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## **How to Buy a Roundtrip Ticket to Planet Earth**

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Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 20-21

Over the last several months I have been doing a series from the book of Revelation. Today I am going to give the very last message in that series.

One of the perennial questions facing mankind concerns what happens after we die. What happens to us and what happens to this planet? Perhaps the most popular view among Christians is that if you are a child of God you get to live with God forever in heaven. People are a bit confused about where heaven exactly is. There is an old Sunday School song that says:

*Somewhere in outer space,  
God has prepared a place  
For those who trust him and obey.*

The chorus consists of a rocket countdown: 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 – BLAST OFF! At which point the children jump up in the air simulating the future launch that we are encouraged to expect.

And when we get to this place way up in the air, what will we do? Well, the common Christian answer is that we will worship God forever.

Now, I love to worship, don't get me wrong. But singing, "Change My Heart, O God," a thousand times in a row, or spending a week singing, "We will dance on streets that are golden," or even singing something as wonderful as "Holy, holy, holy..." could get a little old. I know that we aren't supposed to say this, but hanging around in outer space spending all your time forever singing worship songs simply doesn't sound that exciting.

Sometimes I think Huck Finn got it exactly right. There is a story in Huck Finn where Mrs. Watson, in an effort to make a very fidgety Huck Finn sit still and behave, warns him about the perilous destiny for all restless little boys, who don't sit up straight and study their spelling books. Here is what Huck Finn says,

*Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.*

Huck Finn is right. Heaven sounds incredibly boring – at least for most ordinary people.

But you need to understand that the common way of thinking about the future, our future after we die and the future of planet Earth is almost entirely wrong. Very early on in the history of the Christian church, the church came under the influence of Greek philosophical thought, primarily the thought of a philosopher named Plato, who held to a very strong dualism between body and soul. The church, very early in its history, began to teach the view that when we die our souls go to heaven and we will live eternally in heaven in a pure spiritual environment forever.

Now, it is absolutely true that when a Christian dies today the Christian's soul is separated from our body and our soul does go to be with God in heaven. But that is a temporary state, what theologians call "the intermediate state." That is not the final state for the Christian.

What is the final eternal state for the Christian? Have you heard of something called "The Resurrection of the Dead?" The Bible teaches that for eternity we will be embodied. We will not be ghost-like, floating all around up in the air in outer space somewhere. We will spend eternity embodied. And we will spend eternity not floating around in heaven, but on earth – an earth liberated from its bondage to decay.

Now you know that this popular view of the future of disembodied souls floating around somewhere in outer space in a place called heaven, which will be an eternal church service, not only makes heaven boring, but this view also drains meaning from life right now. Christians sing songs like, "This World Is Not My Home, I'm Just Passing Through." The generally held Christian view is that this world doesn't count for very much in our future, or in God's plan. By and large, God is going to scrap this world and everything in it. He is going to burn it all up. Sometimes the perspective that is offered is one I heard a few years ago, which said, "This world is like the Titanic. It has hit an iceberg called Sin and it is going down. The best thing we can do right now is to try to get as many people off the sinking vessel and into lifeboats so that we might be saved for heaven."

As I've been teaching through the book of Revelation, I've been attempting to give you a picture of the big story of the Bible so that you could fit your life and this church and our world into the Bible's big story. I believe that many people have a sense of ultimate pointlessness in their careers, child raising, and schooling because they think that ultimately what we do right now doesn't matter at all. In one way or other it is all going to be junked, burned. What is the point of oiling a truck that is going over a cliff?

There is an old saying that no one washes a rental car and it has often been applied to housing in urban neighborhoods. People ask: Why in certain

neighborhoods when you drive through don't people have pride in their property? Why don't they mow their lawns? Why don't they paint their houses? Why don't they fix the screen doors? Well, there are lots of different issues affecting urban neighborhoods, but one primary issue is that in many neighborhoods almost no one owns their property. It is all rental property and we treat rental property differently than we treat our own property.

Now, let me apply this to our future. Is the world just rental property like the old hymn says: This world is not my home, I'm just-a passin' through...because if it is rental property, what's the point of cleaning the carpets, caring for children, dispensing medical care, or fixing the computers? What we are going to discover today is that this world is our home and we're not just-a passin' through. Heaven is just a temporary stop on our way back to planet earth.

A few years ago I was in London, England and I attempted to buy a roundtrip ticket from Oxford and then back to London again. Apparently, the English don't speak English very well, or at least they don't speak American. The woman at the ticket counter had no idea what I was talking about when I said I wanted to purchase a roundtrip ticket. I didn't know the proper expression was "return" ticket. So while people were grumbling in back of the dumb American that was holding up the line, I had to become very simple in my explanation. I said, "I want to buy one ticket that takes me from here to Oxford, and then in the evening I want that same ticket to bring me back from Oxford to here."

This is the Biblical message of the Christian's future. We do not buy a one way ticket to heaven. Rather, when a person becomes a Christian, they have purchased a roundtrip ticket from here to heaven, and back to here again.

Today, I'm going to be giving the last in this series from the book of Revelation, a talk that I'm calling "How To Buy A Roundtrip Ticket To Planet Earth." Let's pray.

#### SLIDE

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

Rev 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Rev 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Rev 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Now I want you to note three things about this text because these three things really inform our view of the future. The first is found in verse 1,

## SLIDE

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a **new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

We often drop off the phrase “new earth” when we think about the future. We talk about going to heaven, but somehow we forget the second half of the punch line: It is the new heaven and the new earth.

The second thing I want you to note is the direction of things. Verse 2,

## SLIDE

Rev 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, **coming down** out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

There is nothing here about “I’ll fly away,” or the Sunday School song, “Somewhere in outer space, God has prepared a place for those who trust him and obey.” We don’t read about any blast-off, where we jump up in the air. The direction is entirely different. We don’t go up. Instead, the New Jerusalem comes down.

And the third thing I want you to note in this text is the word “new.” Verses 1 and 5,

## SLIDES

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

Rev 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” God first spoke about the New Heaven and the New Earth through the prophet Isaiah, 66:22,

## SLIDE

Isa 66:22 “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.

What we Christians look forward to is not some ethereal heaven where we float around bodiless, but a renewed universe liberated from the impact of sin and the curse of the fall. The apostle Paul wrote about the future this way in Romans 8:21,

## SLIDE

Ro 8:21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The new heavens and the new earth will not be a replacement heaven and a replacement earth as if God was going to scrap the original creation and start over from nothing. Rather, the new heavens and the new earth will be a renewed heaven and a renewed earth – a regenerated heaven and a regenerated earth, purified and purged from its present imperfections. There will be no more pain, sin or death.

The best illustration of this continuity and discontinuity between our present and our future is the resurrection body. Unlike the Greeks, who taught that we have eternal souls trapped temporarily in a body from which we hope to be released, the apostle Paul teaches that our bodies will one day be transformed, but not abandoned. The transformation Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15 will be from humiliation to glory, from corruptible bodies to incorruptible bodies, from mortal bodies to immortal bodies.

We gain some insight concerning the new earth when we look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The same Jesus, who was crucified on a cross, died and was buried and came back to life, but he didn't come back to life as a ghost. We read in Luke 24:38-43 these words:

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Lk 24:38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"

Lk 24:39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

Lk 24:40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

Lk 24:41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"

Lk 24:42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish,

Lk 24:43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Yet his body was different. He was transformed. He could no longer be killed. He had new properties. He could enter closed rooms. The same Jesus, yet different.

The same earth in the future...yet...different. How can we get a handle on our future and the future of planet earth? Well, John gives us three metaphors, three pictures, which describe in different ways what we might be able to expect in the future. The first is a picture of marriage, verses 1-3,

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Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

Rev 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Now, marriage is an often used metaphor for the relationship of God with his people throughout the Bible. God in the Old Testament often calls himself “the husband” of the people of Israel and the people of Israel are his Bride. We read about this in books like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and most particularly in the book of Hosea. Our relationship with God is supposed to be like a marriage but not the marriage that some of you have experienced the marriage from hell, screaming, fighting, disappointments, wounding, unfaithfulness. Rather, this marriage is the ideal marriage full of intimacy, love, support, protection, celebration, faithfulness.

First century Jewish marriage practices can really help us understand this metaphor of marriage between the church and the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first century, if you wanted to be married, you didn't simply hop on a plane to Las Vegas and go to a drive-thru wedding chapel complete with an Elvis impersonator, or a record of Paul Anka singing, “Having my baby, what a lovely way of saying how much you love me.”

The whole backdrop of Revelation 21 and the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven like a bride is rooted in first century Jewish marriage customs. It begins first with the betrothal of the bride to the groom, in which an actual contract was entered into, binding as the marriage itself. The betrothal was so binding that the betrothed were called husband and wife and the only way to escape the betrothal was through a formal process of divorce.

During the betrothal period, what we call an engagement, the groom put the dowry together to pay the bride's father for the bride. During the engagement period, the bride would prepare herself for the wedding day. On the wedding day, the groom would come with his groomsmen to the bride's house and he would take the bride back to his home where a wedding supper would be held, a tremendous celebration sometimes lasting a week. The contract would be sealed in which the following promises would be exchanged.

The bridegroom would make the following obligation to his bride: “Be consecrated to me as my wife according the laws and traditions of Moses and Israel. I will love, honor and cherish you; I will protect and support you; and I will faithfully take care of your needs as prescribed by Jewish law and tradition.”

And in the marriage contract, the bride would say: “in accepting this wedding ring, I pledge you all my love and devotion and I take upon myself the fulfillment of all the duties incumbent upon a Jewish wife.”

After the signing of the wedding contract and the celebration of the wedding feast, then the marriage would be consummated.

Now, it is Jewish marriage custom that should inform our understanding of our current relationship with Jesus as Christians, and also what we can expect in the future. What is our position now? We are betrothed to Christ. How did this betrothal take place? Just like in first century Jewish homes there was an exchange of commitments, an exchange of vows. The vows would sound something like this:

I, Jesus, take you sinner as my child and as my bride. I promise to love you, to save you, to satisfy you and nurture you. I promise to sanctify you and care for you, always being faithful to you both now and forever, Amen.

We human beings make our vow to Jesus: I, Sinner, take you, Jesus, to be my Lord, Savior, and Husband. I vow to submit myself to you, to love you, to find my satisfaction in you, to trust you and follow you, and be faithful to you both now and forever, Amen.

Let me ask you a question, friend. Have you ever exchanged vows with Jesus Christ? Have you ever heard Jesus say to your soul: I promise to care for you, to nurture you, to provide for and satisfy you. Have you ever said to Jesus: I promise to submit to you, to trust you, to be faithful to you both now and forever." If you've never exchanged vows with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are going to have an opportunity to do that at the end of the message today. This is how someone begins a personal, intimate relationship with God.

Now, just as in Jewish marriage customs, Jesus has paid the dowry price to God the Father for us as Bride. What was the price? The price was his blood, shed for us on the cross. As the apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:18-19,

SLIDE

<sup>1Pe 1:18</sup> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,

<sup>1Pe 1:19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

What are we to do now during this betrothal period? We are preparing ourselves for the Groom. That is what Revelation 19:7 says:

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<sup>Rev 19:7</sup> Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.

Life now involves preparing the bride for her Groom. There is a calling upon every Christian to make yourself ready for your wedding day with Christ. This is a very personal calling on my life.

Some of you have heard me mention this before. But about 20 years ago as I was struggling with my own vocation, God gave me this specific call. See, I was teaching business law at Ohio State to undergraduates and graduate students. But I was restless and I sensed God had something else for me. I was in England praying again: Lord, what is it? What are you saying?

A dear friend named Danny Meyer, who used to be the associate pastor here before he left to plant a Vineyard church, said to me one morning: "Rich, I know what God is saying to you. I had a dream about you last night."

I said, "Really? What is it?"

He said, "In the dream you were a hairdresser and you were putting these various combs, clips, and ribbons in this woman's hair."

I said, "That's it, Danny! That's it! God is not calling me into pastoral ministry. God is saying that he wants me to go to cosmetology school. That suits me so well. Yes, that's it."

Danny said, "No, no. You are going to see that this was God! This was God."

I said, "Right. I think it was the pizza you ate last night."

Anyway, that very evening we were at a Vineyard conference and right before the speaker got up to speak, a woman took the microphone and said: "I feel like I have a prophetic word for some of you men. God is calling you to prepare the hair of the Bride of Christ." And then she went on for about a minute describing how some of us were called to make the bride ready by combing her hair, braiding it, and putting various ornaments in her hair.

I was standing in the back of the room and as she gave this prophetic word, I bent over and began to weep. The Lord said to me: "This is it. You are called to prepare the Bride for her Groom."

Brothers and sisters, I don't believe that this is just a calling upon me. I believe it is a call upon everyone of us who has some influence in the life of another. If you are a counselor, you are preparing the Bride. If you are a small group leader, you are preparing the Bride. If you are a worship leader, if you are involved in discipleship, if you are a parent, if you are a Sunday School teacher, if you pray and intercede, what are you doing? You are preparing the Bride for her Groom.



Let me point out one other thing about this text because it speaks to us about this roundtrip ticket that has been purchased for our future. In verse 3 we read these words:

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Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Eternity is the fulfillment of a prophecy that God gave to the prophet Isaiah 2700 years ago. 2700 years ago God spoke these words to the prophet Isaiah:

SLIDE – Matthew 1:23

Mt 1:23 “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

Now, God has been Immanuel in different ways throughout human history.

- He was Immanuel to the Jewish people when they went through their desert wanderings from Egypt. God was with them in the cloud and in the fire.
- God was Immanuel to the Jewish people when he set his presence in the Holy of Holies.
- God was Immanuel as God the Son became incarnated through the womb of the Virgin Mary.
- God has been Immanuel by putting his Holy Spirit in the heart of every Christian believer.

But the ultimate fulfillment of the promise God with us, Immanuel, is in the future. I want you to note this. Revelation 21 does not say we will be with God. Rather, we read in Revelation 21:3,

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Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

You say: Rich, what is the difference of being with God and God being with us?

Oh, it is a world of difference. You see right now when a Christian dies, our souls go to be with God. The apostle Paul says in Phil 1:23,

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Phil 1:23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

And in 2 Cor. 5:8 he says this:

#### SLIDE

<sup>2Co 5:8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

But our ultimate destination is not to be with God where God is in heaven. Rather, the ultimate destination is a round trip ticket – God with us where we are on planet earth.

The apostle John goes on and informs our thinking about the future with a different metaphor, not the metaphor of marriage speaking to us about fidelity, intimacy and love. But in speaking about our future, he uses the metaphor of a city, verses 2; 9-16,

#### SLIDES

<sup>Rev 21:2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

<sup>Rev 21:9</sup> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

<sup>Rev 21:10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

<sup>Rev 21:11</sup> It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

<sup>Rev 21:12</sup> It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>Rev 21:13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.

<sup>Rev 21:14</sup> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>Rev 21:15</sup> The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.

<sup>Rev 21:16</sup> The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.

Some of you might say: This is terrible! Eternity in a city! My goal in life has been to escape the city and move to the country, to get as far away from the noise and grit and the congestion of the city as possible.

When Marlene and I went on vacation, we took several days on the beach and we looked for a secluded spot on the beach to get away. Some of you like to hike in the wilderness. Some of you like to camp in the woods. But our future is not

an eternal retreat where you are just left alone. Unless, of course, you plan to spend your future in hell. The future of the Christian is a city.

And instead of escaping the city and its grit, congestion and crime, the City of God comes down from heaven, crashes into our city and transforms the city. It heals the city and renews the city. The city becomes the dwelling place of God. That is what John is referring to in verse 16,

#### SLIDE

Rev 21:16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.

He talks about the New Jerusalem being this perfect cube – 12,000 stadia in length, width and height. Well, this is clearly symbolic. There was another perfect cube in the Bible – the perfect cube of the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament temple where God dwelt, where the High Priests got to meet with God once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Now we have this enormously expansive Holy of Holies giving space, freedom and liberty – and yet, this Holy of Holies is connected to the city. Do you get it?

You don't get it. We run away from the city to find God because the city is shot through with crime, noise, and pollution. We find it hard in the busy-ness of confusing details of life to connect what happens with us in church on Sunday and life in the city Monday through Saturday, but one day God is going to bring it all together – Sunday with Monday through Saturday – the city with the presence of God.

Our future, then, informs our present. We are not to run from the city. Rather, our calling as Christians is to heal the city and prepare the city for the city's invasion with The City – The City of God. That's why, brothers and sisters, our church has embraced a calling from God to bring healing to our city. See, we know where all of this is heading and so we want to live lives that are consistent with our futures. That is why we are building a community center in the front of our building. You probably noticed the construction going on outside.

We did a giving campaign from January to March of this year to raise funds in order to build a community center which will house a free legal clinic, a medical clinic, a day-care center, an after-school program, vocational training, recovery groups, parent training. We plan to work together with the superintendent of schools here in Columbus to try to bring some healing to schools in our city. All of this is the result of the vision that the apostle John gives us here in Revelation 21-22. Our future is in the city – a renewed city, a changed city, a transformed city.

And who gets to be part of the eternal City of God? John tells us in verses 12-14,

#### SLIDE

Rev 21:12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rev 21:13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.

Rev 21:14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

We read that on the gates of the city were the 12 tribes of Israel and on its foundation were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lamb signifying the whole company of God's people, both Old Testament and New Testament.

As Eugene Peterson points out in his book *Reversed Thunder*, "Have you ever considered who the twelve Old Testament patriarchs were, or who the twelve New Testament apostles were? Because this also assists us to know who gets to be included in this roundtrip ticket back to planet earth.

We find included are the incredibly obscure, the no-names of life. How many of you can say one meaningful thing about Issachar, Zebulun, or Gad, who were three of the twelve Old Testament patriarchs. How about Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, or Thaddeus, who were three of the twelve New Testament apostles? They didn't even have a speaking part in the New Testament. I mean you could have had a potted plant and had the same speaking role as Thaddeus in the New Testament.

And not only were some of the folks obscure, some of the patriarchs and some of the twelve apostles really messed up. Among the twelve patriarchs were murderers and fornicators, liars. Among the New Testament apostles were cowards and traitors.

What this means, brothers and sisters, is that City of God is not a visit to some great Hall of Fame where you and I walk by and marvel at the deeds and activities who are so much beyond us.

- There is Michael Jordan's sneakers.
- There is Babe Ruth's bat.
- There is Jimmi Hendrix's guitar.
- There is Jonas Salk's microscope.

Oh, we will be aware of the great things done by folks – most done by people we have never heard of. But the New Earth is inclusive of ordinary people and ordinary people who have messed up, but have exercised repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior. Here is what the apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:26-31,

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<sup>1Co 1:26</sup> Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

<sup>1Co 1:27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

<sup>1Co 1:28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,

<sup>1Co 1:29</sup> so that no one may boast before him.

<sup>1Co 1:30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

<sup>1Co 1:31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

On the New Earth we will not be bragging about our activities or our deeds. We will be bragging about Christ and his deeds.

Then we look at the last metaphor to help us gain some perspective about the future – the Bride, the City and the Garden. Revelation 22:1-5,

## SLIDE

<sup>Rev 22:1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

<sup>Rev 22:2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

<sup>Rev 22:3</sup> No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

<sup>Rev 22:4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

<sup>Rev 22:5</sup> There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The apostle John was obviously using imagery from Genesis 2 and the Garden of Eden. There is a river flowing through the city. In verse 2, we read about the tree of life that was also present in the garden.

But let me, in about two minutes, tell you the entire story of the Bible. Because the book of Revelation, and particularly chapters 21-22, is built on the entire Christian Bible, Old Testament and New Testament. You can't understand what awaits us in the future unless you know the sweep of what came before, both past and present.

So the Bible opens with creation in Genesis 1 and 2. We were created to enjoy community with God, each other, and with the larger creation. But in Genesis 3, we read that Adam and Eve sinned against God and destroyed our human

relationship with God, each other, and with the larger creation. In fact, the event called The Fall of Mankind was like a large boulder thrown into a pond. The ripple effect of human sin impacted the entire universe so that not only human society, but also the animal kingdom and the ground itself, is now groaning under the weight of sin.

What does God do as he sees his broken creation? Does he say: Well, it is time to scrap the whole thing and start over? Let's burn up my original creation and start something entirely new.

No, God doesn't hand victory to the devil. He doesn't allow the sin that Satan has released into the world to overcome his good creation. Instead, God embarked on a plan of restoration. He chose this one man, Abraham, and in a key passage that is the foundation for our capital campaign, he said to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 these words:

#### SLIDE

Ge 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

Ge 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

Ge 12:3 I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you.

God is obviously reversing the curse that was pronounced at The Fall restoring the original blessing to creation. God creates a nation through Abraham, the people of Israel. And he tells his people to live for God and also to model to the rest of the world the righteousness and goodness of God, to be a light to the nations.

But Israel fails in the mission. So what does God do? Does he say: okay, now I'm going to scrap creation?

The prophets looked forward to a day when God's plan of restoration would come about. Isaiah says that even though the Tree of Israel would be cut down and reduced to just a stump, yet from this stump would be a tender green shoot, namely the Messiah. This green shoot would grow up to provide the blessing, the shalom of God, restored in God's creation.

One day this tender shoot arrived in our world. His name was Jesus. He stood up in a synagogue in his own town of Nazareth and read these words from the prophet Isaiah. Luke 4:18-19,

## SLIDE

Lk 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
Lk 4:19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

He was announcing that God’s plan to restore creation was being put into effect through his own ministry. He was announcing the arrival of his kingdom, a kingdom that would restore blessing to the entire creation. He called his audience to repent, to turn from their autonomy and their selfishness and to embrace the forgiveness that he offered. This offer of forgiveness opens the way for healing and restoration, first for the individual who receives forgiveness and then through the individual spilling over to the rest of creation.

Friends, this is what life is about right now – restoring the broken image of God in people, restoring people’s broken relationships, restoring people’s broken bodies, restoring this broken city, restoring this world from the ugliness of sin. That is what we seek to do as a church. We can’t bring total healing, but to use Frances Schaeffer, the Christian philosopher’s old phrase, “We are in the business of bringing about substantial healing.”

You see, God is going to heal the entire world, every part of it. No stone will be left unturned. No relationship will be left unhealed. No created thirst will be unsatisfied. Because this is what God is doing, we are going to, as a church, strategize concerning how we can help people find hope.

- For some, it is going to be assisting them to find a job.
- For some, it is going to mean assisting people with their educations.
- For some it is going to be through financial planning or parenting classes.
- For some, it is going to be justice through the provision of free legal services.
- For some, it is going to be healing through the provision of free medical services.
- For some, it will mean helping with recovery from addiction or abuse.

But, brothers and sisters, the ultimate vision of hope that we share with this broken world is this - let us help you purchase a roundtrip ticket back to a fully restored planet earth. Let’s pray.

## **How to Buy a Roundtrip Ticket to Planet Earth**

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Rich Nathan

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