

WELCOME 2nd June 2019 – 7 Easter '19 C

Revelation 21:1-7 & 22:1-7, 12-13 & 20

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Special welcome to our visitors & guests...It is wonderful that you are all here! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship...

The End...It's how most folks think of the book of Revelation...it's the last chapter & then you close the book...the finish...the conclusion...the end...it's over red rover... that's all there is & there ain't no more. And maybe you're glad we've reached the last chapters...get on to something else...

But as so often happens, CS Lewis understands better than any as he concludes his Chronicles of Narnia series (fanciful retelling of the gospel & NT) with these words...

So for us this is the end of all the stories, & we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world & all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover & the title page. Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before

Today...we wrap up our focussed look at the Revelation...but what John received from Jesus & passed on to us builds in us that longing for more...for the certainty that what lies before us so far surpasses our human experience that we live now in an expectant joy – a hungering eagerness so that today begins to radiate with what we know waits ahead.

The one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!"

Then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true."

God's greatest promise is that life not death will have the last word on all God has made. This is not wishful thinking or pie-in-the-sky optimism. We have a hope anchored in the character of God & the life/death/resurrection of Jesus that guarantees not just the future, but fills the present with power & purpose & joy

We'll explore & experience that today...And don't forget the Biggest Morning Tea follows worship where we raise funds for the Cancer Council of Australia...We know this is always a good thing!

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, heavenly Father, in raising your Son Jesus from the grave in glory and in sending us your Spirit, you open the way to eternal life. As we grow in our relationship with and resemblance to Christ each day, let your life burst forth so that each step we take and each word we speak reflects the certainty we have in you. We ask this in your precious name. Amen.

7 EASTER '19 C – MAKING ALL THINGS NEW: LIVING IN CERTAINTY

FAITH CHAT:

1. What does eternal life promised & given by God in Christ mean for you?
2. How is the promise of eternal life something you can share with others?

I consider myself blessed to live in the age when dads are encouraged to be part of the labour & birth of their children. I know some of you waited outside the hospital room door (or at home) while your children were being born & were notified/summoned long after your sons/daughters were well & truly into this world. I went to the classes I read the books. I practiced what we were meant to practice I watched the videos. It was a unique privilege to be there when they joined us out here I would never pretend to fully understand what labour/birth is like except from the perspective of the dad standing there during the whole process encouraging helping as feebly as I'm sure I did & saying all the things we agreed I was allowed to say, & then being overjoyed at holding our girls...& I assure you at no point did it ever cross my mind to say or even think "Whew! Glad it's over." I knew that standing there w/ each of our daughters newly born/snuggly swaddled that "IT" whatever "IT" was had just begun That was the 1st day of lives forever entwined 3 then 4 then 5...Every following day would build on the one before. "IT" had just begun.

And I think I owe you & lots of folks something of an apology for avoiding the book of Revelation...being somewhat intimidated by it...& perhaps treating it as something of a conclusion to God's story that then went off into the mists of eternity & we have nothing to say about that because well...how can you say anything about that which you know nothing? I was wrong...The final chapters of Rev that we're going to have some time with today are in fact not just a summation of what we've been leading up to but most importantly they function (or at least have for me) as a launchpad for living with expectant joy & hungering eagerness & a bubbling urgency to share the hope *this* John has first shared with us...it's gonna be awesome!

Remember...John is not given this revelation of Jesus Christ so John can mark his calendar for the day of Christ's return & be ready for all the events surrounding that moment in time. Rev is not intended to create pointless speculation about the future That's not the goal. John receives this revelation & deposits it into the hearts & lives of people who are under the pump...really struggling to stay faithful in a world that has no time for their faith. In some of the churches where this revelation/letter would have been read they're doing pretty well, but in others they're getting hammered because they trust in Jesus. They're like us...trying to figure out what it means to follow Christ & raise your kids & go to work & live against temptation when nothing seems to be going right...

They held to the promise of a returning Jesus to set all things right & make all things new but no one knew when...& there were arguments & doubts about that...Is he? Really? When? How? How will we know? Has it already happened? Maybe he's not? And as outnumbered outsiders in their own communities there were those who were beginning to spend more time in the world & less time in their faith. Some were starting to blend in & fit in with their unbelieving neighbours & lose their passion & their hope & their lives had assumed that grey dullness of unbelief.

So Jesus takes hold of John & John writes not to fuel pointless speculation about the future but to foster purposeful obedience in the present. **BIBLES**

When we were in Sth Tx at the very beginning of our marriage & ministry John Hagee was a big pastor in San Antonio...Cornerstone Church. Once a year or so, Pr Hagee would preach a big series on Rev & he had this timeline he'd roll out with charts & pictures & handouts & all sorts of stuff where he'd lay this book against the current climate in the world & give his folks & everyone watching on TV a "this is being fulfilled now" sort of insight into Rev. I'd catch bits & pieces on TV there would be a different world leader depicted as the beast or the false prophet or the great prostitute Babylon...I could never figure out how someone who sat through that 5-6 times wouldn't ask: Pr John last time you said...?

John writes not to fuel pointless speculation about the future but to foster purposeful obedience in the present. Every time the NT authors talk about Christ's return it's always with the intent of encouraging the present-tense faith of their readers. And the best example of that I know is....Quickly turn to 2 Pet 3..."*This is my second letter to you, dear friends, & in both of them I have tried to stimulate your wholesome thinking & refresh your memory. I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago & what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles. (Peter says...I know it's tough... don't quit...don't give up...hang onto what you know is true) Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth & following their own desires. They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created." (Yep...it's going to look like a fairy tale...folks are going to challenge what you believe & tell you you're nuts because you'd rather worship with your brothers & sisters than anything else) But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like 1000 years to the Lord, & 1000 years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. The heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, & the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, & the earth & everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.*

You can hear Peter pleading...reminding...encouraging the church...Christ is coming soon...we don't know when, won't know when, but 'til he does...**Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy & godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God & hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, & the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens & new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. So dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure & blameless in his sight.** At no point do Peter or John invite us to become forecasters of the future but to remain faithful in the present. They are not asking us to make a detailed study of the end times but to make sure we live with spiritual accountability in the moment. Listen vs 17-18: *You already know these things, dear friends. So be on guard; then you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people & lose your own secure footing. Rather, you must grow in the grace & knowledge of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now & forever! Amen.*

If all we were to get here was a timeline & calendar date focussed on Jesus' return & how to deal with the events leading up to that John would have stopped either at 21:6-7 *"It is finished! I am the Alpha & the Omega—the Beginning & the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, & I will be their God, & they will be my children..."* or 22:5: *And they will see his face, & his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever & ever.* But from that point there are 16 more verses & ½ of them are warnings & instructions about how to live faithfully until that day arrives in fullness. So what's the point of the Revelation Jesus grants John?

2 things...1 Jesus wants us to see the world in all its dying fakery – The direct warning & encouragement to the 7 churches, the difficult to understand images, the visions of God's Kingdom in its fullness...are all a stark contrast to the world that was attacking the followers of Jesus, that had marginalized those of deep faith, that had grown cold & corrupt to its core, that had 2 weapons stick & carrot persecution & seduction & turned those against the church...But that world will not last & it does not have the power to save or to satisfy.

Jesus showed John 3 major image/themes: the beast, the false prophet, the great prostitute/Babylon. Each is a specific warning do not put your hopes in the gov't, in religion outside of Christ or in the affluence/social status/acceptance that this world so readily offers & then quickly withdraws Ps 146:3 – *"Do not put your trust in princes, in mere mortals, who cannot save you."* I don't care what political party or system rises to power...it is empty – will not satisfy – can at times do only more harm than good & will not last into eternity. 1 Jn 2:15-17 (JB Phillips) - *Never give your hearts to this world or to any of the things in it. You cannot love the Father & love the world at the same time. For the whole world-system, based as it is on primitive fleshly desire, greedy ambition & the glamour of all that is thought splendid, is not derived from the Father at all, but from the world itself. The world & all its passionate desires will one day disappear. But those who follow God's will are part of the permanent & cannot die.* Jesus wants us to see the world in all its dying fakery...that the only thing that sees the front porch of eternity is that which is connected to Christ...that only those who have been incorporated into Jesus Christ enjoy the fullness of the Kingdom. Everything else is lost. Dead end. The things this world says matter most don't matter. Invest only in that which lasts.

2 Jesus wants us to see him in the fullness of his glorious risen love I'm sure I have made this point before... but here we see it in full vibrant living colour. If all Jesus is is a model of niceness/sweetness – moral exemplar – great teacher Big honkin deal! All that did was get him killed in the most horrible way possible. But if he was raised from the dead like he said he would be then everything he said about God's love & grace & forgiveness & the in-breaking Kingdom – God's present rule on earth as it is in heaven must all be true. It must then be true that sin is forgiven & death defeated & the gates & powers of hell crushed under his feet...Kingdom of heaven is at hand. CS Lewis again...*"He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, & beaten the 'King of Death.'* Everything is different because He has done so." God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ & we are now invited to belong to it... forever....freely...& to become part of the overflowing river of life & love that heals & restores & drives out darkness in brilliant glorious light.

We are built for eternity - designed for life without end & God wills life & only God grants life that triumphs over death through Jesus' death/resurrection. How hopeless we would be if all there was in life was knowing that with every breath you took, with every tick of the clock, you were closer to the grave, closer to the disease that would finally take you, closer to death which would be final/irreversible. How futile life is if all this is is the unwinding of that which cannot be rewound. How miserable our circumstances if there is no place or promise that one day God will right all wrongs, set all injustice in balance...*"Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, & they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, & there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."* Rev 21:3-4 But how glorious today is knowing that is just up ahead...where God takes our pain & in its place gives the joy of his presence & the pleasures of life with him forever...where God comforts our hurts, grants strength unending & health undiminishing, & life without end.

The heart of who we are as God's people is the good news that in Jesus God comes to live with us as one of us... Through him God comes for: all who are weary and need rest; all who mourn and long for comfort; all who feel worthless and wonder if God even cares; all who are weak and fail and desire strength; all who sin and need a Saviour — Heaven's doors are open wide in welcome...Jesus is the mighty friend of sinners, the ally of his attacked, the defender of the defenceless, & the justifier of those who have no excuses left.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let anyone who hears this say, "Come." Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life...He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's holy people.

May that grace help us to see this world in all its dying fakery & this Jesus in the fullness of his glorious risen love and to see ourselves as precious beloved bought and paid for with his life...cherished & protected for all eternity. Every day, every hour, every minute every second, you are moving toward that new day where you can worship without distraction, serve without exhaustion, fellowship without fear, learn without fatigue and rest without boredom. The risen Jesus who dwells within you, and gives you life, makes that a certainty forever.

Let's pray with that in mind...Lord Jesus your kingdom will come without our help and without our prayer, but we do pray that it would come among us and that you would use our feeble efforts to widen your kingdom's embrace among the people of this city. By your Spirit conquer us and make our lives worthy of your call, faithful and obedient today. Through your holy name we pray...Amen