you Christ, now, the one born in a manger, the one raised from the dead, to be born in your hearts for your new life. Amen.