

Chat with the Children

- Want you to think about what you like doing on your holidays:
 - quiet, books, sun, excitement, climbing, sports, travel...
- Are we all the same?
 - who should we go on holiday with?!?
- Think we sometimes have a boring picture of heaven:
 - even if someone else might enjoy it, we might not be sure we will!
 - (who'd want to sit on a cloud a play a harp all day anyway!!)
- Bible uses variety of pictures of heaven partly because we are all different, and will look forward to, anticipate something different:
 - basic thing want us all to take from this series is sense of eager anticipation for heaven!

Introduction

- I am not looking forward to heaven!
 - at least, not some ways in which heaven is presented!
 - endless worship service...
 - all the caricatures of endlessly repeated songs and relentless instructions to feel certain things...
- But that seems to be the way it is presented in this passage!
 - worth scraping below the surface a little...

Dominion is the Lord's

- First that basic fact - dominion is the Lord's.
- God is in control.
- He is on the throne - king picture - not like our picture of royalty!
 - v.6: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns."
 - later, v.16: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."
- That is the foundation on which any understanding of the workings of this world depends.
- If we haven't got that clear, then none of the rest can possibly fit into place.

Foundations:

- Think about foundations - take a long time to lay down, unseen, rest of the structure can be up quite quickly, that is where the strength of a building lies.
- Same with knowing and acting on the fact that God is in control.
- Iraq, Congo, Kosovo, Rwanda and the rest might cause me to question "who is in control";
 - but if my foundation is set in what Scripture has made clear, that God is in ultimate control, then I can see beyond the current pain and evil to the restoration of good that he will bring.

Justice is the Lord's

- Second basic truth passage makes clear is that Justice belongs to the Lord:
 - look at vs.1-3 - why is God being praised here? because he brings truth, not lies, justice, not evil.
 - or later vs.11-21 - whole series of pictures, of Jesus riding forth from heaven as a vengeful warrior to right wrong and bring judgement, of the beast, the source of all evil, captured and punished.
- God is not shut off from the evil in this world, remote and distant.
- If you or I get cut up about something we see on the TV, some horrendous crime

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- against humanity that has been perpetrated, God's anger burns even hotter.
- His promise here is that He WILL right all wrongs, He WILL bring truth to light, that NO ONE will escape the justice they deserve.
 - Deuteronomy 32:35-36 - "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free."
 - Hebrews 10:31 - "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
- These are the only reasons I do not fall into utter despair when I hear of the latest evil
 - not in a gloating sense, but knowing that evil will be repaid, justice will be done
- This is also worth us remembering when we are tempted to take sin lightly:
 - EITHER sin that we see around us, that bullying or gossip in the workplace, with all the pain it causes the victim; or the devastation one person's actions (alcohol, greed, selfishness) can cause for family and friends; or whatever...
 - OR sin in our own lives, things we'd rather not admit - lying, lust, malicious gossip, self-seeking in office politics, uncontrolled anger, greed....
- Our God is a holy God - one who will bring justice.
 - "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The Wedding is the Lord's

- The final truth that allows me to face the tragedy of human sinfulness and its particular consequences is found in vs.7-9:
 - Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."
- This is a promise - of a wedding that's yet to come, of a celebration, of feasting and fun, of final fulfilment.
 - I may, personally, struggle with some of the imagery... **but the picture is God given, and speaks of truth ahead**
- Getting married really does change things:
 - (its a sad reflection on our society that I have to say that I'm thinking about what should happen, a couple who have kept themselves for each other, who haven't lived with each other beforehand.)
- I can remember a number of things from when Helen and I got married:
 - the nervousness waiting for Helen at the front of the church;
 - having no idea what the minister who married us said in his sermon!
 - of the grin that was permanently attached to my face all day, not just because the photographer was around - aching cheeks!
 - of the sunshine, of all the people, of all the generosity, of being the centre of attention! The happiness.
 - of how being engaged was great; security of commitment; able to get to know each other better; able to trust and say things which would otherwise have been difficult;
 - but it still wasn't the real thing - had to go home at the end of an evening, didn't share the same surname, had an independent existence;
 - I can still remember the wonderful feeling of "too good to be true" when we didn't have to part ways at the end of the evening, the luxury of conversation all the time! The sense of completeness and fulfilment!
- That, in a nutshell, is what God promises his people.
 - ask God "why all the pain?" and he answers "come see that pain taken away!"
 - ask God "what will it be like in heaven" and he answers "I can only begin to tell you - in ways beyond your understanding!"
- I look back on our engagement, and see that we needed that time to get to know and trust and understand each other sufficiently to make a go of being married.

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- Its not quite the same with us and God, but this period of engagement is part of the deal - and we'll look back and see why later.
 - and we will also learn - and can trust him now - that the marriage is better than the engagement!
- For we are not mere guests at this wedding - we are the bride of Christ, to be married to him, to live with him and love him intimately and completely as we can only dream of just now.
- So when Congo or Iraq or wherever comes on the news, or the killing fields of Cambodia, or the horrors of the Holocaust, or a murder or other tragedy:
 - cling to these three facts: Dominion is the Lord's; Justice is the Lord's; and the Wedding is the Lord's!