



## **The Story of All Stories**

### ***The Story of Scripture – Part 40***

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Revelation 1. This is it. At the beginning of February we started this journey as a church reading through the Story of Scripture together, going chronologically through the Bible to see how this Book, made up of many stories, tells one overarching story. That story comes to a climax in the book of Revelation.

Today I not only want to tie this story together, I want to show every single person within the sound of my voice how this story includes you, right where you are sitting. My prayer is that when we walk away today, every single one of you will see your life as part of a much bigger story, that you will realize you are made for more than what often feels like the mundane or even sometimes day-to-day meaninglessness of this world. I want every one of you to realize that you were made to play a significant part in this story of all stories.

I also pray that for some of you, today might be the day your story changes forever, that a few minutes from now, some of you might find yourself putting on one of these shirts and being baptized, confessing your faith in the One Who is at the center of history.

So let's dive into the book of Revelation. Obviously, because of time, we're not going to be able to do an exhaustive treatment of this last book in the Bible, with all the questions that come up as you read through it. These are questions that have confounded students of the Bible for years and unfortunately have divided Christians and churches from one another, based on how people understand this or that.

This is tragic, because that's not the purpose of this book. God didn't give us this Word to divide us or confuse us. The book of Revelation is not intended to promote hopeless speculation about times and events in the future, which is what a lot of people think is the purpose of this book. They think Revelation was written to drive us to all kinds of speculation and debate about when, where and how this or that will take place at the end of the world, but that is not why God gave us this book. Revelation absolutely speaks about the future coming of Christ and the end of the world, which as we said has led to all kinds of questions and discussions throughout the history of the church. But that is not the primary purpose for which this book was written.

The book of Revelation is not intended to promote hopeless speculation about times and events in the future. The book of Revelation is intended to fuel hopeful obedience amidst trials and temptations in the present. Let me show this to you in the first three verses of Revelation:

*<sup>1:1</sup> The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> 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.*

Did you hear that last phrase? “*Blessed are those who keep what is written in it...*” This means that in order to understand this book, we need to start by putting ourselves in the shoes of the first people who heard it read. Imagine for a moment that we are in the first century and as the church, we are facing persecution on all sides. Some of our church members have been imprisoned. Others have been killed. They’ve been hung on crosses, thrown to wild beasts, or beheaded for their faith in Jesus. John is writing this letter to us from an island where he has been exiled because of his faith in Jesus.

This means that right where we live, right now, we are facing all kinds of temptations to turn away from Jesus, or at the very least to compromise our faith in Him. And we’re surrounded by all sorts of pleasures in the world—money, materialism, sex, success—and are tempted to leave our faith to run after these things. It’s into this setting that God speaks through John to urge followers of Jesus to hold on to hope in Him and obey Him amidst the trials and temptations around us.

Ten different times in Revelation, the people of God are urged to obey the commands of God. It’s interesting that when you get to the end of the book, in Revelation 22, it doesn’t end with a vision of heaven. That’s how you would think Revelation would end, if the book was primarily about the future. Look at Revelation 22. After we see a picture at the end of chapter 21 and the beginning of chapter 22 of a new heaven and a new earth for God’s people, eight of the last 15 verses in Revelation call God’s people to obey, to stay faithful. This includes a recap of what we just read in Revelation 1:3.

Look at Revelation 22:7 with me: “*Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the word of the prophecy of this book.*” This is the same thing that was said in the very beginning. The purpose of this book is not to promote hopeless speculation about the end of the world. The purpose of this book is to call people to a hopeful obedience to Jesus today. That’s the primary point.

So when we read the book of Revelation, we need to look less at timelines about the end of the world and more at our lives right now. Are we faithfully following Jesus today? Or are we giving in to the ways of this world? Are we compromising our faith? Or are we zealously proclaiming Jesus in light of judgment that is coming? That’s what this book is about. It’s written to make us look more like Jesus and proclaim Jesus with greater zeal to people around us in our city and among the nations. The way it does this is by tying together the entire Bible. This book is the climax of the New Testament, the second part of

the Bible. It contains over 400 allusions to the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible. So it shows how the Story of Scripture we've been reading ties together.

## The Story of a Kingdom

I want to pause at this point to recap all we've read over the last ten months in the story of the Bible. I want to show you one theme that I would say is central to this story. I want to show you that the Story of Scripture is the story of a Kingdom. As soon as I use that word "Kingdom," I realize that imagery is somewhat ambiguous for most of us, because most of us have not lived in a country where we've been ruled by a king as part of a kingdom. Or if we have lived in a country with a king, we may have all kinds of different impressions about what that means.

So just to help with this imagery, I want you to think with me about three essential elements of a kingdom. First, in a kingdom you have people who are ruled by a king. You have citizens or residents who are members of the kingdom. These people are subjects of the king. Then you have a place where the king has dominion, the area over which the king rules and reigns. So a kingdom involves the people who are ruled by the king, a place where he rules over the people, plus a purpose for the king and his kingdom. We need to ask, "What is the goal of this king for this kingdom?"

Any kingdom will have all three of these components, which means we can think about the Story of Scripture through this lens. It's the story of a Kingdom in which God is bringing His people to His place for His purpose. This chart is my attempt to show you how all of Scripture ties together as the story of God's Kingdom. If you're visiting today with a friend or family member, or you may be exploring Christianity on your own and maybe you've never read the Bible, today I want to show you the overall storyline of this Book. Even if you are a Christian and you've read the Bible numerous times, part of the point of this journey over the last year is to show you how it all fits together.

Think with me about how the Bible, the Story of Scripture, starts with creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Think about creation in light of these three facets of God's Kingdom that we just talked about. First, think about people. In the beginning we see God's blessing on His people as He creates man and woman in His image as the pinnacle of His creation. God is their King; they are His beloved man and woman who are created to know and enjoy God the King, to worship and walk with God the King, to experience perfect communion with the perfect King. The Garden of Eden was a perfect place. Every relationship in it was perfect. The relationship between God and people was perfect. The relationship between man and woman was perfect. The relationship between people and the world was perfect. This was a blessed people in a place of perfect fellowship, created for one purpose: God's glory multiplied to all peoples. In Genesis 1:26-27, God creates man in His image, then in verse 28, God says, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*" He was saying, "Spread My glory through My image all over the earth."

At the end of Genesis 2, man and woman are married. They become one flesh together and the stage is set for God's glory to multiply through His image bearers. This is the Kingdom of God as it was

designed to be: God's people experiencing God's blessing in perfect fellowship with Him in the perfect place where His glory is multiplied throughout the earth to all people.

Then comes the fall in Genesis 3-11. When the fall occurs, everything changes. Instead of only God's blessing on His people—only the blessing of the King on the subjects of the Kingdom—now we see God's blessing and judgment through Adam and Eve. God had said in Genesis 2, "If you sin, you shall die." This is why immediately after Adam and Eve sin in Genesis 3, we see the just judgment of the King upon His people.

The fact that we still see His blessing is only because of the King's mercy. Because of His mercy, instead of man and woman immediately dying, the King brings death upon an animal, a sacrifice that covers over the shame of the man and woman in their sin. So we see both blessing and judgment through Adam and Eve—now in a place, not of perfect fellowship, but of disrupted fellowship. All the relationships that were perfect in Genesis 1 and 2 are now disrupted in Genesis 3.

Man and woman's relationship with God is now filled with guilt, shame, fear and denial. Man and woman's relationship with each other is now filled with strife. Man and woman's relationship with the environment is totally different. They are cast out of the Garden of Eden, away from the presence of God. Listen closely to the words of Genesis 3:24: *"[God] drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."* Remember that imagery: a flaming sword separating man and woman from the tree of life, which was a picture of perfect communion with the King.

Now, one day man and woman will die, not just Adam and Eve, but every man and woman after them will die as a result of sin in our lives. God's glory is now marred in all peoples. Every man and woman in history since Genesis 3, including every single one of us, is born with a sinful nature, with a heart that rebels against God. This is epitomized in the flood in Genesis 8, in the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, all of which leads to the patriarchs of Genesis 12-50, where we see God's blessing and judgment through fathers of the faith like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

So the King calls a people to Himself, beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. God promises to bless him, using Abraham and his family to show His blessing to all peoples, if Abraham will only trust in God. This is the key from the very beginning of God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 18 and 22: trust in God and His promises, as God begins to lead them to a place of promised fellowship. "Leave your country," God says, "and go to the place, the land, that I will show you." When Abraham gets there, God says, "I will give you and your descendants all these lands."

Then God makes the same promises to Abraham's sons, Isaac and Jacob. This land becomes the Promised Land where God will dwell with His people. He says over and over again, "I will be with you." From this place and through this people, God will make His glory known to all peoples through His faithfulness to those promises. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God says, "I will bless you and through you

I will make My blessing known to all the nations, all the peoples. You will be a conduit of My blessing to all the peoples of the earth.”

This part of the story, though, ends with the people of God—now the people of Israel—going to Egypt to escape famine in their land. Genesis ends with God’s people in a foreign land, holding on to God’s promises, which sets the stage for the exodus and conquest (from Exodus to the first part of 1 Samuel). Here God raises up new leaders, showing once again both His blessing and His judgment. Now, through Moses, Joshua and different judges including Samuel, God shows blessing and judgment.

Think back to our memory verses in Exodus 34:6-7: *“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.”* The picture here is that God the King is both merciful and just. This is why we see God’s judgment in sobering ways—whether it’s the plagues in Egypt or scenes of judgment in the times of the judges—and at the same time we see God’s blessing in awesome ways. God remembers His people in Egypt; He hears their cries and delivers them from slavery. God brings them out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where He gives them His Word and promises to dwell among them.

This leads us to place. God says, “I’m going to be with you as My people in a tabernacle.” God outlines what this tabernacle should look like. It was basically a portable tent with an area at the center of the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies, shaped like a cube, that symbolized the glory of God’s presence with His people. Only the high priest at special times is able to enter into the Holy of Holies, this place where God, the King, dwells with His people. God gives them His Law—regulations for worship—in Leviticus. In Numbers, they rebel against Him and end up wandering in the desert until an entire generation passes away. A new generation rises up, led by Joshua, to enter into the Promised Land—which they do.

In it all, God’s glory is made known to all peoples through His deliverance. As God delivers His people from slavery in Egypt, He says, “The nations will know that I am the Lord.” That phrase, “so they (or you) will know that I am the Lord,” occurs 50 times from Genesis to Numbers. God brings them into the Promised Land and says, “Get rid of all the foreign gods there. Reflect My glory to the surrounding nations.” God, as King, is bringing His people to His place for His purpose.

Yet God’s people again rebel against Him as King, saying, “We want a human king like other nations.” So God gives them what they want. Mark it down. It’s a frightening thing when God gives sinful people what they want.

This leads to the united monarchy, where we see God’s blessing and judgment now exemplified among His people through kings like Saul, David and Solomon. If you look at all three of these earthly kings, you’ll see God’s blessing and judgment. God’s blessing is most clear in His covenant promise to David to bring about an eternal King one day through David’s line. One of the key parts of God’s promises to David and Solomon pertains to a place where God promises to bless them in order that they

might build a temple for God's glory to dwell among His people. So Solomon builds a temple where people can encounter the glory of God. This replaces the tabernacle. It's a temple with various courts—a court for the nations (the Gentiles, a court for Jewish women and a court for Jewish men. Again, at the center of the temple is the Holy of Holies, this cube-like area in that symbolizes God's holy presence with His people; the place where only the high priest can enter on certain occasions into the most holy place.

In all of this, we see God's glory made known to all peoples through His anointing on these kings and on this place. Speaking of the temple, 1 Kings 8:41-43 says all the nations “...*shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand...that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.*” The purpose of the temple is that all the peoples of the earth might know the name of God and fear Him.

As we continue on, the people of God again rebel against Him, including kings and citizens of the kingdom. This eventually leads to a divided monarchy where God's people are divided into a Northern Kingdom called Israel and a Southern Kingdom called Judah. There were all sorts of kings, most of them very evil. As a result, we see God the King showing His blessing and judgment through prophets who foretell God's coming judgment upon God's people, who prophesied that other nations are going to invade Israel and Judah and take the people into captivity.

Yet at the same time, they bring good news that if God's people will repent, God will relent and show them mercy—but they don't listen. So in time, the Northern Kingdom of Israel is destroyed and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, the place where the temple is located. Yet even though the temple—the dwelling place of God among His people—is destroyed, God the King is still with His people. He is with them now in exile where God sustains and strengthens them as they're taken from their land.

He also promises to restore them and eventually bring them back to their land and God the King does so. He brings them back to Jerusalem and in it all, God's glory is made known to all peoples through His discipline of His people. God says in Ezekiel 36, “I will show the holiness of My great name, the name you have profaned, among the nations where you have gone.” He also promises in Isaiah 60 that there will be a day in the future when His light will shine and His glory will rise upon them, then nations will come to that light.

Throughout these prophecies, God promises to bring about the restoration of His people through another King Who will come. But this King will be different than all those before Him. The prophet Isaiah says about this King that He will be a Child born and a Son given; His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, says the Lord Himself will suddenly come—and He does. After 400 years of silence, God the King does the unthinkable. God the King comes Himself in the person of Jesus. God's blessing and judgment are exemplified and exalted through Christ the Messiah, the ultimate Prophet, the perfect Priest and the promised King.

Do you see the significance now of what we celebrate at Christmas? The King has come to us! The King has come to bring judgment and show mercy. This is God among His people. The word for that in the Bible is incarnation. God in the flesh. John 1:14 says the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us. That’s the same word that’s used for tabernacle in the Old Testament, only here it refers to a Person, not a tent. John 2:21 says Jesus is the temple, the place where God and man unite as one. Jesus is the dwelling place of God.

Jesus is God the King living in the flesh among sinful people, so that God’s glory might be made known to all peoples through His salvation. Ah, see it. Jesus changes everything in history. Jesus comes on the scene and does what no one else had ever done or would ever do. He lives a life with no sin in Him, then, even though He has no sin to die for, He chooses to die on a cross to pay the price, the payment for sinners like you and me.

Jesus dies for our sin, then He rises from the dead, defeating sin and the grave, making it possible for all people everywhere to be reconciled to God the King. Jesus changes everything in history. He makes it possible for sinners everywhere in all the nations to be forgiven of their sin and be restored to relationship with God—a relationship with the King. Jesus makes it possible for you, right where you’re sitting, to become a citizen of the Kingdom in relationship with God the King. Don’t miss the point of Christmas. The King has come to make that reality possible!

Yet, at the beginning of Acts, the King leaves. Jesus ascends into heaven after His resurrection so that He might send His Spirit upon His people. That leads to the present, depicted in the New Testament from Acts to Jude, and leading up to today, when God’s blessing and judgment are shown through His church. Beginning in Acts and spanning the rest of the New Testament and continuing today, Jesus is the Judge of all and everyone’s eternity is dependent upon how they each respond to Jesus.

All who turn from sin and self, trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord, become members of His church. There’s no longer any tabernacle or temple, because God is now dwelling—not just with His people—God is dwelling in His people, in our bodies. The New Testament teaches that our bodies are now the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place where the glory of God dwells. First Corinthians 6:19 says that if you are a Christian, God’s Spirit dwells inside of you. He’s not in this temple or that tabernacle—He’s in you. You are the temple.

The church together, according to Ephesians 2, is the dwelling place of God. God’s Spirit dwells among us. Even as we gather right now, God is with us. Now the nations don’t come to a physical building to see the glory of God. No, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we go to the nations declaring the glory of God. This is the purpose of the church: God’s glory proclaimed to all peoples. It’s what we say to each other every week at the end of our gatherings: “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them, teaching them, knowing that I am with you always” (Matthew 28:18/20).

We have been commissioned by this King to proclaim His Kingdom. Do you realize what this means? Start to see yourself, Christian, in this story. You and I are in a long line that began with

creation—with God and a people and a place for a purpose—leading all the way to now, where God is dwelling in this people. We are the place and we have a purpose: to spread His glory and proclaim His Kingdom to all peoples. So don't waste your life on any lesser purpose. Spend your life following the King and proclaiming His Kingdom to all peoples, until one day we will come to the new creation.

Now read with me in Revelation 21. In light of this story, let's see how it all ties together:

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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."*

*<sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup> 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."*

Ah, see it? The culmination of this story of a Kingdom where we see God's final blessing and judgment, where all people—including every person within the sound of my voice, young and old alike—will either experience God's blessing or God's judgment for all of eternity. We'll come back to that in a minute.

Let's finish out the picture. For all who receive God's blessing, they will find themselves in God's place—heaven, a place of eternal fellowship with God. Look down at Revelation 21:15-17:

*And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare; its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.*

We could keep going. Some people read this and think, "Okay, so this is the architecture of what heaven looks like." They figure out the numbers and calculate the measurements, trying to picture it. But if we focus too much on the details here, we may miss the big picture point. The picture we have here in Revelation is a collision of images. It's a city. It's a new heaven. It's a new earth. It's a bride. And it's a temple. If you look at these measurements, you'll realize heaven is described here as being like a cube. You wonder, "Why would that be?" Then you remember back—the temple and the tabernacle in the Old Testament were the dwelling place of God among His people and the Holy of Holies was shaped like a cube. You put these measurements together and it hits you: this is like one giant, massive Holy of Holies,



then you realize that's the point. The point of heaven is that we are going to dwell in the perfect presence of God. All of us. Not just select people like a high priest in the Old Testament, but every single person who has trusted in Jesus will have eternal fellowship with God.

This is what we read in Revelation 21:3: *"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 where we have to be really careful. People start talking about mansions in heaven. "What's your mansion going to look like? Mine's going to have this or that." We start thinking about how heaven is going to be a place where we have all the finest amenities of this world. Don't be so materialistic in your thinking! God is not trying to compete with economic prosperity in the West.

The point of heaven is not that we'll have all the things we could imagine from the world. The point of heaven is that all the things we could imagine in this world will not compare with the fact that we are with God. If all we want is more things, then we'll miss the whole point. The point of heaven is not that we'll have more stuff. The point of heaven is we'll have God. If you want stuff more than God, then you've missed the whole point. It's the dwelling place of God with His people, where we will all be gathered for His purpose: God's glory enjoyed by all peoples.

Keep going here in Revelation 21. Look down at verses 22-26:

*And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.*

Do you see it? Just like Isaiah had prophesied, all the nations, all the peoples, will enjoy the light of God's presence. Revelation 7:9 describes a great multitude that no one can number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, who will enjoy eternal fellowship with God forever and ever.

Turn to the last chapter, Revelation 22, beginning in verse one. You've got to see this. *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life."* That's the first time we see it since Genesis 3. Remember Genesis 3:24 where the flaming sword was keeping man and woman from the tree of life?

Now we see again the tree of life, *"with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."* It will be life for people from all the nations. This is where all of eternity is heading.

## **Your story and the King**

This then leads to your life, your story right where you're sitting, and the King. In light of this story, every single one of us must decide between one of two options. One, we can gladly surrender to the rule of Jesus the King. Revelation 21:7 tells us we can trust in Jesus to make us a citizen of the Kingdom. Or number two, we can ultimately rebel against the rule of Jesus the King. Revelation 21:8 describes those who turn from Jesus and find their portion in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Please see this picture here in Revelation. For all who rebel against Jesus, you will spend your life separated from God on earth, separated from the King Who created you, the King Who knows what is best for you, the King Who made you, loves you and desires your good. For all who rebel against Jesus, you will spend your life separated from God on earth, then you will experience an eternity of never-ending judgment in hell.

This may sound like strong language and I know it's politically incorrect language. But if you read the book of Revelation, you will see horrifying pictures of holy judgment that are coming upon all who turn from Jesus. These words may sound unloving, but I would maintain that if the Bible is true, then these are the most loving words I could say right now. God in His Word is telling us, out of love for you, that never-ending judgment in hell is coming for every single person who rebels against Jesus.

So I want to plead with you to surrender your life to Jesus—and surrender is the right word. It's not just to give intellectual consent to Jesus, to believe that Jesus died on the cross. The Bible says even demons believe that, but they will be in hell forever. The Bible beckons us to surrender to Jesus, trusting Him as Lord of our lives. And we are to do this gladly. Why? Because for all who surrender to Jesus, you will spend your life in communion with God on earth, reconciled and restored to a relationship with the King Who gives life. He is the King Who loves you and Who knows what is best for your life.

So you can live as a citizen of His Kingdom in a day-to-day relationship with God the King. You can come into the King's presence anytime for anything you need. Not only will you be in relationship with the King, but you will also be an ambassador for the King. You will be His representative to other people in the world who are in need of His love—people all around you and all around the world. You will be part of a unique community of the King called the church, which is made up of men and women from all nations who are saved by His grace to enjoy His goodness, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and planting communities of the King. It's like we saw earlier, where more and more churches are being planted among all nations.

This is what it means to spend your life in communion with God on earth and then to experience an eternity of ever-increasing joy in heaven. Did you hear it in Revelation 21:6? *"To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."* It's a picture of joy that is free and joy that is full. Psalm 16:11 says, *"In your presence, God, there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasure forevermore."* This is ever-increasing joy.

Do you ever find yourself experiencing so much joy doing something that you think, “I don’t want this to end”? That is how the Bible depicts heaven. The difference is heaven never ends. It will get better and better and better because God’s goodness is infinite. That means there will always be more and more and more to enjoy, where we will be like priests in the temple with perfect, unhindered access to God.

The Bible depicts us in heaven as a bride with her husband. The language in Revelation 19 and 21 is like the joy of a wedding. No husband stands at the front of a church on his wedding day, looks at the back of the room emotionless when his wife walks out, then says, “Hmm. There she is.” No, when those doors in the back swung open, he about jumps out of his shoes, thinking, “That’s my wife!” That’s the picture of joy here.

We’ll be as brides with a Husband, as participants in a banquet, as children of a Father, as heirs of a King. Do you realize this? The King of the universe is your Dad and He is preparing a Kingdom for you. We will be with Him and we will behold Him. Revelation 22:4 contains what I would say are the five most beautiful words in all the Bible: *“They will see his face.”* We will see Him; we will serve Him and be served by Him. The Bible depicts God the King serving you and me. In the words of Isaiah 25:6, *“The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.”* He will serve us as we reign with Him and rest in Him. No more striving against sin in a world of suffering. No more sorrow. No more tears. No more pain.

I was meditating on Revelation 21:4 this morning. There will be tears that will last until that day, but they will not last beyond that day. Our bodies will be resurrected, our souls will be satisfied, our desires will be perfect and all creation will be restored. Remember, the Bible does not picture heaven as some boring place where we float on clouds and sing songs while we stare at light for a few quadrillion years. This is not an endless choir practice.

It’s a place where we’re going to experience the fulfillment of all our desires, in a new earth where we will have a Kingdom to rule, a universe to explore and friends to enjoy from every nation, people, tribe and tongue—living, loving, working and worshiping together.

I love the way C.S. Lewis ends the last book of the Narnia series. He writes:

The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us, this is the end of all the stories, and 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, and all their adventures in Narnia, had only been the cover and 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.

The end of Revelation, the end of the Bible, is only the beginning of a story where every single chapter will be better than the one before. So I want to invite everyone to bow your heads and close your eyes. I’m going to ask the most important question I could possibly ask and I want you to answer it

honestly just before God. That's why I asked you to bow your heads and close your eyes. Before God, I ask have you surrendered your life to the rule of Jesus the King? It's the most important question in the world, not just here, but for all of eternity.

If your heart does not resound with a "Yes!" in answering that question, I want to invite you and urge you to surrender to Jesus today. You are not guaranteed tomorrow. You're not guaranteed the rest of today. In this moment, I want to give you an opportunity to put your faith in Jesus, to gladly surrender your heart to Jesus. Just say to Him right now, "Dear God, I am a sinner. I need You to save me from my sins. Today I trust that Jesus died on the cross for me and I want to surrender to Him as my King. I want to be restored to a relationship with You, now and for all eternity. I gladly submit to Jesus as King of my life."

With our heads still bowed, if you just prayed that to God, I want to invite you to lift up your hand if you're saying, "I am trusting in Jesus as King today. I'm surrendering to Jesus as King today."

O God, for the hands in this room, I praise You for those who are experiencing new life in Your Kingdom. I praise You for doing what I've been praying for all week long, that You would bring people here today who are under Your judgment in sin and that they would receive Your mercy in Christ in a way that means we will worship You together for all eternity. All glory be to Your name.

I pray that You would give them and others who have not been baptized the courage to celebrate new life in Jesus through baptism. May they put on one of these shirts, step into that pool and say, "Yes, my life is identified with the King of history. My life is surrendered to Him." God, I pray that in light of all we have walked through, not just today, but for many of us over this last year, that we would live as part of this story, as citizens of Your Kingdom, as ambassadors for You, our King.

I pray that we will proclaim the good news of Your Kingdom. O God, may Your Kingdom come. May the good news of Your Kingdom be spread across this city and to the ends of the earth. As we continually pray as the way You taught us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come." And we cry with Revelation 22, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly." We look forward to the day when we will see Your face. We pray that You would help us, by Your grace, to live with hopeful obedience from this day until then. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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