**St Martins C3 – October 1, 2023**

**Come, Lord Jesus – A Glorious People**

**Sermon Summary: Passage: Revelation 21**

Imagine if you grew up in a home that perfectly prepared you for life. There was the right mix of love, safety, encouragement and discipline. A place where you were set up to reach your full potential. A place where you would always belong. For Christians, that home is Heaven. Heaven isn’t just a reward for those who follow Christ. Heaven is the home God created for his people to be all that He destined them to be.Heaven is the place God’s people reach their full potential. This is the main point of Revelation 21.

In the opening verse we read of God ushering in a new era for Heaven and earth. One where evil has been removed and God has created a home for His people.

**The key question of chapter 21 is, what (or who) is the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven?** There is deep symbolic theme here as we seek an answer to that question. What we discover is the New Jerusalem is a symbolic way of describing the people of God, or the Church. Here are four important descriptors in the chapter that link the New Jerusalem to the Church:

1. **The city is the bride of Christ. (Verses 2, 9, 10)**

Consistently in scripture the bride of Christ is His Church.

1. **God is present in the New Jerusalem in the same way He promised to be present with His people. (Verses 22-27, 3-7)**

A major theme of the Bible is God wanting to dwell with His people. God isn’t trying to get us out of this evil world, He is seeking to removal evil from our world, so He can dwell with us.

Life flourishes when God is present with His People and they are living harmoniously with God and His ways. In the New Jerusalem, God’s life permeates the whole city. God has made His Home with His People. When we are fully with God and God is fully with us, that is Heaven.

1. **Christ built the church on the ministry of the apostles. (Verses: 12-17)**

The twelve tribes and twelve gates of the apostles, speaks to the structure God used to gather and lead Israel and His Church.

1. **The numbers used to describe the New Jerusalem have previously described all of God’s people. (Verse 15-17 & Chapter 7)**

The number 12, is a number God uses to establish or provide the foundation for the people of God to form. (12 tribes and 12 apostles). 12 x 12 means complete. Add in a 1,000, which is symbolic for “many,” and you get to 144,000 as the complete gathering of all of God’s people. That doesn’t mean there will only be 144,000. It is a symbolic way of describing all of God’s people. Just like the city is 12 x 12 cubed. Or, it is the complete number of God’s glorious people.

**So, if the New Jerusalem is the church, what is God revealing about the future of His People? (verses 18-21, 11)** The New Jerusalem is described as a glorious city, because this is a picture of Christ preparing a glorious church, which will be revealed one day. Evil will be removed and the glorious work of Christ in His church will be unveiled. (Romans 8:18-21) **The glory of Heaven is not just the beauty of the environment, it is the beauty of God’s character being revealed in God’s people.**

There is a glorious eternal future for those who are in Christ. Heaven’s “home life” that we have a taste of now, we will fully experience in the future. That ought to empower us in the present to cooperate with the glorious work of Christ in us and around us. (Ephesians 4:1, 1:18-19) The question is: *Are we living our lives now in the light of the glory Christ wants to reveal in eternity?*

**Suggested Questions for Connect Group Discussion:**

*Do you see the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21 as the Church, or a literal place God is creating for us?*

*If the New Jerusalem is the Church, what does this passage tell us about God’s purposes for His Church?*

*If Heaven is the place where we are fully who God called us to be, what might us and the church reaching its full potential look like?*

*How might God be expecting us to prepare in the present, for us being at home with Him in the future?*

*How does the reality that God has a glorious future for you, change how you live for Him in the present?*

Songs we sung this week: Your Great Mercy, King of Glory, Holy Ground, King of Kings, A Thousand Hallelujahs.

**Monday’s Devotion – Know Christ and make Him known**

**Philippians 3:7-9**

*I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him.*

This week we are exploring some of the key ways God is working in His Church to bring it into its full potential. Or, to put it another way, how God is preparing His Church for the future.

In this passage from Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi, he is encouraging them with the first and most important role of the church. That is to know Christ and make Him known.

God’s main purpose throughout all of human history is to restore the relationship between us and Him. Therefore, it makes sense that when God’s purposes are fulfilled in the New Heaven and Earth that the glory and fullness of this relationship is revealed. It is a relationship that is beautiful, good, pure and perfect. We will fully know God and He will fully know us. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

When we see that a relationship with God is one of the main purposes for our lives in the future, it ought to shape our values and priorities in the present. How might we go deeper in our relationship with God? How might we draw others into knowing that relationship with God for themselves?

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Bearers of God’s Life**

**Matthew 10:8** *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!*

As we saw yesterday, our first priority is to know Christ. Without an ongoing relationship with Christ, we can’t receive the life that He has for us. Once we do know Christ and begin to experience what Christ life in us is like, we then become the ones who take that life to those around us. We become bearers of Christ’s life. We become the ones which God uses to bring His Kingdom to the world around us.

The context of this verse above is Jesus sending out His disciples with the life that He had imparted to them. There are a couple of important things to note here that are relevant to what we are talking about this week:

1. When we and others receive God’s life it brings about the good things that are in His Kingdom. It brings deliverance from evil, physical health and life and freedom at a social and psychological level. That might seem something out of reach for many of us. However, we need to remember that this is the life of God’s Kingdom, that He is ushering in now.
2. We are to give away that which we have received. When we experience God’s power and presence, we are then empowered by God’s Spirit to bring that power and presence to others. We have received what we are to pass on. So, what have you received that you are passing on?

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Overcome evil**

**Revelation 12:11**

*And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.*

**Ephesians 6:12**

*For weare not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

As we have seen in this series, there is a cosmic spiritual battle between God and Satan. We have also learnt that in the end Satan and evil lose and God wins. However, in the meantime, we join with Christ in the spiritual fight. For God’s Kingdom and His Church to advance, the forces of evil need to be pushed back.

In the Revelation passage above, we read of how those who stood their ground against evil were rewarded in Heaven. God has empowered His people and expects His people to stay strong in Him.

In the Ephesians passage we are reminded that authoritive prayers make a difference. We are in a spiritual battle now and need to engage in the battle through prayer.

What works of the enemy are you identifying in and around your life that you need to stand against in prayer? How might God be using that to strengthen you for Heaven?

**Thursday’s Devotion – Be Holy**

**1 Peter 1:16** *“You must be holy because I am holy.”*

**Revelation 3:18-21**

*So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.* *“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.*

The message of Revelation reinforces what much of the New Testament teaches. The main emphasis is that we are in right relationship with Christ. Flowing from that, we take His life to others and overcome sin and evil. What we see here is the importance of valuing what God values and live righteously.

Christ is not coming back for a church that is compromising with the world. He is not coming back for a church that is lukewarm. Christ is returning for a holy church. A church that identifies what sin is and overcomes it. A church that has earned the right to share a meal and then the throne with Christ.

The Revelation passage was written to the church in Laodicea. A place that was affluent financially, but weak spiritually. May we heed Christ’s warning as a first world church and stay sharp spiritually, while living in an affluent culture.

**Friday’s Devotion – Love each other**

**1 Thessalonians 3:11-13**

*May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon. And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. May he, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.*

Notice in this passage how Paul’s encouragement to us to live God’s way in the present is shaped by his vision of what God is calling us to in the future.

As we have already seen this week and see in this passage again, God is returning for a strong and holy church. However, another important work of God is the love that God pours out into His Church and the expectation that that love will be shared with each other and with the world around us.

Love for God and each other will be a predominant feature of our lives in Heaven. In the future we will be fully aware of how much God loves us and because of that have the capacity to fully love God and those around us. Paul’s argument here is that, if this is a feature of Heaven, then let it be a feature of our lives in the present.

So, where or to whom, might you need to express Christ’s love at the moment? How might seeking God’s capacity to love others being doing a deeper work of grace in your heart?