

INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back...Encourage you to continue that connection time within your Missional Family Meetings...*{{OR better yet, let us help you get connected TO a Missional Family Meeting if you're not already, SINCE while THIS time is a as we say, "a time for those hungry to just find freedom and rest," Missional Family Meetings are REALLY where we're able to "connect around the good news of Jesus and help others do the same!" So let us know how we can help YOU get connected}}*...*{{Parents, if you haven't already, feel free to dismiss your kids with Claudia so we can dig into the Scriptures together - PAUSE}}*

Anyone ever been to France/in particular Dijon/as in the mustard - you seen the The Dijon Cathedral? In it, there's a statue of an angel near the pulpit. And in one hand, the angel's holding a writing utensil, and in the other, a tablet. And the face of this angel is directed down toward the pulpit, as if to indicate that it's eagerly writing down everything the preacher's saying...I am REALLY hoping there are no angels taking notes today, because I'll tell ya: The thought of, not only, trying to tie together our year-long "True Myth" series both this week and next, BUT today unpack what is essentially the culmination of Biblical/redemptive history/the end of the story/or better said, the **end of the BEGINNING of the story**; it has me acutely aware of my limitations.¹ SO, I'm gonna pray and then we're gonna read and unpack **Revelation 21:1-6**. One of the most seminal passages for, not only, understanding how the whole the Biblical narrative comes together, but more importantly, the HOPE we have BECAUSE of this Biblical narrative...**So let's pray together...(Amen)...Would you follow along as we hear the reading of God's word from Revelation 21 together?...Berklee** reads.

TEXT:

Hey, can we thank BOTH **Berklee** and God for the reading of His Word?...So we began our "True Myth" series way back in January saying, as C.S. Lewis did, that the Bible is up there with ALL the greatest myths ever told...EXCEPT that it's true. It really is, as Tolkien said, "*a tale that were it NOT true, we'd nevertheless want it to BE true!*" To the point that, ya know, I find most people who don't believe the Scriptures are, ironically, NOT rejecting THEM, but rejecting something they think they're about, that they actually aren't. People say, "*I don't believe in the Bible.*" And you ask em what they think the Bible's about, and 9 times out of 10, I'd say in response to em, "*Yeah I don't believe that either.*" BECAUSE, as **Revelation 21:1-6** shows us here, at the center OF the Bible is a message of UNBELIEVABLE hope...One that's: **Needed, Unique, Wonderful, and Accessible**.² A hope that's **Needed, Unique, Wonderful, and Accessible**. Let's look at those 4 things: **First**, It's **Needed**: The book of Revelation/like all the Bible, in order to understand what it means for you and me, requires we understand what it meant for those to whom it was written. And Revelation/even with all it's apocalyptic literature was written by the Apostle John, TO first-century churches, IN seven different cities of the Roman province of what is now western Turkey. And the REASON John wrote Revelation/or I should say, recorded and passed along what's essentially a revelation/a vision from Jesus about

¹ Cathedral and Communication illustration adapted from "The End of the Beginning?" - Message #8; Revelation 21-22" - J.D. Greear

² 4 Items from insights in "The End of History" - Episode 595 - June 25 - Tim Keller Sermons Podcast by Gospel in Life

how creation as we know it is gonna to come to an end, and then usher in a new eternal beginning - the reason he recorded and passed along this vision was in order to give fellow Christians who were experiencing hardship in those Roman cities... **hope!** Cuz ya know when someone is really suffering or about to suffer; **what do they need/what do you need most?** You **need hope** right? Back in 1942, Viktor Frankl, as a prominent Jewish psychiatrist and neurologist in Vienna, was arrested and transported to a Nazi concentration camp with his wife and parents. Three years later, when his camp was liberated, most of his family, including his pregnant wife, had died. And so in 1946 he wrote the bestselling book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, which not only detailed his experiences, but more importantly answered the question of why some people were able to survive the camps when others, who had the same experiences, were not/how could some be more resilient to suffering than others. And through observation and study, Frankl concluded that the ones who were resilient had one thing in common: Meaning/**Hope!**...He talks, for example, about how for those who were **hoping** to survive in order to get back to their loved ones, or career, or just some semblance of normalcy; when those things were taken away for good, they no longer felt a reason to live, and so consequently weren't able to keep withstanding the atrocities/many times even, themselves, committed suicide...He showed that you **need a hope** that can't be taken away if you wanna be resilient...Incidentally, this is WHY so many/maybe YOU have really struggled during this pandemic. Ya know, found yourself battling depression, coping in some unhealthy way, or just living with a kinda low-grade anger or anxiety. It's BECAUSE what you'd lived-for and hoped-in has in some way been taken from you!...It's also why this idea that there's no God and life is nothing more than a process of combustion and oxidation and so we oughta just live-it-up/while that might sound good in a philosophy class or a debate over drinks; you understand, it doesn't work for real life. Frankl even commented on this. He said, *"The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment - that life's essentially meaningless and hopeless - I am absolutely convinced, he said, that the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka were ultimately prepared not in some (government building) in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers."*³ You have to have **hope!** Cuz at some point, we all experience things that shake us up right/like the agitator in a washing machine.⁴ And if you don't have **the hope you need**, that shaking will become for you, an ending!...John wrote Revelation to give those who were and would suffer, **the hope they needed. Do you have a hope that can't be taken away?**

Second, look at what makes THIS hope, so **Unique**: John says, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away..."* So again, John's recounting what will-be when Jesus, who lived, died, resurrected, and ascended, returns right? And what's so unique about what will-be...is the progression of things here. This progress we see here of that which was old, being made new, and of God doing here to Creation essentially what happens to a car when it goes to the junkyard - recycling it, in order to produce a new/more wonderful

³ Viktor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: Introduction to Logotherapy*, 1982. - Cited in HEALTH: "There's More to Life Than Being Happy - Meaning comes from the pursuit of more complex things than happiness" by EMILY ESFAHANI SMITH - JAN 9, 2013

⁴ Washing Illustration adapted from: "The spiritual side of our lives really does matter" - Mike Huckabee

car⁵...In other words, progress! And we all love progress right? Makes us feel like things are improving/makes us feel alive...What you gotta understand is: if you appreciate progress/in any form, you get that appreciation...from the Bible! The **hope** we have that life should and can meaningfully progress; that's utterly **unique** to the Christian faith. Tim Keller⁶ helped me see this when he said, ya know "*ancient cultures, philosophies, religions ALL believed that history was cyclical and wasn't going anywhere.*" You see this in the kinda pop-Buddhism around us today when you hear people talk about "*paying it forward,*" "*doing good things, so good things come your way,*" or just "*thinking positive thoughts, so that positivity fills your life.*" It's ALL a subset of a cyclical/Karmic worldview...But the **hope** that history/YOUR life within history is NOT cyclical, but rather progressing toward a glorious goal - that comes from the Bible and God working to make "*a new heaven and new earth.*" It's utterly **unique**! ***Are you trying to find the hope you need outside of the God of the Scriptures?***

Third, this hope/it's not just **needed** and **unique**; it's also **Wonderful**: Ya know, Plato/late Aristotle made famous the idea that life at it's fullest contains The Good, The Beautiful and The True right? - That a truly **wonderful** existence contains things like ethics, justice, righteousness, but also interaction with the arts and fashion, with BOTH being grounded in reality rather than fiction. Goodness, Beauty and Truth...You notice, as John's trying to describe what will-be, he shows us just how full of goodness, beauty and truth it's GONNA be. Look, he says **First**, "*I saw (a) holy CITY, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...*" I've heard it said that, "*If you don't like the city, you're prolly not gonna like heaven.*" Cuz as you see here, heaven is going to be urban/cosmopolitan! And that's BECAUSE the Bible has a much more positive understanding of cities than we often do. The assumption behind so much of what the Bible says about cities is that, not only is God in the business of building em/He's a kind of urban planner, but anyone in their right mind would wanna live in em!⁷...Now, I know some of you maybe fancy yourself only living here for a short period of time, because generally speaking, you believe, as I heard one person say, "*God made the country...humans made the suburbs...but the Devil made the city!*"⁸ Unfortunately though, that's just not true. Throughout history, cities have always played an integral role BECAUSE practically speaking, cities have always provided a greater number and diversity of human connections right? Now of course, that can create division. But positively-speaking, the density and diversity of cities MEANS a greater possibility for community, connection...love! When Jesus/via John tells us here that eternity'll be a "*new city,*" He means we get to look forward to a forever-existence FULL of the most wonderful human connection you can imagine! I mean, just think about your best times in life; Don't they always revolve around being really connected to others?...Of course, because that's what we're created for - to be in deep-love-relationships. Eternity, Jesus is saying, is gonna be FILLED with em! That goodness is in-part what's gonna make it so wonderful!

⁵ Adrian Rogers, *Unveiling the End Times in Our Times*, 253.

⁶ Insights from "The End of History" - Episode 595 - June 25 - Tim Keller Sermons Podcast by Gospel in Life

⁷ God with Us; In the City - The Nature of Faith: Hebrews 11 and 12—December 11, 1994 - Hebrews 11:8–16 - Timothy J. Keller. + The City - The Vision of Redeemer - October 2, 2005 - Isaiah 25:6-26:6 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁸ God with Us; In the City - The Nature of Faith: Hebrews 11 and 12—December 11, 1994 - Hebrews 11:8–16 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

But **Two**, it's gonna be wonderful because it's gonna be FILLED with beauty! You see John says that this heavenly city will be like *what class?* "*A bride adorned for her husband.*" Now let me ask you: why bride? Why not say, "*like a beautiful work of art or beautiful landscape?*" Why bridal imagery here? Well, because here's the thing with beauty: It's as they say, "*in the eye of the beholder*" right? Meaning, something you find beautiful, I may not and vice versa. But when it comes to brides, there's a kinda universal truth... They're never ugly. I've officiated a lot of weddings, and with every wedding I've ever done, two things have always been true: **One**, The Bride has ALWAYS looked gorgeous, and **Two**, No bride of any wedding I'VE ever officiated came dressed in a bikini. Now, I know people do it/these underwater weddings and such. But it's usually only the like .00001% of the population that already has flawless skin and perfect bodies. For the rest of us, we're puttin' on clothes because clothes cover up our flaws. Bridal dresses are custom made to perfectly cover up every flaw, which is part of the reason WHY every bride always looks so beautiful/NOT in the eye of the beholder, but to everyone... So when Jesus tells us here that eternity will be "*like a bride adorned for her husband,*" what He's saying is; it'll be filled with more beauty than you can imagine, BECAUSE every flaw/every blemish will not just be covered over, but made beautiful... Think about how exhilarating that'll be. Husbands, think about when you first saw your wife walk down the aisle! I remember when the big wooden doors at the back of the sanctuary in the church in which Abby and I got married, flung open and she first appeared... Guys, I straight-up ugly-cried, because she was just so beautiful... In-part, what's gonna make eternity so wonderful is just the immense beauty of it!

But then **Third**, it's gonna be wonderful because it's gonna be... true-fantasy. *What do I mean by that?* I mean, think about the fantasy genre of literature or cinema. We love it don't we? Cuz of course it depicts worlds and experiences we WANT to be true! Things like there being no sadness or pain. No brokenness or injustice. Total harmony! And even though we know it's "fantasy," we love it, cuz there's a sense in us that, THAT'S the way things are supposed to be - that we're NOT as one philosopher said, "*(supposed) to be born crying, live crying, and die crying.*" I mean, why do you think Disney holds 40% of the entertainment market?⁹ Because we eat up fantasy!... Here's the thing about our hope in eternity though: It's fantasy... that's TRUE! Cuz you see, John says that God "*will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death, mourning, and pain shall be no more.*" He's telling us that the hope we have for eternity is the hope of a forever-existence FREE from ANY kind of sadness. As Sam Gamgee famously said in The Lord of the Rings, "*everything sad being made untrue.*" And in-part that's because, in God's grace, the whole arrangement off of which our world currently works, will be altered. You see where John says, there'll "*no longer (be) any sea*"? That doesn't mean that there'll be no water in heaven. It just means that this "*new heaven and new earth*" will, as Warren Wiersbe and John MacArthur point out, have a different arrangement or life-principle as far as water's concerned. Cuz follow me on this: On the one hand/and in John's day here, the sea was emblematic of danger, storms, separation. It signified everything threatening to humanity.¹⁰ And so to have there be "*no more sea,*" is John saying, danger, brokenness, fear, separation - all that's gonna be

⁹ <https://www.ipl.org/essay/How-Does-Disney-Influence-Culture-PJ4EP6Z3XG>

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Victorious*, 179.

overturned...But on the other hand, while the sea was emblematic of danger, it's also emblematic of life right? Our lives are dependent upon water for survival. And so for there to be "*no more sea*" is John saying, "*not only will every threat to our lives be removed, but the entire operating principle OF life will be completely different.*" Specifically, while there'll be a river in heaven, it won't be of water as we know it, but of as **Revelation 22:1** says, "*of life - the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*"¹¹... **You see?** ALL these details from "*the new heaven and earth*" being "*a city,*" to "*a bride adorned for her husband,*" to there being no "*sea*" or "*sadness;*" ALL of it, is Jesus saying, "*Don't you see how wonderful this is gonna to be? There's no way you'd reject this if you knew it to be true!*"

Which leads me **Fourth and Finally**, to this hope being **Accessible**...Because it IS true, it can be yours IF you see two simple things here: **One**, from where it comes and **Two**, who it's for. And you see very clearly in **v.5** that this hope/it flows...from the throne right? From the One, it says, who's "*making all things new.*" And throughout both Revelation and Scripture as a whole, it's obvious that the One to whom this is referring/the "*Alpha and Omega*" as **v.6** says, is of course Jesus. And so we're being reminded that, quite simply, there is no heaven/no eternity...no Kingdom, apart from the King!...And that's important, cuz I think a lot of times when we think about death/life-after death/if think about it at all, we see it as just sort of a continuation of the good things we enjoy now. So if you're into golfing, you think of heaven as playing Pebble Beach without the possibility of a bad shot. Or if you're into fishing or shopping; it's having clear waters/fish biting all day or never-ending boutiques and an unlimited bank account. If you're a foodie, maybe you think of heaven as a place where the best foods are overflowing, the bars are never under-packed or over-packed, but only ever appropriately-packed. If you're a new or expecting mom, maybe heaven for you is just...a nap...Regardless, what you see here is that heaven is not just the continuation of the good things we enjoy now, NOR is it for people who merely want to avoid hell. No! Heaven is for people who love Jesus¹²/who see that everything which makes heaven **needed, unique** and **wonderful** is because it flows FROM Jesus!

But **Two and Finally**, ya gotta see that this hope/it's not for good people, or moral and just people. It's not for those identified with a particular political party, or of certain race, ethnicity or gender. No, **who does it say gets this hope?**...The thirsty! **You see that?** "*To the thirsty,* it says, *I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.*" **What's it mean to be thirsty?** It means longing right? In this case, longing to have Jesus not just be King, but King of every area of your life, BECAUSE you're dissatisfied with being your own King entrusted with securing your own hope...**Thirsty!** That's all it takes. BECAUSE you see, this is a hope, which is as it says, "*without payment.*" Free of charge, since Jesus has already paid for it on the Cross. All you have to do is...be "*thirsty*" for it, which is to say, in each area of your life - your friendships, marriage, work, finances, each area, say, "*Jesus, I long to bring everything under your throne!*" And then watch as this **wonderful, needed, unique, accessible hope** begins to flow into and out of your life to others! **Are you willing to do that?...Let's Pray...**

¹¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 263.

¹² Statement about who heaven is for adapted from quote by Eric Geiger