

When you walk with God

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[0 : 00] Revelation chapter 21, starting at verse 22. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, and yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

[1 : 14] No longer will be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night. They won't need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Amen. I want to take a little bit of while now, or a bit of time, just to think about what we read in the book of Revelation. And picture there in chapters 21 and 22, which is really helping us to fast forward into a glorious future.

So I just want to start by fast forwarding with you into a glorious future, which is phase two of our exit from lockdown.

So imagine this glorious picture, that you're walking with friends from more than two households. You're still socially distant, but there's three or four of you meeting up for the first time in several months, and you're just walking around the meadows.

[2 : 31] And you're sharing about lockdown and how it's impacted on you and what went on. And some of it's quite sad. One of your friends is fearful.

And one of your friends feels really just down and apathetic about everything, can't be bothered. Another has really struggled with sexual sin and pornography. And you're listening to their stories, and it just sounds so bad and difficult and hard.

And you're wondering, what on earth do I say? Because hard times often do bring the big questions. I was reading a book this week by a psychologist called Yalom.

And he touches on this issue about the way that hard times bring big questions. And he talks about a book by Tolstoy, the Russian novelist.

It's a short novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. And Ivan is a really mean-spirited, nasty bureaucrat who's dying in agony.

[3 : 41] And as he dies in such pain, he reflects on the idea that he's dying badly because he lived badly.

And that's an insight that brings real change to his life at the end. And that change floods him with peace and meaning in his last days.

And Yalom's comment in that is this, that the idea of death may save us. So I'll say that again. The idea of death may save us. So in other words, reflecting on the end of our life makes us think more deeply about what does it look like to live a worthwhile life and to live my life well.

Contemplating death is good for us. Even secular thinkers will say that. And I think the coronavirus has been one of those kind of moments, those kind of paradigm shifts that make us open to bigger questions.

To think about what am I living my life for? What gives life meaning and purpose? How do I live for the things that are really worth living for and not kind of fritter my life away or trivialize it?

[5 : 05] Think about the Apostle John who wrote the book of Revelation. Think of him walking with his group of friends at the end of the first century.

Walking through a sunlit olive grove. You can imagine the beautiful scene. And these friends are talking about how not a pandemic is affecting them, but talking about how persecution is affecting them and impacting their families.

They've seen family members arrested, tortured, torn to death by the lions. Killed in really cruel and brutal ways. And some of these friends now are fearful.

Some are overwhelmed by apathy. Some have turned to sexual promiscuity. That's what was going on in the churches that John was writing to. And in response, what's John done in the book of Revelation?

Well, he's given them a big view of God. Of Jesus Christ. The risen Jesus who reigns over all things.

[6 : 13] The lamb who was slain. Who now holds history in his hands. And who has thrown Satan out of heaven. And whose kingdom is surely coming.

So he's trying to say to them, there's a great God who rules on the throne of heaven. Who loves you and cares about you. And he also gives them not just a great view or a grand view of God.

But a very intimate view of God. Of the God who invites us to eat with him. A God who invites us to draw near into his presence.

And today I'm going to talk about how this God invites us to walk with him. In the garden of his friendship. So to all of us, no matter how we're kind of going through life at this time.

There's two things here for us. One is a vision of a great God. God who rules over everything. And then the same God who invites us into very personal, close friendship with him.

[7 : 18] And your Thursday thought, your phrase that stays as you wake up late in the week and think, I've watched that service at Cornerstone. What was Neil McMillan talking about? Well, what I'm talking about is this.

We wake up each day to walk in friendship with God. We wake up each day to walk in friendship with God. You might wake up in the morning fearful or anxious or tempted or stressed or feeling sick.

But each day you wake up to walk in friendship with God. That's the purpose. That's the point of every day that we have breath in this world and of life in the world to come.

To walk in friendship with God. So let's just think for a little while about walking with God. We have a beautiful picture in Revelation chapter 21 of the eternal city.

So there are two cities in the book of Revelation. The city of Babylon, which is in opposition to God and to his ways. And then the city of God, which is where God reigns and we live under his good rule.

[8 : 29] And the new creation, the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth that John envisages at the end of time. He talks about the city and he says, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

That's a really interesting idea, I think. You know, what is a temple? Well, if you ask me generally what a temple is, I think about a building. Probably quite a splendid building.

And it's a building that's been created for people to go in and worship. So it's a building where people meet with God or enjoy God's presence. Some kind of edifice or shrine.

But in the Bible, temple simply means any place where God's near intimate presence is found. It's the dwelling place of God.

So in the Bible, temples actually take many forms. At the beginning of the Bible, the temple is the garden where God walks in Eden.

[9 : 39] Later on, as the Jews wander through the wilderness and the desert, the temple is a tent, a tabernacle where God meets with them.

Later on, it is a building, a temple built in Jerusalem where God is present for Israel. Today, if you're a Christian, your body is a temple.

God is present in your life through the gift of the Holy Spirit. And what we're reading is that in the new creation, in the new heavens and the new earth, the temple is the entire cosmos.

God is present immediately and directly everywhere in the new creation. And so there is no temple building. In the new creation, in the new Jerusalem, in the city of God, there is no temple to be seen because the whole cosmos is the temple.

In this world that we all want, God is present immediately and directly for all the people who are there. We all get to see his face.

[10:46] It's the most incredible, intimate, immediate, powerful, joyful, fulfilling experience of God that we could ever imagine.

Our whole life feels utterly fulfilled. We are satisfied in ways we never dreamt of. Every longing is met and made whole in the presence of this glorious God.

As we read into Revelation chapter 22, we read about the river of the water of life that flows from the throne. There's life in fullness and complete abundance.

Life joyful in the presence of God. We will walk in the presence of his light. We will be healed. The fruitful healing of the tree of life lines the banks of this river.

So out of the throne of God, out of the presence of God, flows the fullness of life. For we are satisfied and made whole and given the deepest joy imaginable.

[11:53] And we walk in this light and the nations of the world walk in this light in the new creation. So who lives in a temple? Who lives in the presence of God? Well, a priest.

That's always the way it's described in the Bible. To be a priest is to serve God in his temple, to live in his presence and to walk with him. Adam and Eve, we're told, walked with God in the Garden of Eden, in that temple of God's presence.

So what does it mean to be a Christian in the new creation? It means walking in the presence of God. What does it mean to be a Christian today?

It means walking in the presence of God. So to be a Christian, you might find that quite an...

Especially if you're not a Christian, you might think, what does it mean to be a Christian?

And it seems like quite an abstract set of beliefs, maybe. But this is one way to personalize it. It's saying God is inviting me to go for a walk with him as a friend. He's personal.

[13:00] He's real. He wants to walk in my company. Because to go for a walk is the sign of close friendship, isn't it? And a sign of immediate friendship.

You know, you might be out for a walk with someone and you start arguing. And do you know what will happen? You'll fall out of step. One of you will lag behind. The other will walk away in front.

And when we walk away from someone, we're withdrawing friendship in a really literal way. Well, God always wanted to walk with us.

But we're the ones who walked away. We chose something else other than God. But God says this, I will walk among you and you will be my people and I will be your God.

He wants to be that close to you. To walk side by side with you. Day by day. In the normal circumstances of your life. You don't have to wait for the next life.

[14:02] For that. We're not offering you pie in the sky when you die. We're saying now, here, God invites you into friendship with himself. And God knows that you won't always be the best walking companion.

But be sure of this. He will never, ever tire of your presence. He'll never get bored with you. He'll never get fed up with you.

He'll never walk away from you. God loves his friendship with you if you're a Christian. And if you're not a Christian, God would love to have friendship with you.

Because he holds you in high esteem. He thinks wonderful things of you. And he wants you to walk with him. So many of us have the wrong idea of God.

I've got my book here again that I showed you last week. Created to draw near. By Ed Welsh. So I'm recommending it to you again. And he talks about this idea of walking with God.

[15:06] And he says this. It erodes the old myths of God being far off and chronically disappointed with you. It erodes the old myths of God being far off and chronically disappointed with you.

So many of us feel pretty worthless and like failures in life. And especially when it comes to religion, like we can never live up to all the expectations. And then we have this sense, well, if that's true, God just must be so disappointed with us all the time.

And that's just not the way it is. God delights over his people. He rejoices over them with singing. He loves us. And he wants to wash us.

That's one of the great pictures of Revelation. Make us clean through the work and the death of his son Jesus and draws into the closest friendship with him. You were indeed created to draw near. So to walk in the garden, to live in the temple, to live in the new creation, to live in the presence of God is to walk with God in close friendship.

[16:12] And I want to say that that also means walking with others. And especially walking with others who are not like you. God walks with us so that we will walk with others.

The new creation, the new heavens and the new earth are made visible in the world that we live in today through the lives of those of us who are in Christ.

We are new creations. So if we want a glimpse of the future, then those of us who are Christians, the people of God, those who walk with God, we need to really live in God's presence and communicate that presence, bring that presence to the world around us as we live our lives out in the ordinary circumstances.

We need to be the authentic presence of God.

The earth will bring their splendor into it. On no days will its gates ever be shut. So there's the idea of all the nations coming together in the presence of God and bringing the best of their culture, their language, their society into God's presence, bringing their cultural riches, their splendors into the presence of God.

[17:49] The leaves of God. The leaves of the tree that we read about in chapter 22, these are for the healing of the nations. There is no longer any curse. I just think that's a really great idea and very, very important.

That walking with God means bringing the nations to God. To be a Christian is to be sent out from the presence of God to people who are different from us, who are not like us.

God is saying to every Christian, go and build the kingdom with people who are not like you. Bring in the nations. Bring in the poor, the marginalized, the forgotten and the weak.

Because the nations find their unity in the presence of God. Today is Pentecost Sunday, where the Christian church remembers the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

And on the day of Pentecost, it's in Acts chapter 2, you can read about it later. The disciples, the apostles speak in a multitude of languages and everybody hears the gospel in their own native tongue.

[18:59] And it's this picture of the nations hearing the gospel, the nations finding life together in Jesus Christ. The breaking down of ethnic and sectarian and national and tribal divisions through the unity of the gospel.

Isn't that an important thing for us to remember today? In a world still brutally affected by racism, we've seen the heart-rending videos this week.

And we're outraged. And we long for an end to these things. And it is important to remember that racism, tribalism, sectarianism is a denial of Pentecost.

It's an attack on the kingdom of God. It's a denial of the new creation. We show the kingdom of God today by loving people who are not like us.

I know that lots of you, even if you're not a Christian, lots of you give much of your time and energy and wisdom and strength to try and serve others and help them.

[20:08] To build a world which is fairer and juster. To work for people who need care and support. Lots of you do things professionally and as volunteers to care for the vulnerable and the marginalized.

You want to build a better world. And to build that world, though, I do want to say, go first into the presence of Jesus.

And walk with Jesus. And he'll help you build that better world. Without the life and the blessing of the king, building a better world becomes a crushing burden.

We become exhausted by the seemingly never-ending tide of darkness. We solve one problem only to face a hundred more. We become disillusioned or weakened.

We have a sense of our own frailty and of our own finitude, I suppose, that there's so little that we can actually do. And we get overwhelmed.

[21:15] We cannot bring the kingdom. Only God can. But we can be servants in the kingdom as we bring God's presence into this world. It's his love, his presence, his life that sustains us in the service of others.

It's great to give your life to serve and help others. But do it in the strength of King Jesus, who gave his life to serve and help you.

As a church family, we're going to be six years old this September at Cornerstone. We want to keep on moving out in mission. We're still planning for church planting next year.

We're still planning mission in our own community and using our new building, the old school house, as it's refurbished, using that to do mission in our own community. So we're going out to bring blessing to others.

But we can only do it as we live and walk in the blessed presence of God. And if you're not a Christian, I want to say to you, please just become a Christian. It's not that complicated, but it's such an important step.

[22 : 28] You can walk in the presence and friendship of God. How? Because the end of chapter 21, it says this, Nothing impure will enter into the new creation, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful.

So you might immediately think, oh man, I'm excluded. But who does get in? Well, not good people, because everybody's done things that are shameful and deceitful. It's those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

It's about trusting Jesus and what he's done for you. None of us can walk with God just by becoming a better person.

It's not what we do to rescue ourselves that matters. It's what Jesus has done for us. He takes our shame. He takes our brokenness.

He takes our sin. And he walks away from God to the cross to suffer in our place. So that we can be restored to walking in friendship with the Lord.

[23 : 34] So what we annex for you? Look at your life. What's its meaning and its purpose? That's what this crisis is asking you to do.

And let me really encourage myself and you, whoever you are, Christian or non-Christian, walk with God, let him lead the way. Take his outstretched hand.

Trust your life. Trust your journey to him. And you'll never walk alone. Let me just pray. And then we're going to have our last song. Father, I just want to say thank you so much for your invitation to walk through life with you.

We don't have to be on our own. We don't have to be lonely. We don't have to be lost. You're willing to be beside us wherever we are.

Thank you for your great acceptance of us. Your great love for us, expressed through Jesus Christ. May we see your hand reaching out to us today.

[24 : 37] And may we put our hand in your grip and walk with you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.