

## WELCOME 29<sup>th</sup> May 2022 – 7 Easter '22 C

Revelation 21:1-7 & 22:1-7

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again...It seems Pr John has safely reached his destination & is enjoying the joy of his US family after a long pandemic-induced separation & we thank God for every mercy between here & there & back again. Like always...**Bible Study & Discussion Questions are provided with your worship materials.** Our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-up is on hold this week.**

**As we move into this week...**“When I grow up I want to be...” How many times is this conversation replayed by children in a family? Firefighter. Police officer. Doctor. Vet. Nurse. Actress. Bride. Chef...We're born looking into the future. We live for a “dream” realistic or not...toward some preferred destiny...even if it shifts a few times before we get there. I didn't grow up thinking “pastor”

We learned that from **God.** The Bible says, **“God has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.”** – Ecc1 3:11 We might dream it...play at it...even strive for it, but only God holds the door open to our **true** destiny: **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.”** The one sitting on the throne said, **“Look, I am making everything new!”**

But unlike child's play; God's vision for us is no unicorn & fairy floss wishful thinking. His promised **future filled with hope** is assured in the risen & ruling Jesus Christ & not a far-off somewhere over the rainbow pipe dream but an experience right now right in the middle of life's tough & troublesome days. John is granted a vision no other disciple has...of the fullness of God's kingdom & glory...and that vision is in the present tense.

**God's home is now among his people! Christ is risen. I am making everything new!** God has chosen to dwell among us by his Spirit poured out at Pentecost & in you through baptism into Christ. 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...

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.

Revelation 21

## 7 EASTER '22 C – IN CHRIST'S HANDS: UNVEILING THE NEW REALITY – GROWING DESTINY

As many of you know...I ride a **bicycle** a few kilometres almost every morning. I even sometimes ride when the weather suggests I should stay home & drink more coffee. I need the exercise. I like being able to see people & pets & other exercisers in our neighbourhood all trying to stay one step ahead of traffic or road construction or each other. I don't do **stationary** cycling. I have never been able to maintain the speed, time, distance or enthusiasm on a stationary bike. If I'm going to do something, I want to get somewhere, even if it's the same 10k route around Glenfield...I'd rather be out there hot or cold dodging puddles poodles & pedestrians than trapped in a corner of a room peddling away like a **rat** in a wheel. There is an undeniable sense of accomplishment when the cycling app on my phone tells me how far & how fast I've gone. I'm not training for a race...but I like to know that in the 30-35 minutes I've been pedalling...I've gone somewhere.

I believe most of us are like that about most things. We plant gardens to see flowers bloom. Put veggies in the ground to eat & share them. Sow crops to harvest & sell. Invest in livestock or real estate for a return. We play sports or support a team hoping for wins. Our minds & hearts think forward...We "see" our children as they might become. Every teacher just *knows* they see "potential" in their students far beyond what they're producing in their class at the moment. Our lives inescapably push toward the future.

If we're serious about those futures we "see"...from "When I grow up I want to be..." to "Will you marry me?" to the pumpkins we can't seem to get rid of because we have so many...We live right now to see that future come to life. If we want those pumpkins we better leave some space A LOT OF SPACE & stick those seeds in the ground early & keep the water & weeds in the proper proportion. If we "want" a spouse we learn how to be the spouse someone would want to marry. If we want to be butcher baker or candlestick maker...we learn the skills & character to get there.

That's the whole point of Revelation: **To** guide & shape the "right now" work of the church so that it gives witness to the assured future they have in Jesus Christ AND **To** experience that future fullness in whatever circumstance they find themselves today. So many of us get lost in Revelation because we dig in looking for a timeline to the end-of-all-things or for some mystery code that unlocks secrets hidden since John was on Patmos. Nonsense...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 would have been read they're doing pretty well. In others they're getting crushed

because they trust in Jesus. In still others, they're asleep in front of the cricket about to spill their beer on their own lap & need to wake up to be about the business of being Christ's presence in this world. 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 the passive dullness of unbelief...instead of calling themselves "churches" they needed to sell the furniture & do something else because they were an embarrassment to God.

For the most part...they're like us...trying to figure out what it means to follow Christ & raise your kids & go to work & live against temptation & apathy & complacency when nothing seems to be going right, or when the promise of Christ's return seems like it may never come to pass. So John receives this word from God & then records it for the church not to fuel useless speculation but to foster purposeful obedience. John's not interested in treadmills, exercise bicycles or treading water...**HE** is convinced the world is still living in darkness & those who are light need to shine...to be radiant...to burn with the fire of the first Pentecost & the passion of the first Easter. In that conviction John is not alone. Every time the New Testament authors write of Christ's return it's always with the intent of encouraging the present-tense faith of their readers. It's always about stirring the church to live like they know who actually wins in the end & how the defeat of death, the forgiveness of sins, the promise of the resurrection of the dead & the life of the world to come make a difference in their relationships, schools, homes, jobs & communities **TODAY**.

Peter would write **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.* The apostles saw the church struggling to survive past next weekend & pleaded with those early followers to live with intentionality & accountability & above all to live lives reflecting the Spirit they had received from the risen Jesus. To simply live more hope-fueled more joy-filled more loving more forgiving more generous and more compassionate than their pagan family friends & neighbours.

And to empower that sort of living in the present John points to the end to help us remember that this world in all its glamorous glorious glittery brokenness is fading fleeting & futile. The toys trophies & trinkets that grab our attention & devotion & heartfelt striving are all meaningless & eternally fake with no power to satisfy or

save. Every craving satisfied by earthly pleasures will return in greater hunger deeper longing & demand a higher cost. The things the world says matter most...don't. The things the world says are crucial...aren't.

We elected a new Prime Minister last weekend & to hear some tell it either heaven has reached earth or hell rose up to devour Australia. You know as well as I, in a few years we'll do it again. So how do we welcome a new PM...by remembering what Scripture says: **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 temporary, it will not keep all it promises, at times it will do only more harm than good & above all it 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...* and we pray that whoever is in office remembers that crucial truth...that they too are accountable to the God who reigns over all things forever...that their power isn't all that grand.

But as we stand in the midst of a world that is flailing & faltering John helps us remember that the glory of heaven is ours...that we are being led by & towards the God who 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 & need rest; all who mourn & long for comfort; all who feel worthless & wonder if God even cares; all who are weak & fail & look for some support; all who sin & need a Saviour. John shows us that since the curtain in the temple was torn in two & the door to the tomb left open & unoccupied, God's home is now among us & at this moment Jesus remains the mighty friend of sinners, the ally of the attacked, the defender of the defenseless, & the justifier of those who have no excuses.

CS Lewis seems to always get it right: “**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.” If this life is all there is what hopelessness would overtake us...every breath one closer to the last, every heartbeat one more you'll never get back, every day one less in your tally...But how joyous & glorious to live knowing you are precious beloved bought & paid for with the life of Jesus Christ. You are his...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 & rest without boredom. The risen Jesus who dwells within you & gives you life makes that a certainty forever.

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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**