

Hope and a Future!

- Read Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27 (or whole chapter?)

Introduction

- You know the feeling:
 - its great to be on holiday...
 - **but its also great to be back home!!**
- Familiar things around you, all the conveniences of your own home:
 - we often find that the boys spend the first few days after we get back from holiday going round and playing with all the toys they've not had access to for the previous fortnight or whatever, almost as if they were new!!
- There is something about coming home - after holidays, hospital stay, whatever - welcoming, safe, comforting...
- Lost for Words - second most asked question - what about life after death?
 - so last week we began to explore - **yes there is - our knowledge and confidence rooted in the resurrection**
 - if you like, that opens the doors into a whole new world!
 - this week wanting to **"peek through the door"** into this new world...
- I wonder what our picture of our "future home" in heaven is like?
 - the Bible uses a variety of different images....
 - Jesus words, **"I go to prepare a place for you"** - a home
 - the promised land - harking back to Israel as a land flowing in milk and honey
 - here in the passage we read in Revelation 21, its a **city, the new Jerusalem**, new capital and centre for God's people
- Want to pick up five areas that this passage highlights that are worth dwelling on:

1. New Jerusalem: A safe place to live

- **First** thing is that the New Jerusalem is a **safe** place to live.
- Secure - strong walls, no fear, a place of peace, no need to shut the gates, enemies defeated.
 - why? because God is there!
- Contrast with our insecurities and take comfort.

2. New Jerusalem: A beautiful place to live

- **Second** thing is that the New Jerusalem is a **beautiful** place to live
- All beautiful gems and precious metals - gorgeous, opulent - even the foundations, out of sight, built of gems.
 - why? a reflection of the fact that God is there!
- Sometimes the world can be a grim and grimy place - left over industrial land, unsightly housing, concrete blocks, depressing.
 - mankind has scarred the earth; hole in ozone layer, deforestation, and so on;
- But, God's future is beautiful! Attractive, worth looking forward to.
 - we will be able to live in, enjoy, appreciate all that is lovely!
- There is a verse in Philippians 4:8 - **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.**
 - able to do that surrounded by all that God has made unspoiled!

3. New Jerusalem: A happy place to live

- **Third** thing is that the New Jerusalem is a **happy** place to live
- No more tears, or reason for tears, no more pain, death, mourning...
 - we don't have our pains to seek in this life!
 - but in God's presence, those pains evaporate - how can death continue in the presence of the source of life? how can pain continue in the the presence of the most gracious healer?
- God's promise is of a place of true and full contentment. Happiness.

4. New Jerusalem: An open place to live

- **Fourth** thing is that the New Jerusalem is an **open** place to live
- Gates open in **welcome** - all who turn to God.
 - just as the gospel is open to all who call on the name of the Lord - regardless of age, gender, race, past behaviour... so is heaven, for the gospel merely reflects God's desire!
- Contrast with our shut-in mentality - own language and customs, own friends, own kind of people:
 - what would happen if a load of 5th and 6th form turned up here, or some of the Buckfast drinkers, or... we would find it hard!
 - all who turn to God...

5. New Jerusalem: A holy place to live

- **Fifth** thing is that the New Jerusalem is a **holy** place to live:
 - all that is evil is taken away.
 - holy - pure, nothing unclean, reflecting the God who is there.
- We are lumbered with sin - and worse, we often tolerate sin.
 - but in heaven, all that will be gone - and we ourselves will be cleaned up from the inside out!

Conclusion

- All these things are in the future.
- "**Pie in the sky when you die**" - absolutely! And a pretty yummy pie at that!
 - sometimes people throw that phrase back at us as if it was an insult; as if Christian faith made no difference now, only a kind of focused wishful thinking!

But:

- these promises are for real - its not just wishful thinking - that's our real home, and have not we all felt the longing to be there from time to time? To be done with the hassle, the weariness, the work of this world?
- C S Lewis captures it beautifully in the last of the Narnia books; Unicorn speaking as all the characters enter "**heaven**": "**I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it until now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.... Come further up, come further in!!**"

And:

- There is also "**cake on your plate while you wait**"!!!!
- God's kingdom (future) **DOES reflect back into time!**
- And we should be about the business of kingdom building, here and now:
 - **bringing security** - in relationships - dependable, truthful, reliable, acting with integrity, consistency;
 - **bringing beauty** - creativity, song, arts, working for redevelopment, flowers on someone's window sill that brighten up their day;
 - **bringing happiness** - going out of our way to bring light into someone's life - presents to bring happiness, not buy attention, time for others...
 - **bringing welcome** - welcome to kingdom, welcome to church, welcome to homes, hospitality;
 - **bringing holiness** - standards, purity, being prepared to speak up (cf David Persimmon in Adrian Plass, "An Alien at St Wilfreds", having his photo taken by worldly photographer).

Bringing God's kingdom!

- let us be "**changemakers**", reflecting the wonder and glory and the hope of heaven as we live lives of profound significance here, now.
- "**may your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!!**"