

What We Believe, Part 10: The Consummation

Revelation 21:1 ESV (Pg. 603) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” **6** And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

We believe in a hopeful future that expects the success of the gospel through the Church and anticipates the full restoration of all creation; that the consummation of all things includes the personal, visible, physical, and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the just and the unjust, the separation of those outside Christ from the benevolent presence of God into enduring eternal punishment, while those who are righteous in Christ shall live in glorious bodies and reign with him forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory.

- I. Perhaps you recall the story of Cinderella; a girl who, once wealthy, was now oppressed and harassed by her wicked stepmother and stepsisters; forced by them to do all kinds of menial tasks and manual labor.
 - A. One day the news was heralded in all the land that the king was hosting a grand ball to find a suitable bride for the handsome prince. All the maidens of the realm were requested to attend.
 1. But in their cruelty, Cinderella’s family tries to keep her from going, being jealous of her beauty. But after they leave, the girl’s fairy Godmother appears.
 2. With a wave of her wand, she provides a stunning gown and a pair of glass slippers. She turns a pumpkin into a coach, and transforms a couple of mice into beautiful white horses...and Cinderella is off to the dance!
 3. But she is warned that the spell which transformed her will wear off at midnight, at which point she must return home, or risk exposure.
 - B. At the ball, Cinderella captures the notice of the Prince, and they dance and laugh the night away.
 1. Soon they retire to the garden to be alone, and at the very moment they are about to share their first kiss, the clock begins to peal the first of 12 bells.
 2. Midnight! Cinderella frees herself from the Prince’s embrace and dashes off before the spell can wear off, leaving nothing but a glass shoe, shimmering in the moonlight...*the end*.
 - C. Wasn’t that a compelling story? Are you satisfied with the ending? What was missing? 6 little words: “**And they lived happily ever after**”.

1. What good would the story of Cinderella be if we didn't know that the prince, tramped through the village, placing slippers on feet til he found his true love?
 2. What good is it if Cinderella goes home, to a life of slaving away for her unjust stepmother? What if Cinderella and Prince Charming don't get married and ride into the sunset to fulfill their destiny of living "happily ever after"?
- II. Over the past 10 weeks, we have told you what NRLC believes: how all wisdom and authority is vested in the Scriptures; of a Father who planned your salvation, a Son who accomplished it, and a Spirit who applies it; We spoke of how God regenerated you, making you alive in Christ. We told of the Gospel, the story summarizing this information for mankind's benefit. We said Christ had inaugurated a kingdom that is expanding even now. Pastor Dave told us about the church, the kingdom's agency, consisting of all believers, functioning in the world as the Body of Christ.
- A. But, as good as it is, all of that information can be very unsatisfying if this story has no "happily ever after"! Even Paul acknowledged this when he spoke of one aspect of the church's great hope: the resurrection of the dead.
1. **1 Corinthians 15:19 ESV** *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.* He wanted us to believe in the reality of a "happily ever after" for the people of God!
 2. In fact, every single New Testament writer spoke of a preferred future where sorrow, sickness, sin and death would be done away with; where "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:4)".
 3. But they also speak of a time when the wicked, rebellious and unjust will be punished; where, as the scriptures say "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night (Revelation 14:11)."
- B. 2 weeks ago we talked about the "already" aspect of God's kingdom; today we look at the "not yet". We call it "the Consummation of all things", completing the story. By it, human history as we know it, the devil's reign of terror, and every whit sin comes to an end. God is glorified, and God's people are vindicated.
1. This topic is called "Eschatology"; meaning the study of "last things".
 - a) Eschatology includes things like the return of Christ, the restoration of the created order and the redemption of the saved and judgement of the lost.
 - b) This topic, like few others, has historically been **very** controversial, with a lot of debate concerning the relevant passages (much of it uncharitable).
 2. So the way I want to focus on 6 things that we can all agree on, no matter your deeply held views on the subject of the end times. But before we begin, let me clarify some things up front.
 - a) First, I am not going to try to persuade you to any particular eschatological position. I definitely hold a position that I've crafted through much wrestling, study, and necessary humility over the years, but there's no way to make a clear persuasive case in one Sunday morning service.
 - b) Because of this, I am not going to tackle anything that overly mysterious or overly disputable from the book of Revelation, Daniel, or Matthew 24.
 - (1) For example, that means I'm not going to discuss the timing of Christ's return, the identity of the antichrist, what 666 means, or the meaning of the various beasts of Daniel and Revelation.

- (2) A lot of people who love Jesus just as much as you do interpret those things in 100 different ways than you do, so we will leave that for another time. What I'm am devoting our time to is what we agree upon.
 - c) For anyone interested, I personally am an amillennial, partial preterist.
 - (1) When I say those words, some of you are googling it, some of you are convinced I'm a heretic, others couldn't care less, and others think I just spoke in tongues and are waiting for the interpretation.
 - (2) But if anyone wants to learn the specifics of what I believe and why, I'd be happy to buy you a cup of coffee and discuss it in a spirit of love. If you want to argue, that's ok too...but you're buying the coffee.
 - C. While I can't say that all eschatological systems are created equal, as a general rule, all Christians believe that the Bible has something to say about what is coming at the end. But, as they say, the "devil is in the details". How will the events predicted transpire? What is the expected chronology?
 - 1. When I was younger, I often heard people say, "I'm a pan-millennialist; I believe it's all going to pan out in the end." This may be a way to dodge things that are difficult to interpret, but it really only serves to remove the "happily ever after." **Revelation 1:3 ESV Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.**
 - 2. It is very difficult to be blessed by reading, hearing, keeping what is written in the book if we are determined to ignore or avoid it because of fear.
 - D. I encourage everyone to adopt a position on these things; or, if you already have a position, have the courage to read and study both your own position, **as well as** the position of others, acknowledging that you might not know everything!
 - 1. And as always, remember that no theological system is infallible - only God's revealed Word is! It must be the final arbiter of truth for the believer.
 - 2. As you study, do so with a teachable heart. If you're convinced of your position **only** because it's what you were taught and always believed, you are just as much in danger as someone who participates in a false religion, never looking with a critical eye at the things they have always believed.
- III. With all that stated, Let's begin our list of the things we can agree on...
- A. First, we should agree that the coming of the Lord Jesus will be unexpected. **Mark 13:32 ESV "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. 35 Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."**
 - 1. Many people place great stock in "signs of the times", but the Bible's emphasis seems to be that Jesus' coming will be unexpected, taking people by surprise. In 2,000 years, the church has not yet learned the import of Christ's words, "concerning that day or that hour, **no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

- a) In 1988 a booklet was widely published entitled “88 Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988”. He did not. So the author did the logical thing. He wrote a booklet called “89 Reasons Why Christ will return in 1989”.
 - b) The late Harold Camping did the same thing a few years back. Some quit their jobs, sold their homes, and waited for Jesus. Again, he didn’t come.
2. While Jesus tells us in the passage we just read to stay awake and alert, he doesn’t want us to be obsessed and distracted by his coming. When Christ ascended, the angels told the gathered Apostles to stop gazing into the sky! Christ would surely return as he had promised, but until then, they were to obey what He had commanded them to do. It is no different for us.
- B. Second, no matter what you believe about the chronology of the end, we’re assured that Jesus will gather his people, both dead and living. **1 Thessalonians 4:16 ESV** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.
1. This is the “blessed hope”! Both “the dead in Christ” and “we who are alive, who are left” are assured that we will not be overlooked, but that we will be gathered to our Lord to be with him forever.
 2. Paul says that at his coming, Christ will resurrect all his own, and then the end will come gloriously, “when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24).
- C. Thirdly, at the end, Christ will fully and finally establish his kingdom, the kingdom that has been advancing since the time of his incarnation. The OT prophet Daniel looked forward to that day. **Daniel 7:14 ESV** And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.
1. All resistance to his rule will be squashed, and all praise and worship will finally be lavished on it’s sole rightful recipient.
 2. Our text referred to this this morning when it spoke of a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem. **2 Peter 3:13 ESV** But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It’s where God says, “Behold, I am making all things new.”
- D. Fourthly, we know that this kingdom will not be bliss for everyone because in this kingdom, God will sit exalted on his throne while all the wicked fall on their faces in terror before his awesome and dreadful presence, awaiting their just sentence.
1. **Revelation 20:11 ESV** Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. **12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. **13** And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. **14** Then Death

and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. **15** And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

2. What a terrible day for those who reject Christ, spurning his Gospel! I long for the day of my union with Christ, but I shudder for those who will stand before God, naked, without excuse, withering under the weight of his holiness. Christ said, “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28)”.
- E. Fifth, in his coming, Christ will be seen by all. His return is not mythical, metaphorical, invisible or merely spiritual; rather it is actual, significant (influencing all creation), and perceivable to the 5 senses.
1. **Revelation 1:7 ESV** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.
 - a) Jesus said on a few occasions that “**you will see** the Son of Man coming (or sitting - as a judge is seated) in the clouds of glory”
 - b) When Christ returns, no one will miss it - even if they don't watch the news or log in to facebook. His coming will be worldwide and fully known, announced with a piercing trumpet blast and the victorious shout of the archangel. The righteous, both living and dead, will meet him in the air and will be by his side as he judges the wicked and rebellious who rejected him, both living and dead. Everyone of them will see him!
- F. Lastly, on that final day, the Lord's return will be glorious. The creation itself, as we have always known it, will be dramatically affected.
1. **Isaiah 11:6 ESV** The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. 9 **They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.**
 2. This isn't just an indicator of changes in the instincts and behaviors in the animal kingdom, but a promise of lasting, God-ordained, global peace.
 3. Jesus often referenced glory when describing his coming; of “coming on the clouds of glory” or of “coming in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”! His coming will be the most significant event of the future.
 - a) The kingdom will be glorious, because our glorious Savior makes it so.
 - b) But what is so different about the coming kingdom that isn't true of the presence of God that we as believers experience now?
 4. The Bible teaches that King Jesus will remain visibly present, enthroned and available to his elect redeemed on a renewed planet earth for all eternity.
 - a) We read this earlier: “the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God”. This is the great promise of the consummation.

- b) Everything points to that moment. It is the moment of completion for the church's mission of proclaiming the gospel to all nations.
- IV. One of my favorite phrases in our statement is "a hopeful future". As a child I was terrified of the coming of the Lord because all I ever heard about was a tyrannical worldwide leader. I was told repeatedly that, if left behind, unless I took that leader's mark on my body I would be starved, tortured and executed. But if I did take it, I would be damned for all eternity. If you'll excuse the expression, it was a classic case of "damned if you do; damned if you don't"!
- A. The basic message was, try as we might to preach the gospel and proclaim righteousness, this world's going to hell in a hand basket and there's nothing we can do as believers except hold on tight until Jesus comes at the last second and pulls our collective butt out of the fire. Frankly that doesn't sound very hopeful.
1. It also wasn't a very helpful tool for evangelizing my lost friends, either. Just like a one-sided "turn or burn" message, the "avoid the antichrist and mark of the beast" theme might serve well to scare the daylights out of my friends, but it rarely produced any lasting conversions once their fear wore off.
 2. What was lacking in that message was the beauty of Christ, and the glory of his sacrifice on the cross for human sin so that sinners might believe, repent and love him. Love makes us obey, fear, the Bible says, has torments.
- B. My eschatology today is completely hopeful. I long for the day when Jesus "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
1. I proclaim the gospel often, fully confident that it is enough to transform this sin-depraved world and win new disciples for the glory of Jesus. Isn't that the meaning of the passage that Dave and I both read to you in the last couple of weeks?
 2. **Matthew 16:18b ESV** "...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
- C. This doesn't mean that everything until that day will be painless and carefree! But Jesus said we'd be hated, persecuted, arrested and killed. That's the normal Christian life! We're the exception! We think we're persecuted if someone serves our coffee in a red paper cup, or warmly wishes us a "happy holidays"!
1. Many of us have been pretty spoiled by the illusion of religious freedom.
 - a) It's an illusion because it could vanish at any moment and we'd be more like our brothers and sisters around the world.
 - b) But it's also an illusion because we think that because we're healthy and can pay our bills mostly on time, we're enduring in trial and that we're favored and blessed. In reality many of us are spiritually fat and lazy.
 2. But Revelation chapters 2 & 3 contains 7 amazing promises to the one who truly conquers, or endures, or overcomes until the end. Remember that next time you're in suffering. Remember that "as it is" isn't all there is.
- D. On the last day, we won't be saved by the hair of our chinny-chin-chins! Jesus will bring this story to a beautiful close one day. Can you trust him until then? The prince will go throughout the village, and find his true love, and as sure as anything else I've said this morning, they will live "happily ever after" forever!