

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
September 2022

(added progressively for each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Revelation 21:1-27

The New Heaven & Earth & Eternal State of God's Church

Based on S Olyott

Revelation 21:7

7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

The Book of the Revelation has been the subject of a number of occasional Sermons towards the end of 2021. We began to work through the Chapters at our Tuesday Bible Study and brought to the attention to the whole congregation various sections of the Book on these occasions. Throughout December 2021¹ we discussed the sometimes controversial Chapter 20 and concluded with the following summary:

When we get to the end of this chapter the 'great passion of the ages', should be clear to us. Throughout the history of the world, the Gospel will be preached. All that time Christ's Church will continue its work of gathering in the elect by the proclamation of the Gospel. However towards the end of the world in a brief season there will be a great unleashing of evil – some believe that that will be headed up by a particular person. There will be a final rebellion against God and against His Church. It will be a time of awful and severe testing for the Lord's people. It also seems, from earlier in this book, that the Church itself, although it continues to exist, will no longer have a voice for that brief period.

Then entering into that situation, as all things seem to be 'all up' for the Church, our Lord will come. Bodily, visibly and gloriously! He will raise the believing dead and He will transform the living believers. There will be a great gathering together of the Lord's people. He will destroy, by the breath of His mouth, the 'man of lawlessness'. He will judge all men and angels to be consigned to their everlasting destinations. He will refashion the new heaven and the new earth, which will become the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed.

With this as background we now begin several weeks of looking at the important and uplifting final two Chapters of the Revelation of Jesus Christ as given to the Apostle John.

Our approach has been not to look in every possible detail of the Book, but to give an overview of it. For two reasons: For too many it's a neglected Book – so we seek to stimulate a little interest and appetite; to others it's a completely closed book. Therefore by having a broad overview we can have a least some glimpse of what is in this book.

¹ Recordings of the 4 sermons titled: Earthly & Heavenly Aspects & The Great White Throne, are still available on our website and also from Kerusso. As are the downloads of the four parts of it on the website.

We pointed out that the Book is written for believers, who live in evil times. Particularly times of persecution. So the Book is intended to encourage us in this evil world! Also we must remember that it is a symbolic book. It's filled with 'pictures' and visions. So when we find mention of trees, streets, waters, rivers, walls, precious stones and the other things. Remember they are all symbols. John saw it all in a vision – when he was 'in the spirit'.

The book contains 7 independent visions. They're somewhat like the pipes of an organ. Each pipe starts at the same level but they extend upwards by different lengths. All the visions start, approximately, at the ascension of Christ. The first visions only take us to the brink of the judgement. The middle visions take us to the judgement. While the latter ones: describe the judgement. But now you must be asking, if you have read the book of revelation, so far: "What happens after the judgement?" It's in this last vision, which is in Chapter 20, 21 & 22, that we are told what happens after the judgement. Chapter 20 takes as far as the Judgement and then we have two whole Chapters telling us about the Eternal State.

Had we looked, even as a quick overview, at the development of the seven visions as delivered to John. We would have found that there was a Chiastic Structure of the Revelation from Chapter 12 to 22:5

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE
of
The Revelation

- A. The people of God depicted with the imagery of light and creation (12:1-2)
- B. The dragon: Satan (12:2-6)
- C. The beast and the false prophet (13:1-18)
- D. The bride: The people of God in the imagery of purity (14:1-5)
- E. Babylon the prostitute (17: 1-6)
- E. Babylon destroyed (17:15 – 18:24)
- D. The bride is blessed with marriage (19:1-10)
- C. The beast and the false prophet are destroyed (19:11-21)
- B. The dragon is destroyed (20:1-10)
- A. The people of God in the imagery of light and creation (21:1 – 22:5)

So what we have learned: is that throughout history the Church will exist. Throughout history the Gospel will be preached. Throughout history 'lost' people will be saved. However at the end of history, there will be a great unleashing of evil. Then our Lord will come and all his enemies, he will conquer and vanquish.

All the people who follow His enemies, (remember if you don't follow Christ, you must be following the devil – there is no neutrality!) All who follow His enemies. He will eternally punish. That's all perfectly clear in the Book of Revelation.

But what happens to those, in history, who have followed the Lord Jesus Christ? What happens to them after the judgement? After the 'judgement seat' of Christ what will happen to you – the believer? What will be the eternal state? We have plenty of information which tells us what happens to us when we die. Often in the Revelation we have seen folk who have been beheaded or killed for the sake of the Lord Jesus, gathered in heaven. But we haven't had any information about the eternal state of believers. That's what we are to find now and in future weeks.

Firstly we will overview the first 8 verses of Chapter 21: John has taken us as far as the Judgement and now he tells us what he saw as this 7th vision continues. In verse 1 he saw that heaven and earth, as we now know it, has completely passed away. Every stain caused by sin. Every stain of death. The whole 'curse'. The present order of things have completely gone. You'll know that the Bible teaches that this present universe will end with a great conflagration. A great fire. The elements will melt at a fervent heat. (2 Peter 3:12) But what John sees, verse 1, is a new heaven and a new earth. Now we are poor English speaking people, so we can't distinguish between 'new' and 'new'.

Almost every other language, in the world, is capable of doing it. Not us. So we may say that we have a 'new' car. What do we mean? Is it a different car or a brand new car? In French or most other European languages you wouldn't have this problem because they have two words for these situations. And so does Greek. There is 'new' in the sense of something being renewed, and 'new' in the sense that something is brand new and completely different thing from anything that ever went before. Which word 'new' does John use, when he talks about a new heaven and a new earth? He uses the first: a renewed heaven and a renewed earth, that John sees.

The old order of things have completely passed. The old heaven and earth have been completely melted down. Then they have been completely rejuvenated, renewed and made again. That's what John sees in verse 1. *1... a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, ...* So it's not a completely 'other' heaven and earth. It's a rejuvenated, renewed heaven and earth.

Then the first thing he notices as he looks around the new universe is that there is no sea. Why no sea? Well the sea in the Bible as you may know, is a symbol of the present unrest and conflict of sinful man. It's significant that earlier in the Revelation. Where did the 'beast' come from? Out of the sea! Well all those former things have passed away. Sin, conflict, the supposed rule of the devil, enemies of Christ. None of them are to be found in the new universe. And nor is the symbol of them – which is the sea. So John sees a completely transformed – a completely, wonderfully rejuvenated, new universe.

Now we go to verse 2: In this universe, John sees the Church of Christ. The Holy City: is the Church of Christ! We can prove that from verse 9. *“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* (We know already that the ‘Bride’ of Christ is the company of believers who are His Church.)¹⁰ *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ...* So Jerusalem which he sees descending out of heaven from God is the Church of Christ. The Holy City is the Church of Christ!

Now where is the Church of Christ at the moment – in the present order of things? Well, hopefully some of us are here. Here we are in the ‘body’. We’re far from perfect. You could not call us Holy and you could not call us a bride adorned for her husband. We’re full of imperfection. But some of the Church of Christ is here – Imperfect. And some of the Church of Christ is elsewhere. They are the spirits of ‘just men’ – made perfect! The believers who have gone before and are in the presence of Christ – surrounding His throne. (Revelation 7:15)

But they are not living on the earth. So at the moment we have an imperfect Church of Christ on the earth and a perfected Church of Christ, without their resurrected bodies, in the heavenly. But in the new heaven and new earth. That state of things won’t continue. The Church of Christ, which is in the presence of God, actually comes down from heaven – from God, out of heaven. Prepared as a bride – adorned for her husband. And we have the whole Church of Christ – in the body – with God, living in the new heaven and the new earth. Clearly some of the distinctions which we currently know, will not exist in the new heaven and the new earth. A distinction between heaven and earth; physical and spiritual – for example. So we are seeing a glimpse of the future glory which awaits us.

Our future dwelling place is the new heaven and the new earth. A perfect Church of Christ. Now verse 3: The only known inhabitants of the new heaven and the new earth are the believers who make up the Church of Christ. So the new heaven and the new earth is the dwelling place of the Church. And the Church, verse 3, is the dwelling place of God! Everything that has been promised through the long centuries. Having been partially realised during the long centuries. Is realised in full. In the future state.

Here you are on earth as a believer. God is your God and you are His child. That’s a truth now! But in the future state, it will be true in a way which is not even true now. When we shall say, *He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.* There will be a fellowship and enjoyment of God. There will be a dwelling of God amongst His people, which transcends anything that we have ever known before.

In verse 4 we see a little of the new order of things. The Lord in His kindness doesn’t tell us what it is like. He tells us what it is not like. The present order of things is an order of tears. No tears in heaven. Not even tears of joy. No death. No sorrow. No crying. No pain. Why not? Because those are all things that characterise the present state and this present state has passed away. Those former things, belong to now,

and they won't be found at all – then.

Some commentators suggest that John was so absolutely transfixed, by what he was seeing, that he forgot to write. Hence verse 5. 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."*

Verse 6: The one who had in His hand the beginning of the universe, has in His hand the end of the universe as we know it. And the remaking of the universe. He is the Originator and the Completer. ⁶ *... the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.* He promises this glory to all who will come and drink. *To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.* We shall see that the spring (fountain KJV) of the water of life is God Himself and the Lamb. Anybody who is thirsty – says this Book, addressing present readers, in this present state – may come and drink of the water of life, freely. Anyone who wishes to come. May come! There is no need for any reader or hearer of this Book to experience the 'second death' which has already been mentioned.

"Yes" says the Lord, verse 7, "persevering believers shall inherit all things – these things. The things that have been described. 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 sulphur, which is the second death."*

So God there, confronts this world with two destinies: There's the new heaven and the new earth in which the Holy City – the Lord's people – dwell, and ... everybody else – whoever they are, experience the 'second death' – which is the everlasting punishment spoken about in verse 8. We have to remember that the things we have been reading about haven't been fulfilled yet. The Book which we are reading is addressed to the present readers. We are being told about the heavenly glories, so that if we are believers. We will be encouraged by the prospects, And so if we are not believers. We may still seek the Lord while he may be found.

We are being told about the damnation of unbelievers, so that if we are believers, we will know that evil shall have its downfall. And so that unbelievers, may flee from the wrath to come and take the 'water of life' while it is still being offered. The Revelation isn't just about the future. It addresses itself to the present needs of its readers. It's an evangelistic Book in that sense.

What we have learned so far is that only the redeemed will enjoy the new universe. But what precisely will our eternal state be like? We will find out as we continue from verse 9 next week. But what we have to remember is that it is all symbol.. It is all vision. All 'picture'. We cannot tell while in this life, precisely, what the eternal state will be like. When Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, that there is a physical body and a spiritual body: is there anybody present who can describe what a spiritual body is actually like? (In physical terms!) We are being told something that we are not able to grasp.

So we are going to be told something about the heavenly glories – it's beyond our understanding. So it will be described in symbol and in 'picture'. At least in order to get some idea of it. We can get the idea well enough to know that we want it and that we are excited by it. But not enough to put down a formal definition. For those people who unreasonably, want all their contrived, questions answered.

[2570]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

Revelation 21:1-22:5

The New Heaven & Earth & Eternal State of God's Church – Pt 2

Per S Olyott

Revelation 21:23

²³ 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.

Last week we started to work through Chapter 21 of the Revelation. We were introduced to the renewed heaven and earth (verses 1-8). Finding that all descriptions were necessarily in the form of symbolism since our physical world and the consequent understanding that we experience through it does not equip us to understand a spiritual existence.

Now we come (verses 9 onwards) to the description of the New Jerusalem, which is also described in symbols & 'pictures'. Having already been told, through the writing of John, that the New Jerusalem – the Holy City of God – is in fact the 'bride' of Christ: The Christian Church in the New Heaven & the New Earth.

Verses 9 – 22:5: Where we will not work verse by verse but just note the main features.

- Our Eternal State is described as a city. The Holy Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem is not something to which we go. The new Jerusalem is something which we are! This is so different from human understanding and expectation that it needs to be constantly stressed. There's only one Zion in the Bible. Only one true Jerusalem and that is the 'people' of God.

Verse 10: ¹⁰ *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,*

¹¹ *having the glory of God, ... And then: verse 16, ¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, ...*

The length, breadth and height of it are equal. Also verse 18, ¹⁸ *The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.* Note that to human, physical experience and therefore understanding, pure gold, clear as glass is beyond us. What John was describing was so wonderfully different that that was the best he could do. As was the case with the streets (verse 21).

We've already seen in the previous chapter (13:9) that the Church is described as a city. In that Chapter we saw the beloved city surrounded by it's enemies. At which point the fire came down from heaven and devoured the enemies of the Church. But now we see the Church as a glorious Church. Without spot or wrinkle or any sort of imperfection. So all the words and epithets which are being heaped up have the purpose of describing this inestimable glory of the Church in the Eternal State.

When you consider the word 'city' in the 21st Century what do you think of primarily? If you've seen reports of the war in Ukraine, probably rubble and burnt

out buildings. But more generally 'city' conveys the idea of a multitude. An urban mass. That is what is being conveyed to us here. The Church of Christ is a glorious church, which is composed of a multitude. A multitude that is now in transcendent splendour: verse 11. ¹¹ *having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* And again at verse 18: ¹⁸ *The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.* ¹⁹ *The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.*

What we have to note about his city (verse 16) is that it was a perfect cube. There are no cities like that on earth. ¹⁶ *The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. ... Its length and width and height are equal.* And we also read that each dimension was *12,000 stadia*. In our measurements just under 1400 miles (2250 km). Of course 12000 is 3 x 4 x 1000 (3= the number of God, 4= the number of the universe, 10x10x10 = the number of perfection cubed!) That is: God's complete plan for the universe. Together with God's saving purposes being now complete and perfect.

You might wonder: where else in the Bible do we get a perfect cube? In the Temple and before that the Tabernacle. The Holy of Holies. In that case, once a year, the High Priest went into that perfect cube. Which was a symbol of the perfect unveiled presence of God. But the whole city is a cube! We shall spend eternity in the unveiled presence of God. It won't be one priest once a year, but the whole Church of Christ – all the time!

- This city is the chosen 'bride' (verse 10). The groom has come for the bride and the bride is now described (verse 9) as the Lamb's wife. So the eternal state of the Lord's Church is first of all described as a city; this city is lit by the glory of God; (verse 11) ¹¹ *having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* (verse 23) ²³ *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.* (Chapter 22, verse 5) ⁵ *And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.*

It is a 'picture' of the saints of God – true Christian believers. Basking in the unveiled glory of God. From the throne of God it radiates His glory. This glory fills the whole city. All the light that is there comes from him. There is no night, because 'night' in Scripture is a symbol of sin, 'darkness' and perdition.

So our eternal state as the Holy City, which in fact is being in the 'Holy of Holies', where we bask eternally in the glory of God.

- The Lord God and the Lamb are its Temple. (verse 21:22) ²² *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.* In the Old Testament days, if you wanted to worship God. You had to go to the Temple (or the Tabernacle before that). So there were some places on earth where you were closer to God than others. But not so in the Eternal State. You don't need to go to any particular place to have fellowship with God, because in

our Eternal State our fellowship with God will be direct and immediate. You'll be no closer or further from Him in one place than another.

So we go to the Holy of Holies, to bask in the glory of God. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing we shall be in perfect and immediate fellowship with God.

- This city is surrounded by a great and high wall. (verse 12) ¹² *It had a great, high wall, ...* (verse 17) ¹⁷ *He also measured its wall, ...* (verse 18) ¹⁸ *The wall was built of jasper, ...* A wall of course is a symbol of safety and security. A common Christian fear is that having got to heaven will we remain in this glorious condition for ever and ever. Here we have this symbol inviolability of security and safety. Notice that the wall (verse 17) is 144 cubits. So far in the Revelation 144 has been a symbol of the Church. Both of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The wall is the reminder that the Church will never have to be robbed of safety and security again.

The wall also has foundations. (verse 14) Twelve foundations. (Verses 19 & 20) The foundations are decorated with various stones. The 12 foundations are the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. It's the Apostolic teaching which surrounds the city. It's the Apostolic teaching which encircles the glorified Church. All these Apostles had one thing in common: they proclaimed the Saviour. Their teaching is the foundation of heaven. A direct connection: The people who subscribe to and obey the Apostolic teaching are the true Jerusalem! They are the Zion of God. It is those very people who are to be glorified.

- Now what about all these Jewels in verses 19 & 20? We can at least recognise that there were 12 jewels on the High Priest's breast plate in the Old Testament. Some have suggested that if John did his own translation of the Old Testament, perhaps he is referring to the same jewels. Which could be a suggestion that we owe our presence in heaven to the intercession of our "High Priest", the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's also interesting that all these jewels may be found in 1st Century writings as the signs of the zodiac. Except that when they are found in Pagan rites they are found in exactly the reverse order. That Pagan order supposed a daily progression of the Sun through the patterns of the stars that were associated with the zodiac. The suggestion is that John was led to deliberately put them in the reverse order to signify that the glorified state would be totally unlike anything in the old heaven and the old earth.

- In this wall are 12 gates. Verses 12,13, 21, 25, 27 (and in the next chapter verses 14 &15, also) tell us about that. Each gate is a pearl. Each gate is guarded by an angel. The city is square, with 3 gates on each side. What do the gates symbolise? Four throughout the Revelation is the number of the universe. People come to this city from the four sides – the 'four corners' as it were. Twelve is the number of the elect.

These gates are never shut! When do you usually shut the gates of a city? At night or when there is danger or when the enemy is approaching. There is no longer any fear from these! So the gates are always open. (verse 26) ⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations.

- There is both street and river in the city. Sometimes, in English, we use a sentence like this: On the banks of the Murray the river gum flowers. We don't mean that there is only one solitary gum tree on the banks of the river Murray. What we mean is there are a whole number of trees. Many commentators take verse 21:21 to mean not just one street, but streets in general. However we are still faced with symbols whether one or many. ²¹ ... *the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.* The eternal state is characterised by splendour, purity – indescribable glory!

^{22:1} *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 ...* Hendriksen² points out that there is a hymn which contains: “*Shall we gather by the river that flows by the throne of God.*” He says that we should still sing the hymn but correct it to say, “from the throne of God”! There is an ever flowing abundance of eternal life flowing from the throne of God in this place of splendour, purity and glory.

It's hard to work out what is contained in verse 1 & 2 of Chapter 22. Some commentators say that there is a street and a river with a tree of life growing in between them. Others say that there's a street with the river flowing down the middle and an avenue of trees of life. It's not worth an argument. The symbols are clear nevertheless. The fact is that the 'tree of life' flourishes! In the Eternal State. The very tree which our first humans, and also ourselves, forfeited in Eden is flourishing in the eternal state. The tree giving everlasting, never dying, ever renewing, life. It's leaves are for the healing of the Nations. Health giving leaves.

And so on. The symbolic 'picture' of the eternal state. Next week we will round off the delights of heaven as symbolised in the first five verse of Chapter 22 and then go on to complete the overview of that chapter to complete our brief interlude examining the Revelation.

[2022]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

Revelation 22:1-21

The New Heaven & Earth & Eternal State of God's Church – Pt 3

Per S Olyott

Revelation 22:7

⁷ ***“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”***

Last week in Part 2 of this topic, we made a broad overview based mainly on verses 9-27 of Chapter 21 with a few references to 22:1-5. We have been discovering the delights of heaven, awaiting the redeemed, as symbolised by the Apostle John.

Briefly now, we continue with 22:1-5, before turning our attention to the rest of the last Chapter of the Last Book of Scripture.

- The tree of Life. We have already noted the array of the tree of life (Verse 2). It's leaves having healing properties especially the spiritual healing of the Nations. The ever-abundance of this blessing is intimated by the worldly familiar: ² *... yielding its fruit each month*. But of course in the Eternal State there is no monthly cycle caused by the earth's travel around the Sun. So the concept of day and night, month and year are no longer in effect. However this continues to point to the fact that symbols in the Book of Revelation are taken individually and are not necessarily consistent with each other.

So the leaves are constantly available for their healing properties. The symbol of everlasting, never dying, ever renewing life. There's an abundance. There's no lack. No shortage. There's no curse! (verse 3) It's significant that the tree (verse 2) and the 'curse' are mentioned next to each other. So we think back to Galatians 3:13 *“Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”*³. Whereas our Saviour was cursed hanging on a tree. In the Eternal State there is a tree which guarantees there is no more curse.

- The throne of God and of the Lamb is there. Chapter 22, verses 3 & 4: This Church is the dwelling place of God. This city is where God's throne is found. It's where the Lamb's throne is found – there is no distinction between their thrones. And God's servants aren't spending eternity in idyll leisure. His servants shall serve Him! The ridiculous Pagan notion of people floating around on cotton wool, strumming away at some primitive form of harp. Has no connection with Scripture. Where the whole emphasis is in serving our Lord; seeing His face; And His name being on our foreheads!

He openly acknowledges that we are His. At the moment we live in a world, such that people don't recognise us for what we are. We are the 'Children of

³ ^{3:13} Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— Where the quote is from Deuteronomy 21:23.

God' but they don't know that. But at the 'Last Day' we will be openly acknowledged. We will carry His Name throughout eternity. Openly acknowledged as His!

- The redeemed reign. (Verse 5) Strange isn't it: God reigns. The Lamb reigns. And now all His people reign! The city is fully, filled with Royalty. Filled with kings. All this is piling up the symbolism to fill us with excitement and expectancy: Of the Eternal State of the Church.

Let's be quite clear, who the citizens of this city are. (Chapter 21 verse 7)

⁷ *The one who conquers⁴ will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.* [Where as the footnote shows those who conquer are: *they who, hold fast their faith even unto death against the power of their foes, and their temptations and persecutions.*] And verse 12: ¹² ... *and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed*— which we also encounter in Chapter 7 – the 'chosen' of God. Then verse 24. The Nations of them that are saved⁵ shall walk in the light of it. (KJV)

Again verse 27. ²⁷ *But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.* Chapter 22 verse 3. ³ *No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants (bondservants) will worship him.* Chapter 22 verse 14. ¹⁴ *Blessed are those who wash their robes, (do his commandments) so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.*

Scripture is perfectly clear. These glories of which it speaks, in marvellous symbolism, are reserved for those who are Christ's. Everybody else is 'outside'. In this beautiful book, the Revelation. In which we have the most clear teaching of the exclusiveness of salvation. Only those who are Christ's. Who are in His book of life. Are in glory. If you are 'in the faith', you are in the New Jerusalem. If you are not in the faith, you are outside.

Now we look briefly at verses 6 – 21 of this last Chapter:

This is very straightforward. Any symbolism has already arisen earlier in the Book and can be explained quite quickly.

In verse 6, John is assured that the things which he has seen and the things that he has heard are of divine origin! ⁶ ... *the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.*" This is one of the closing em-

4 Extract from Thayer's Greek Lexicon for STRONGS NT 3528: **νικάω** [the specific example of this 'root' word being **νικῶν** (nikōn)]

– absolutely, to carry off the victory, come off victorious: of Christ, victorious over all his foes, Revelation 3:21; Revelation 6:2; ἐνίκησεν ... ἀνοίξει κτλ. hath so conquered that he now has the right and power to open etc. Revelation 5:5; of Christians, that hold fast their faith even unto death against the power of their foes, and their temptations and persecutions, Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; Revelation 3:5, 12, 21; Revelation 21:7;

5 Verse 24 (of Chapter 21) implies the residents of the eternal State. The Reformation Study Bible also recognises that these are the redeemed. With the note: **The Nations.** Redeemed humanity in all its cultural diversity.

phases of the book. There's been a lot of apocalyptic books written in history. Lots of books filled with imagery, symbols and 'pictures'. But this one is going to close with the assurance that it comes from God.

So in verse 7, our Lord speaks again. Telling us that He is coming quickly! It won't be long until the things that have just been described are our experience. Therefore the people who keep the sayings and the teachings of this Book are blessed indeed!

In verses 8 & 9 we have a surprising incident. Previously John has been so struck with what he has seen that he has worshipped the angel. He does it again! Men of God do have faults and men of God have recurring faults. Even men who have marvellous visions, may still do things which are contrary to the will of God. He falls down at the angel's feet. But the angel again reminds him, very sharply, that he too is only a servant of God. It is God alone who is to be worshipped!

Then he is instructed not to seal the Book. Books were often sealed. To be opened at a later time. Or not to be opened by a particular person. This book is not to be sealed. Because the things that the Revelation teaches begin to be fulfilled at once. Hence the parallel visions: each one starting at the time of John. Nothing is to start to be fulfilled at some future date. They begin to be fulfilled at once. The 'time of John' and the 'last time' connect.

Verses 11-15: A very serious warning! Verse 11 is a difficult verse. " ... ¹¹ *Let the evil-doer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.*" What does this verse mean? Well all we can say is that whatever a man has chosen to be let him be that. You mix in this world with a man who is unjust and he is determined to be unjust, then let him remain unjust. While you are determined to continue to be holy and righteous. Then you get on with that.

But there could be more to it than that. When our Lord comes, at His Second Coming. That is it! There is no second chance. Those who are unjust etc when the last day breaks then they remain as they are at that point. There is no change once the Eternal State has broken upon us. Those who are righteous (only through Christ, of course) and holy remain in that condition: the glorified.

But know, verse 12, that the Lord is coming! "I'm coming with rewards and I'm coming with negative judgements."

Verse 13: He tells us that He is the beginner and the end of history.

In verse 14, it is made clear to us that only those who obey Christ will enjoy the blessings that have just been described. Everybody else is 'outside'. Once more we come to this great division of the human race. Eternally! This book is becoming increasingly solemn. It could be classed as exciting while it is only predictions. But the Book is preaching to its readers and assuring them that these things are true. That they are true because God says so. That Christ really is coming. That there will be a division of the human race!

Indeed our Lord Himself, verse 16, attests that the Book is genuine. You see: As we have suggested before, this is the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostle John. It's our Lord Jesus who sent this Book to the Churches.

Who is this Lord Jesus? Well he is the 'root' of David and He is the offspring of David. He is the divine human, Christ. As well as the *bright morning star*. (An Old Testament symbol found in Numbers for the royal personage of the Messiah.)

Verse 17: Now there are many interpretations of verse 17. Some think that the *Spirit and the Bride* – the Holy Spirit and the Church – are calling for the coming of Christ. ¹⁷ *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come."*

But to support that interpretation you have to do a switch in the verse. Because the remainder of the verse is a clear invitation to the lost to come and be saved. To partake of the water of life freely.

The whole verse then could be taken as a sweet evangelistic invitation. The Eternal State hasn't yet broken. The judgement hasn't yet occurred. The great division of the human race has not yet happened. We still do live in the Gospel age. We live in the Gospel age where the Holy Spirit works in the world through the Church. So people hearing this Book, where the Spirit and the Bride do address the world. They say, "Come. Come to the Saviour presented in this Book. Come to the salvation proffered and offered in this Book.

Let the person who hears this Book say, "Come!" Anybody who is thirsty for Salvation. For that blessed state we've been speaking about. Let them come. There is no exclusion of Jew or Gentile, man or woman, boy or girl. Whosoever will – let him take the water of life freely – without charge! Without contribution. He only has to come and drink. This is really the spirit of verse 17. This glorious Book is ending with an address to the readers.

It's searching our hearts already. To make us ask whether we are in the State or whether we aren't. Am I bound for the glories which have been described or will I experience the 'second death'? If I am in any doubt, then I am a 'lost' man or woman!

None the less I am invited to come and partake of the Salvation which is being spoken about in this Book.

Verses 18 & 19: This important and divinely inspired book, with its heavenly teaching is not to be meddled with or tampered with. No body is to add to it. No body is to subtract from it. If you add to it: God will add its plagues to you. If you take away from it: then God will take away your part from His Book and from the Holy City and all the blessings written in this Book. No one is to call this Book spurious. No one is to say that it is uninspired. No one is to say that it is not worth studying. The integrity of the Book is guarded by divine threats.

The One who is 'coming', verse 20, is coming quickly. John in his 'heart' is completely engaged now, with his subject. He's seen something of the heavenly glories. He's consumed with longing. He longs for the Lord to come! He cries out, "Amen. Even so Come, Lord Jesus. (KJV) The same cry which is translated from the Aramaic, *Marana tha*⁶. A phrase the early Christians used to say: "Our Lord, Come." Even so, come Lord Jesus!

6 See the same reference in the last sermon on 1 Corinthians, several weeks back.

With that cry the Book which is also a letter from the Lord to us, ends with the benediction and the reminder that not just some believers but ALL believers depend on the grace of God. It's a tremendous conclusion to Holy Scripture. We have in our hands the holy writ of God. You now see, if you turn to the first pages, that it began with the creation of the heaven and the earth. Now you come to the last pages and you have the New Heaven and the New Earth. In the second page of the Bible you would see the Sun and the Moon and the stars coming into being through the Word of God.

Now we are seeing that there is no need for the Sun, Moon and stars. If you were to read on in Genesis you would read of paradise lost. But now you've closed the Book as you come to a Paradise that has been restored. The coming of the power of the devil you find in the Genesis chapter 3, but three Chapters from the end of the Bible you read of the doom, destruction and the eternal punishment of the devil. At the end of Genesis 3 you read of man being expelled from the Garden and earlier in that Chapter of men and women fleeing from the presence of God. But today we have just read of the redeemed of God basking in and enjoying the presence of God. In Genesis the Tree of Life is forfeited. But now we see the Tree of Life being enjoyed. It's the most perfect conclusion to Holy Scripture. We are persuaded that it is the Word of God, 'by the majesty of its style' says the old confession, and the 'unity of all it's parts'. WCF 1v.

When we come to the last verses of the revelation, by know in our Christian conscience: this is not just the end of the Revelation, but that it is the end of the 'whole counsel of God'!

[2385]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen.**

Delivered Sunday 25th September, 2022

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Suffering, Comfort, Deliverance

Per S Olyott

2 Corinthians 1:2

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second letter of Paul the Apostle to the Church at Corinth. Chapter 1: Paul is writing to the Corinthians. In the south of Greece is a little strip of land at the end of which there is what appears to be a large island to which it is connected. Corinth is on the little strip of land. It had a population of about 750,000. It was, what the English – who know about these things – would call a ‘middle-class’ city. There were an enormous amount of slaves, with a large proportion of ordinary, working people especially on the docks.

It was quite a strange city, given that you could see boats going through streets – on rollers. Because this little strip of land was so narrow that it was actually easier to get the boats out of the water. Take them through the streets on rollers and then put them back in the sea on the other side. Rather than to sail all the way round in the frequently rough weather.

It was a grossly immoral city. Which is often the case with ports. So immoral that the word Corinthianise⁷, in Greek, actually meant to be immoral. It was a city of brothels; their equivalent of ‘night clubs’; drunkenness. As well as theatres, medical schools. A city of debate, music and concerts. A very wealthy city.

And in it was a Christian Church!

Paul had gone to Corinth in the early years of the 1st Century. About AD 51-53. He had stayed there 18 months. He practised unsophisticated plain preaching in this very cosmopolitan, cultured, but mixed-up city. But nevertheless people had come to Christ. Large numbers of them. Jews, Gentiles, free people and slaves. People who had Roman citizenship and others who had nothing.

So there was this great Christian Church, which had been founded by Gospel preaching. Paul went back two or three years later. Because there had been some very significant moral problems in the Church and he went to ‘sort them out’. It was a very painful visit. He had had to be very severe.

However now Paul is thinking of going back to Corinth. He’s shortly to leave this part of the world, because he has in his mind the idea of evangelising Spain – the Western end of the Roman Empire. So he is planning to move from the area of the Aegean

⁷ Because of Corinth’s sordid reputation, a new Greek word was coined, *korinthiazomai*, which meant “to live immorally like a Corinthian.”

Sea. Providing on his way the opportunity for a final visit to Corinth. So he writes this letter to prepare for his visit to Corinth for the third time.

It's called the Second Letter to the Corinthians, but in fact it's the fourth he wrote. In God's Providence two have been lost, but these two have been kept for the Church of all time. Therefore for us!

It was a very strange Church that he had to write to. They had greatly admired Peter, who had visited that Church recently. He was 'rough and ready', straight forward and a Jew. One of the 'original' Apostles. They greatly admired Apollos. Who'd been there recently. He was also a Jew. But brilliant in the Greek Language. Full of oratory, rhetoric and powerful speaking and compelling preaching. So they weren't now, quite so sure whether they wanted Paul back or not. He didn't have that sort of 'sparkle', and besides he wasn't one of the original Apostles. Maybe he wasn't a real Apostle at all!

They were also troubled by certain people who had come to the Church, since Paul had left. Who said that they were apostles. They were Charismatic people in every sense of that word. You were 'electrified' in their presence. They worked all sorts of 'signs and wonders' – miracles. Did all sorts of compelling signs. Spoke powerfully. Whereas Paul's preaching was rather poor in comparison. So there was further doubt about Paul's Apostleship. Was he really a 'messenger of Christ'.

So Paul is preparing the way for his intended third visit in writing this letter. He's going to talk about why he's delayed his visit; pleased that the earlier moral problem has been sorted out; restart the collection of money for the poor of the Jerusalem Church – which had stalled in his absence; and particularly he is to talk about these 'other' apostles and 'their' Gospel and 'their' Jesus. Because not every Jesus who is preached is Jesus. Not every one who uses the word Gospel is preaching the Gospel. Not everyone who claims to be a 'true messenger of Christ' is. So it's a very important letter. And it's a very difficult one. Nonetheless important!

Firstly we are going to see, here and there, wonderful glimpses of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want the fullest statement of the death of Christ in Paul's writings, you'll find it in this letter. Most of us know snatches of this letter. But it is very unusual for a Church to study it all the way through. Which is what we will do! So we will see the Work and Person of Christ.

Also we will see, more clearly, the relationship between the Testaments. How does the Old Testament relate to the New? What are the differences; similarities; and connections, between the two? Because these so called 'new apostles' had a very strange view of the Old Testament. Paul is going to put us right on that!

We will see how to recognise a true Minister of Christ. Very important for younger Christians, who by and large are mobile in the location of their employment. So from time to time they will have to seek out a new true Minister for their spiritual guidance. Paul is going to tell us that you don't just weigh them up by the 'message they

preach'. Not only that. The Gospel can be defined and he will continue to define it in this letter. But you also weigh people up by the life that they live. He's going to show us in this letter that the Gospel preacher has two great characteristics: He preaches Christ, crucified, buried, resurrected and reigning, but he lives also a crucified life. The whole message of the 'Cross' is reflected in his lifestyle and his approach to Ministry. So we will find that out.

But what you will discover and will help you the most is where God's power is seen. In the 19th Century there were the Bismarck's, Movements of Empire, Wars and conflicts and fights for Colonies, and the great word in the 19th Century was power – power – power. That 'spirit of the world' came into the Church! All these Movements: Higher life, Second blessing. Which came to life in that atmosphere. Implying that 'what the Church needs' is Power! But they hadn't read 2 Corinthians. Paul tells us that God doesn't want us to be powerful! He wants you to be weak. Doesn't want you to be strong. He wants you to be vulnerable.

Because God's Power is the reason you are only weak instruments. God in His might meets men and women in their ordinariness. The great need of the hour is not exceptional Christians – exceptionally Christ-like. The great need of the hour is dependant men and women – who realise that they have nothing in themselves. They have to find it all in God.

That's the message of 2 Corinthians. Can we hope to savour an anticipation of such great and necessary teaching.

The letter opens with a familiar Greeting. Why does Paul start as he does? ¹ *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*, Because there were these 'other apostles'. Who had sent them? They had sent themselves! They had come into the Corinthian Church and said, "We've got the answer." But Christ had never met them on the Damascus Road – like He met Paul. He had never appointed them: Apostles of Jesus Christ. An Apostle, remember, is an infallible interpreter and teacher of the Christian Faith. Who has seen Christ physically resurrected and has received the personal commission from Him. "I'm an Apostle," says Paul, "by the will of God!" He's going to argue very strongly for his Apostleship. Which is extremely important to us as well. Otherwise, why bother to submit, to such a letter as this.

¹ ... *and Timothy our brother, ...* Who is not an Apostle! It is quite wrong to use the word, Apostle, even of a great preacher. Or even someone sent by an Apostle. By definition there can be no Apostles today. And there aren't! All people who say they are Apostles are misleading you. If you call anyone an Apostle you're misleading the people you are speaking to. So what Paul teaches will be helpful in sorting out, who is who.

He's sending his greetings: announcing who he is. But who is he writing to?

¹ ... *To the ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia) of God* ... Is what he writes. Now when a Greek heard the Greek word, *ekklesia*, he thought of a parliament – meetings in the city square where people came together to discuss business. City business, politics. That's what

the word, *ekklesia*, meant. 'People who came together', is what they would understood it to mean. But when a Jew heard the word, *ekklesia*, because most Jews at that time when reading their Old Testament in Greek (The Septuagint). They thought of the *ekklesia* of the Old Testament when the people came together first in the desert and then in the Temple. The great national gatherings of the Nation.

Here is Paul using the same word in: the *ekklesia* of God. There are people who are the Israel of God, who have been called together into a company at Corinth. They are the ones Paul is writing to. As well as *all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia*: Where Achaia is the Province in which Corinth was found.

That's why we can take the letter as being to ourselves. It's to the Corinthian Church. But Paul has always insisted that his letters written to one Church, should be read in other Churches. We're a Christian Church! It's to the Corinthian Church, but it's to all the saints who are in Achaia. It's a logical extension that it is to all the saints. Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles. We are mostly Gentiles! And also remember, that the Apostle Peter said, that what Paul wrote is Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). That's why we come to study such a book as this.

A true Apostle is writing to God's gathered people. A community of God's people. He is writing to a Church. He's writing to this Church. We have a 'Word from God' to the Church!

Now once more in verse 2 Paul sends his familiar greeting. He's used exactly the same greeting in six other letters in the New Testament. Nothing exceptional about it. Except to tell you once more: When two Greeks meet they say, "Grace." And when two Jews meet they say, "Peace" (Shalom). So Paul covers both saying, ² *Grace to you and peace ... but not from Paul. ² ... from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. His letter is intended to do you spiritual good and it comes in that spirit of friendly greeting.

That's how he opens the letter. Already we can feel the momentum beginning to build up. Because here is an Apostle of Jesus Christ, speaking to the Church, in a way which is intended to do us good. A friendly letter intending to wish us peace and health.

His first subject is comfort in suffering. This is found in verses 3-7.

For today we now pause being ready to continue with Paul's letter next week.

[1958]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.