

Revelation 21v4 Sermon – No More...

What do you think about when you think of heaven? A good place? I used to think heaven was tinged with orange light. Peace? Clouds, angels, harps? Maybe, what you expect me to say tonight is that it's not about what we get in heaven, but it's all about Jesus – it's about a living, loving relationship with the one who saved us. That's where history is heading.

Some of you may know that my Mum died about five years ago, and a couple of years after she died I went to see some family friends, and the eldest daughter of the family, who must have been about 7 at the time, she knew my Mum quite well, and she said something to me that I wrote down on a note on my phone and have kept ever since. She said "And now your Mummy's dead, but she's in heaven so that's good. It's really nice to be with Jesus." It's really nice to be with Jesus. The words of a 7-year-old, summing up what it means to enter eternal life as a follower of Christ. The main thing is that we're with Jesus.

Maybe that's what you expect me to talk about when given these verses. But, I don't know about you, but that feels quite intangible to me. We can't really grasp what it means. It all feels rather spiritual, how does that help me on Monday morning? When I'm swamped with deadlines at work, when there's family conflict, when I'm overwhelmed with health problems, when a hundred and one things go wrong with the house, when I'm feeling exhausted and my mental health is playing up – Jesus doesn't feel very real to me, and the promise of a perfect relationship with him feels a bit more like an empty spiritual slogan, rather than something real, encouraging, and hopeful.

But the thing is, where we're going – it's not really "heaven". Did you see in verse 1 that there is a new heavens and a new earth. What we're getting is not some other realm - it's a new creation! It's not an empty spiritual slogan – it's something real. God, in his grace, in Revelation 21v4, gives us a picture of what it's like to have that perfect relationship. He shows us that it's not a hollow, religious promise, but a promise that has real, physical elements.

V1-3 give us the cosmic, relational aspects of the new creation. V4 tells us the real, visible, physical effects of that restored relationship. Perfect relationship with Jesus in God's kingdom is good because so many of the bad things in this world come about due to the brokenness of that relationship. So when the relationship is restored, these bad things will be no more.

What I want us to do this evening is grasp the physical realities of the new creation and rejoice! Admittedly, we can't separate the physical blessings spelled out here from the spiritual blessing of perfect union with Christ, they come together. The new creation is real, and physical, and great, BECAUSE of the relationship we'll have with Jesus there. But today we're going to look at the new creation through the lens of these physical blessings, as we dig into Revelation 21v4 together. It's probably my favourite verse in the Bible, because it makes eternity feel so real and so wonderful. So let's dive in.

We're going to look at five things that in the new creation, will be no more.

1) No more tears

Discussion in pairs: When was the last time you cried? (No pressure to share details if you don't feel comfortable doing so)

I hope that was a useful discussion, it's a really good way to get to know someone, I recommend it as an icebreaker question with a new group of friends. Tears are really interesting aren't they? They're

a physical manifestation of our internal, intense emotions. Sadness, anger, frustration, despair – they all come flooding out of us in tears.

And it's heart-breaking to see someone else crying isn't it. Imagine a child sobbing unconsolably so much that they can't talk. In some ways it's even more heart-breaking when a child, or even an adult cries without making a sound – the tears just come pouring out of them involuntarily – it's like they're leaking. The emotion is just too intense to bear.

But God will wipe away every tear from his people's eyes. The word here for "wipe away" is used in other places in the New Testament to mean "take away completely" or "blot out". God doesn't just clean us up and make us feel better temporarily, wiping away our tears only for us to start weeping again a few minutes later, giving us a lollipop to distract us from our sadness. He blots out our tears – they're gone! Forever!

Sometimes we like crying, sometimes it's a good thing, tears of joy, or emotional connection maybe when we're watching a film. That might have been the last time you cried for some of you. I've been known to cry at three separate points in *Monsters Inc.* But I don't think this passage should be taken literally in those terms – I think some of us may well cry with joy in the presence of God.

But think back to the last time you cried out of sadness, or anger, or frustration. And imagine God reaching down, wiping away those tears and taking away the hurt, the despair, the discomfort that caused them. That's what the new creation will be like – no more tears. He will wipe them away. The perfect relationship we'll have with Jesus is one that will leave us in our sadness no more – never again/

2) No more death

And then no more death. Death is a huge enemy. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians it is "the last enemy to be destroyed. And people in our culture respond to it in different ways – I've got a few quotes about death here.

Some people acknowledge that death is sad. Keanu Reeves the actor was once asked "What do you think happens when we die?" and he responded not with a statement about life after death, but the effect on those we leave behind – "I know that the ones who love us will miss us". Death is sad for those we leave behind, and some people just accept that, and acknowledge that sadness.

Other people romanticise death – Oscar Wilde once said to die is "to forget time, to forgive life, to be at peace"

Some try and joke about death – Oscar Wilde again, had the last words "Either these curtains go or I do." Spike Milligan, the comedic poet had written on his tombstone, "I told you I was ill." And Mark Twain wrote – "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."

And others submit to the inevitability of death, viewing it as a power that we can't escape. An anonymous text in a German chapel says "Good folk, come, rich or poor, this way. Come, young and old, to see the play. And think on this: though every man Would live forever. No one can." It's bleak, inevitable – death comes for us all. Or, in *Doctor Who*, a character reflects – "Everybody knows that everybody dies."

But what that character goes on to say can be applied directly to what we will experience on the day when Jesus returns. "Everybody knows that everybody dies. But not every day. Not today." And the new creation is the big "not today" to death.

You may notice in your Bibles that the first part of v4 is in quotation marks, that's because it's a reference, not quite a direct quote, from Isaiah chapter 25v8. It's a passage where Isaiah foresees the banquet of lavish food, hosted on the mountain of the Lord, the party God's inviting his people to, when he's destroyed their enemies. I'll read from verse 7 – "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."

Death is the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. Everyone has to face death, it's unavoidable. Everybody knows that everybody dies – but not on the day of the new creation.

But it's more than just life going on forever, it's more than just the end of death. Death in the Bible is not just the opposite of being alive, death is the opposite of life with a capital L – goodness, joy, happiness, flourishing – Life to the full. Paul in Romans 7 says that Sin produces death. So the end of death is the end of the effects of sin. Jesus in John 5 says that believers have passed from death to life – so the end of death means we pass forever into the kingdom of believers. Anyone who believes will never taste Death with capital D. Christian believers still die, but we don't deal with the big enemy of death. That's why we can say whoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life. And when Jesus returns, even physical death will be no more.

Are you afraid of dying? Car accident? People with knives skulking around dark alleys? The threat of nuclear war? There's danger of death all around us. But this is a promise that death no longer has a hold on us now – and the new creation will go on forever, without even physical death. Just as Jesus is alive – we will be alive with him for all eternity, because he will raise us, and God will swallow up death forever.

3) No more mourning

Thirdly, no more mourning – and we'll go through these ones a bit quicker.

I wonder, do shout out, what do we think of when we think of mourning in British culture? (Discuss)

And does anyone know of any mourning traditions in other culture? (Discuss)

Some have several days of mourning.

The biblical word used for mourning here is not just about death, it's about loss. I think the same is true in English. You can mourn for a relationship, you can mourn the loss of an opportunity. It's the impassioned anguish we feel when we know we're not getting something back. We hate it don't we? We feel powerless – we mourn for what we've lost, things feel so dark, and heavy and nothing seems to lift us up out of our slump.

The biblical word here is used in James 4v9 "Let your laughter be turned to mourning", I think that's helpful – it's the opposite of laughter. They say laughter's the best medicine, but aren't there days when nothing's funny. Nothing's enjoyable, it's all loss and sadness.

But this, like everything else in this verse will be no more. No more of those deep pits of despair. No more mourning. No more loss. How could there be? It's eternal! All we have will be secure, and no more will we be in mourning or anguish over anything. That is the new world that God is bringing in – that's what perfect relationship with Jesus looks like. Not a shallow spiritual emptiness, but a deep, physical reality.

4) No more crying

Fourthly, no more crying. At first I would have thought this was a repeat of “no more tears”, maybe you thought that too. But it’s not. The Greek word doesn’t mean weeping, it means “Crying out” or “Shouting”. It’s used elsewhere in the Bible in Acts to mean clamour or commotion, and in Revelation 14 it’s translated as “A loud voice”.

Again, it’s that impassioned anguish, that noise that just rips out of you when you can’t stand it any longer.

I was at one point trying to get internet sorted in my flat, just round the corner from here – wifi didn’t work, my phone 4g didn’t work, I got a hub, but I couldn’t find anywhere to plug that in so that it worked either. And I just put my head in my hands and let out a long “ARGH!!! WHY???”

Maybe that’s not you, maybe your crying is less audible, more just inside your head – you just scream to yourself. But either way, that intense emotion that doesn’t have any words, that white hot anger, frustration, sadness – all wiped away, all gone.

That yell when the car won’t start – no more. That shout at the children when they won’t listen to you and you’ve already had a hundred and three things go wrong that morning – no more. That yelling at the printer that we’ve all done, the cry that it feels like nobody will hear because everyone is demanding more and more from you, that frustration we express at our football team when they let another two goal lead go. No more. No more. No more. God will take all our anguish away.

5) No more pain

And finally, no more pain. I love this one, because there are so many different scenarios in which we feel pain, aren’t there? I reckon those of us who work in hospitals are familiar with seeing people in pain, from the minor to the excruciating. From the paper cut to the heart attack, from the stubbed toe to the labour pain. All of those things will be no more in the new creation. How great is that?

And as we’ve already seen, other things that cause us non-physical pain – mourning, tears and crying, will be no more too. But let’s focus on physical pain. Every hurt you’ve ever felt – big or small – from the niggling sinus pain to the unbearable broken leg – all will be gone. Never again will we bite our tongue when eating! Never again will we spill tea and burn ourselves! Never again will we break bones, or have toothache, or migraines, or scrape our knees. Imagine how fast you could run without cramp! Imagine enjoying the sun without fearing the pain of sunburn!

No more pain! And that’s because all that is wrong that causes pain will be gone! No failings of our bodies, no war, no sickness, no injuries, no accidents, no violence. Just let that sink in. It’s amazing. It’s just unfathomable! It would be so, so different from our world now!

6) The old is gone

Well that’s what the last part of this verse is about – it’s not just a changed world – the old order of things has passed away. The world we used to know will be almost unrecognisable as pain is removed, as death, tears, crying, mourning – all gone. This is God’s world, the world he brings in. Don’t we long for that world?

7) But not for everyone

But just a few verses later, we see that this isn’t the case for everyone. The second death.

I shouldn't be able to talk about this without a tear in my eye, because hell is real, and hell is awful. But in my sinfulness I don't understand how awful it is.

There are tears, there is death, mourning, crying and pain, because there is an absence of God and all his blessings.

Some media presents hell as a place of decided negative experience – as if a neutral space in between heaven and hell exists and a higher power chooses whether to bless or to torture. If you've seen "The Good Place" I think that's a good example – malicious demons thinking up new punishments for bad people. I've heard an atheist in a Q&A say "I don't want to believe in a God who threatens to torture me for eternity". But it's not like that. Hell isn't God stoking the fire, it's God turning his face away. "You don't want anything to do with me. As you wish, I'll have nothing to do with you". Jesus says that hell is when he says "I never knew you". And that's when we realise that everything good we've experienced, and claimed for ourselves, belonged to God.

Some of us here may have friends or family who as far as we know did not know Jesus when they died. It's hard to think about. And there's no easy comfort there. But we know that what those who experience the second death want is for those they love not to go there too.

I've heard people say – "I want to go to hell, that's where all my mates will be". We have one unique story in scripture, which gives us the voice of a man from the depths of hell. A rich man, in the place of torment, begs for a messenger from heaven to go and tell his family. "I have five brothers, let him warn them, so they do not end up in this place of torment".

And we don't have to end up in this place of torment. The warning is there, the warning comes from the prophets, and from Jesus Christ himself – repent and believe the good news. What good news? The news about the new creation – where there is no more death, no more tears, no more mourning, crying or pain. The news that Jesus died on the cross, taking our punishment, so that all who believe in him can enter this perfect world, rather than this second death.

If you have family or friends who may have died without being forgiven by God – of course, we don't know for sure where they are – they're begging that you don't end up in the second death too. Don't reject the offer.

And what is that offer? It's not a shallow spiritual promise – it's not sitting on a cloud playing a harp. It's a real new creation. We're going to sing a song in a minute called "hymn of heaven" – I wish it was called "Hymn of the new creation" – but it's still a great song that focuses our eyes on the day when death will be no more. Whenever you think of heaven, remember it's a physical reality, a gift that God is giving to those who trust in Jesus. No more tears, no more death, no more crying, no more mourning, no more pain.

Do you want in? Do you want in? Then come to Jesus and cling on to him, and the blessings that living in relationship with him brings. And if you've already done that – then fix your eyes on the reality of the new creation. Let's pray