

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## ***Kingdom Outposts*** **Revelation 21:1-8**

**Keywords:** missional, kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, eternity

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:** Too often the mind of the Christian is set upon heaven, when in reality it is not our final destination. Alongside that error is the error of thinking that the gospel is ultimately for us to be saved, therefore, to go to heaven. But this is not true either. The gospel is ultimately about God bringing renewal to all of creation, destroying sin, Satan, and death. It speaks of God redeeming a people to be His kingdom and His sons. In this sermon Pastor Henry seeks to help us see the new heavens and earth and then consider how that future reality is to be expressed by the church in the here and now.

### **I. Introduction.**

If you have ever been involved in any long range planning then you know how hard it is to keep a “big picture” view in mind. Whether it is debt reduction, raising children, guiding a business, or just losing weight, you have to keep the big picture in mind.

What happens if you fail to do this? Usually you will simply fall short of the ultimate goal. For every long range goal that you have there will always be small steps that have to be taken to achieve that goal. But as you go through those steps you can get so caught up in the details that you forget why you are doing those various activities and things.

The Church is no different. We have been entrusted with an enormous treasure—the kingdom of heaven. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 25 when he gives a story of a master leaving his possessions to his slaves. Some of the slaves were faithful to invest the money given to them and they received praise and reward. But one was afraid of his master and afraid of losing the money, so he merely buried it. That one was severely rebuked, was forced to give his money to one of the faithful servants. But this story was not about investing, it was about God’s kingdom. This man had failed to show himself truly concerned about God’s kingdom and he himself was cast into hell.

Why? What happened? Simply this, the final slave failed to grasp why the master had given it to him. It was designed to extend the master’s estate. The master

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

knew there was risk whenever you seek to invest. But the last slave did not keep this in mind. He was so focused on personal safety and comfort that he did nothing with the money given. And the mistake was one that he would have to deal with for eternity.

I read somewhere recently that Peter stepping out onto the water and then sinking was not the failure. It was the 11 who stayed in the boat and never even tried (Stetzer's Breaking the Missional Code) I like that, for it reminds me that we are called to take risks for the sake of God's name.

Last week we saw a glimpse into the very throne room of God. We saw how utterly holy and unique He is, unaffected by His creation below. But we also saw the glory of His nearness in Jesus Christ. And we saw that the death and resurrection of Jesus was not only about saving people from sin and judgment. It was something greater for it made Him worthy to open the scroll and bring about the judgments of God, where all things shall finally be made right.

But there is one other aspect that we need to hear so that I can keep this all tied up together. In Revelation 5:9-10 we heard these words: "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. **You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.**" Note the two verbs, "have made" and "will reign." One has already occurred and the other is yet to occur. The Kingdom of God is why Jesus bought us with his blood.

Fast forward now several chapters in Revelation and we will now see the culmination of those judgments. **Read 21:1-8**

## II. Introduction.

- A. As Christians we need to have a mind set that focuses not on the here and now but in the not yet, specifically the new heavens and earth.
  - 1. If not, we can become wrapped up in good works here but really with no eternal thought. Good things, but wrongly motivated and therefore of little lasting value.
  - 2. Any vision, if not ultimately founded on the new heavens and earth, is too small a vision.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

3. But if we can gain a sense of what is to come and realize that it must come about because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then radical things can take place in our lives.
- B. My goal is simple. I want us to see what is God's ultimate purpose in saving people from their sin. And if we can see His purposes then we can own that for ourselves which will then help us understand how to live here in this broken, fallen age.

### III. The Text:

- A. The focus is completely upon the new heavens and earth.
1. The challenge for us in all of this:
    - a. All that we live with and take into account in our lives will be different.
    - b. Try even for a moment to get your brains around a life that does not fight back and break.
  2. Isaiah 65:17-19 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, And her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.
  3. 2 Peter 3:11-13 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.
  4. Even Romans 8 speaks of this time though not with that specific language.
  5. What this tells us is that history is not cyclical; rather that all of creation is hurtling toward this end result.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- B. There is no sea.
1. This is a reference not to water but to the presence of sin and the destruction and chaos that it brings into creation. Think Genesis 1 and the flood and such and it may help you. It is typical in apocalyptic language.
  2. Here are a couple of examples though:
    - a. Isaiah 57:20-21 “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud. There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.”
    - b. James 1:6-8 “But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”
- C. New Jerusalem.
1. He is not describing here a subset of the new heavens and earth.
  2. Rather this is just a different metaphor of the same thing. The new heavens and earth is the New Jerusalem.
  3. In fact, John changes metaphors again and make it the "bride."
  4. Three metaphors all saying the same thing, with different imagery.
    - a. Hebrews 11 speaks of a city from heaven that was anticipated by Abraham, the father of all who believe God's promises.
    - b. In Revelation 3 Jesus speaks to the church of Philadelphia regarding the temple of God (cf. 21:22) and the New Jerusalem.
  5. There are many allusions going on by using Jerusalem as the metaphor. Simply consider the Jerusalem of the Old Testament:
    - a. It was the city of the great king
    - b. It was the city where true justice and mercy was to flow.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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- c. It was the city where the people met with God.
    - (1) The sacrifices were offered there.
    - (2) *Yom Kippur*.
    - (3) It was a place of worship and song.
  - d. The image of 'city' brings also social relationships.
    - (1) The book of Revelation speaks of two cities.
      - (a) One is Babylon, the other the New Jerusalem
        - i) One exemplifies sin and evil and corruption, the other the opposite
        - ii) A society where perfection reigns rather than imperfection
        - iii) But it is a "city" emphasizing the corporate aspect rather than the individualistic way we tend to view it.
      - (b) Or, if you want to change the metaphor, realize there are two women.
        - i) One is Jezebel—the whore.
        - ii) The other is the pure bride.
- D. God's explanation (3ff).
- 1. God now declares what is happening.
  - 2. This is what lies at the heart of the new heavens and earth. It is again ripe with Old Testament allusions
    - a. Leviticus 26:11-13 'Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (1) How was God with His people back then?
- (2) Through the mediated presence of the tabernacle.
- b. Jeremiah 31:31-33 Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
  - (1) Very similar to the Leviticus passage.
  - (2) But now the bar has been raised even higher.
- c. We learn in John 4 that the earthly tabernacle is no longer going to be the "place" to meet God.
  - (1) Rather, through the ministry of the Spirit we shall dwell with God all due to the sacrificial work of Jesus.
  - (2) Jesus became our tabernacle and temple and it was in Him that all could approach God, for He is the high priest, the sacrifice, and even the temple itself.
3. And then here in Revelation 21 we have the consummation, where it is fulfilled in totality
  - a. This is why tears and death and mourning and crying and pain are all banished.
  - b. This gives us another glimpse into what sin is and does.
  - c. Note the intensely personal and destructive force it brings.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- d. We tend to make it the offence against God, which is true. But we fail too often to see the effect of sin upon humanity.
  - e. But here we have the consummation. And when this time comes, sin no longer has a place where it can exercise its power.
4. Notice how God defines the new heavens and earth.
- a. He shows us what it is NOT.
  - b. This is easier for us to see it this way. Our ability to understand what it is to be like is even now incredibly small.
  - c. So He shows it by saying what is no longer exists. And that alone is enough for those who love God to become excited.
    - (1) Isaiah 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away
    - (2) Isaiah 25:8 He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken.
- E. God again tells us what he is doing (5ff).
- 1. He tells John to write it down, because it is true, it is faithful.
  - 2. "it is done." Do not despair, do not falter—it is done!
- F. Why?
- 1. Because He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

2. Here we have the declaration that the One who started all things shall end all things.
  - a. He alone stands outside of creation and existence as we understand.
  - b. And He alone is able to remake and renew all of creation
3. Who can enjoy this? Who can take heart and have great hope?
  - a. Those who thirsts for God.
    - (1) Isaiah 55:1, Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
  - b. It is for those who overcome. What is meant by this?
    - (1) Not a picture of a battle.
    - (2) Rather it is found in Rev 2-3 and it is simply those who persevere before the Lord. They continue to seek that city that is to come. They continue to seek a treasure that is not seen at this time. They continue to live as aliens and strangers in this world of ours.
  - c. The amazing promise to be God's son— means little to us in our land.
    - (1) In the ancient world sonship was bound up in identity— which family you belonged.
    - (2) Matthew 5 the peacemakers are called sons of God.
      - (a) Not a description on how to become a Christian, rather, that the supreme peacemaker is God and therefore the one who seeks to make peace you are acting like God.
      - (b) You are exemplifying the nature of God when you seek to make peace.



# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (3) Or as Jesus said to the leaders who were so proud to say that Abraham was their father.
  - (a) Not at all! For Abraham rejoiced to see my day and you are trying to kill me.
  - (b) Your father is not Abraham, but the devil. He is not denying that they are not ethnic Jews and children of Abraham, but that their character reflects something else.
- (4) But in the new heavens and earth this will never again be said.
  - (a) All who thirsted for God, all who overcame, shall perfectly and eternally reflect Him.
  - (b) We shall be like Jesus, who said, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.
  - (c) We shall not just be image-bearers we shall be his sons.
- (5) Notice the opposite of sons— vs 8.
  - (a) These are the ones who do not overcome. Those who call themselves now sons of God, but do not persevere.
  - (b) And their place is hell—the second death.

## **IV. The New Heavens and Earth in Application.**

- A. Missional living and evangelism rides on this passage.
  - 1. We need to see that there is something better than the now.
  - 2. We need to see that the gospel and the church is designed to prepare us to die, to meet God.
  - 3. We must learn to look and live before our city beyond the now.
  - 4. We have to think about this carefully and deeply. How are we reflecting hope and joy is what is coming rather than what is now?

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- B. But we are also called to be outposts of this new heavens and earth. We are to show this in our lives, our words and our actions.
1. Our culture usually avoids at all costs the thought on death. We sanitize it.
  2. Or, it embraces death as the ultimate escape, the way out of this mess we call life.
  3. When Christians face the first death too often we fail to think rightly on it.
  4. The terror of dying captures our hearts and our prayers. Listen to your prayers. Listen to your community group prayer requests. The paramount issue is to be healed, safety, comfort, happiness, pleasure, etc.
  5. But though a request to heal is not wrong, it is short-sighted. For it looks to the here and now more than the new heavens and earth where all death flees.
  6. We need to ask God in the face of illness that we be content and the die well. Let us live and die as sons of God. Let us show in the face of this great trial, **that we do not fear the second death.**
- C. Colossians 3—two reasons we are to not participate in these activities and attitudes. January 13, 2017
1. First, because we are already part of the kingdom in heaven.
  2. Second, because on account of these things the wrath of God shall come.
- D. The Gospel Is To Be Lived Out Before The World.
1. God ultimately has come to rescue and renew all of the universe through the work of Jesus.
  2. Our responsibility is to live before our fellow man in such a way that they see vestiges of that in very practical, tangible ways.
  3. At times that will be through works that fight against the ravages of sin: Galatians 2:1-10.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

4. At other times it will be through living in a counter-cultural manner.
  - a. We are to be that city on the hill that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 5:14-16.
  - b. What are three key idols of our culture? Money, sex and power.
    - (1) Money:
      - (a) We need to make sure that as a church and as individuals we show a spirit of generosity and mercy through our funds.
      - (b) Remembering always that gospel came to us when we were most needy.
    - (2) Sex:
      - (a) We must resist the glamorization of sex that our nation lives for as well as the fear of sex that too many Christians exhibit.
      - (b) The church is to function as a true family, therefore the men and women respect one another as sisters. It is an act of love and respect.
      - (c) It shows love toward those who do not agree with the gospel's view of sex, but does not budge regarding the truths of God's word.
    - (3) Power:
      - (a) The church should reject all forms of power brokering and share power instead.
      - (b) The gospel tells us to follow our Lord, who washed the feet of the disciples.
      - (c) The gospel reminds us that out of every nation, tribe, people and tongue God purchased a people to be His own.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

5. Finally, this means that if we understand that our final destination is not heaven, but the new earth, then we reject the idea that physical/material is bad, and spiritual/non-material is good.
  - a. We learn to rejoice and find great delight in God's creation—seeing it as His creation.
  - b. We show the world around us how we can worship God in this creation, without becoming worshipers of the creation (cf. Romans 1:18ff).

## V. **Benediction:**

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

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## Small Group Questions

- **How well do we portray God's character as sons? Would our neighbors and friends and family say, there is a son of God?**
- **What are some ways that the Church over history has lived out the truths of the new heavens and earth?**
- **How can your group begin to battle the powers of this age by seeking to portray the joys of the new heavens and earth? In other words, how can you perhaps begin to be a blessing to those around you?**
- **How well are we doing in showing an Kingdom-oriented alternative to the many idols of our land? Why or why not?**