“The End of the Beginning”
Revelation 21-22

Of all the sixty-six books of the Bible, perhaps none are as mysterious and intriguing as the last one. Throughout church history, the book of Revelation has puzzled even the brightest of Christian scholars. Even Luther and Calvin had difficulty with it. And yet the mystery that surrounds the book of Revelation should not keep us from it. It is the only book that has a direct blessing for those who take it up and read its contents. (see 1:3)

The full title of the book is the ‘Revelation of Jesus Christ.’ It isn’t simply a book to be analyzed and dissected into prophecy charts, nor is its main purpose classroom debate. Revelation is a book that directs us to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

Danny Akin—“I believe the theme of the book could be described as the majesty and glory of the Warrior Lamb, King Jesus, who is coming again to rule and reign forever!”

The purpose of Revelation is not to simply present the church with an exciting preview of the future, but to present us with an exalted picture of Jesus Christ.

Though it is hard to believe, today is the last day in 2017.

And as we literally stand on the threshold of a new year, perhaps we wonder at what 2018 might hold for our lives:

• will I meet someone this year who might be future husband/wife material?
• will I finally experience a financial reversal in my favor?
• will my children remain healthy?
• will the world go to war over the North Korea threat?
Well, while Revelation doesn’t give you any of the details of your future like some fortune cookie, it does reveal to us the ultimate future of the world, the future of unbelievers, and the future of the people of God. It presents us with a picture of humanity bowing at the feet of Jesus. It shows us how good will ultimately triumph over evil, how right will win over wrong, how wickedness will be judged, and how righteousness will receive its reward.

Revelation was written somewhere around 90 AD, and its author is John the apostle. He had been exiled for his Christian faith by the emperor Domitian, and the place where he would live out the remainder of his days was a small prison colony island called Patmos. As he was worshiping one day, the veil between heaven and earth was torn asunder and he was given the vision that he goes on to write about in the book. The title of the book comes from the Greek word ‘apokalupsis’ which means unveiling or disclosure. It refers to bringing something to light that has formerly been kept in secret.

We get the word ‘apocalypse’ from this term. When we think of the apocalypse, the first thing that comes to our mind is total disaster. Though the ‘Apocalypse’ of John does in fact include some of these elements, it is much more than that. John’s apocalypse refers to the unveiling of Jesus Christ, a future which God revealed to John in order to inform us about what will take place at the return of Jesus Christ.

The last two chapters of Revelation record not just the end, but what I am referring to as the ‘end of the beginning.’ As we draw our study of redemptive history to a close, I want to show you what I mean by this expression, ‘the end of the beginning’—heaven, hell, and the future of humanity.

1. A sure FULFILLMENT of the plan of God (21:1)

Remember that redemptive history is all about the plan of God to redeem a people for Himself. This is what the whole message of the Bible has been from
John shows us here in Revelation 21 how the plan of God is fulfilled, though throughout the history of the world it has been attacked and subverted by sin and Satan.

What is the plan of God?

1—Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The plan of God involves a new heaven and a new earth, one that is untainted and undefiled by sin. The word ‘new’ is a word that means new in character. It implies recreation rather than renovation. It means that God’s plan involves His ushering in a completely new order. The old must pass away for the new.

The apostle Peter described this scene:

2 Peter 3:10—“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

He is describing the end of the old order and the ushering in of the new. Before this will happen, the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth will come first, and then the new heaven and the new earth are the next phase in God’s eternal plan. For eternity, the redeemed people of God will dwell with Him in the new heaven and new earth.

The new order will be radically changed from the universal order we currently know now, one that is marred by sin and rebellion. I think that this all merely reflects God’s creative purposes from the very beginning. In fact, it is amazing at how the first two chapters of the Bible are parallel with the last two chapters.

Warren Wiersbe - “When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled, God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so
forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.”

It is all about how the sovereign God of the universe has acted in real time and space to redeem lost humanity and the plan that He set in motion in order to do so. This plan was initially:

Announced in the beginning

Let's go all the way back to where we were on the very first Sunday of this year. The book of Genesis provides the foundation upon which the whole drama of redemption rests. Opening the grand story of the Bible, it sets the scene, introduces the characters and their relationship to one another, and reports certain events that prove decisive for understanding the world in which we now live. It begins with the original creation and the plan of God to fill the earth with His image bearers.

In particular, the opening chapters of Genesis not only explain how humanity has become alienated from God, living under His curse rather than His blessing, but also reveal that God will not allow evil to win the final victory.

Through a redemptive process that begins in Genesis, God will eventually overcome the Serpent through the Seed of the woman, who is the New Adam—the Lord Jesus. Thus, what begins in Genesis is fulfilled in Christ. That has been the subject of our study this whole year. Now, here in Revelation at the end of the Bible, we have come full circle. The Bible begins with creation, and it ends with re-creation.

Not only that, but the plan of God has been:

Unfolding throughout history
From the very first book of the Bible through the last book, the theme of salvation and redemption to be found in Christ is found throughout—on every page, in every chapter, and in every book. That’s because the Bible is a book of salvation. God’s Word tells us how we came into being, what our problem is, and points us to the only One who can save us—the Lord Jesus Christ.

David Dockery - “Jesus Christ is the center to which everything in Scripture is united and bound together— the beginning and the end, creation and redemption, humanity, the world, the fall, history, and the future.”

God’s plan was announced in the beginning, and it has been unfolding throughout history. Ultimately, this plan will be perfectly:

Realized in the future

John shows us here in the book of Revelation how the plan of God will be ultimately and perfectly realized, how through Christ God will restore creation to Himself. The perfect world that He created in the beginning has been marred by sin, but that’s not the way that it will always be. Redemption includes a new heaven and a new earth where redeemed men and women from every nation, tribe, and tongue will one day dwell with God for all eternity in a perfect and uncorrupted environment.

2. A bright FUTURE for the people of God (21:3-6)

What we read in these last two chapters of the Bible is about the sure fulfillment of God’s plan, and it is also about the bright future that we have to look forward to as God’s people. John tells us that God’s ultimate plan is to establish a new heaven and a new earth where His people will spend eternity with Him in perfect relationship.

2—And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
The city will be described in greater detail at the end of the chapter and on into the next. But it is important for us to understand the heavenly city as both a place and a people. This city is a place, but it is more than that—she is a bride adorned for her husband. Nothing invokes more beauty than a bride on her wedding day. The great climax of every wedding is that moment when the organist keys down on the wedding march, the sanctuary doors burst open, and the congregation stands as the bride makes her entrance and walks down the aisle, beautifully dressed for her husband. It is a breathtaking scene.

Guys, in all the weddings that I have ever done as a pastor, I have yet to hear one person complement the groom in his rented tux. Why? Because all eyes are on the bride!

This is the image we are given of the heavenly city. What John describes here in these verses has been the long anticipated hope of God’s people—future glory with Christ.

Hebrews 11:8-10—“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

Hebrews 13:14—“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

The history of God’s people begins in a garden, and it ends in a city. Let’s take a look at what this future city involves:

*Intimate fellowship*
3—And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

This has to be the most wonderful promise in all of the Bible. In fact, this is what the Bible has been pointing us to throughout its 66 books. God desires to dwell with man and woman who are made in His image. This is what the garden of Eden was all about.

The next time you read through your Bible, pay close attention to the emphasis that Scripture places on the dwelling places of God. For instance:

To begin with, God walked with man in the garden of Eden. Then He dwelt with Israel in the tabernacle and later the temple. When Israel failed, God’s glory departed those dwellings. In time, God came to dwell among us in the person of His Son. And today, God doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands, but He is pleased to dwell in the hearts of believers through His Spirit. One day in the future, we will bask in the glory of God’s presence in a place of unhindered fellowship.

**Revelation 22:3-4**—“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

Since Genesis 3, all that humanity has known has been cursed. The last word of the Old Testament is ‘curse.’ Mankind cannot see God’s face now because of sin’s curse. But Jesus came for the purpose of bearing our sin so that the curse could be broken. Now, He is making all things new. We enjoy His abiding presence now, but will see His face one day in the future. O, what glory!

**Perfect rest**
4—He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’

The wonderful sights that John was privileged to see were so amazing that the best way he found to describe it was by contrast. Notice the words ‘no more.’ (21:1, 4; 22:5)

And just what exactly does he say will be ‘no more?’ I love how Dr. Chuck Swindoll points out at least twelve things that are present with us now, but are missing from the new heaven and earth:

- No more sea—because chaos and calamity will be eradicated (21:1)
- No more tears—because hurtful memories will be replaced (21:4)
- No more death—because mortality will be swallowed up by life (21:4)
- No more mourning—because sorrow will be completely comforted (21:4)
- No more crying—because the sounds of weeping will be soothed (21:4)
- No more pain—because all human suffering will be cured (21:4)
- No more thirst—because God will graciously quench all desires (21:6)
- No more wickedness—because all evil will be banished (21:8, 27)
- No more temple—because the Father and Son are personally present (21:22)
- No more night—because God’s glory will give eternal light (21:23-25; 22:5)
- No more closed gates—because God’s doors will always be open (21:25)
- No more curse—because Christ’s blood has lifted that curse (22:3)
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.’

The Lord tells John to write it down, for it is all certainty!

Eternal satisfaction

6—And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning
and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without
payment.

Those of us who live with modern conveniences don’t think much about the value
of water, but this would have been a major concern to a first century reader. In
my mind, I can imagine John as he was abandoned there on Patmos, perhaps
feeling the physical pain of unquenched thirst. Think of how he might view the
free and abundant offer of water.

It is a picture of deep and spiritual satisfaction within the soul. It is something
that only Jesus can give you. And notice that the verse says He gives us this
water of life without payment. It is a free gift to be received in faith, not
something to be earned.

It costs you nothing because Jesus has paid it all.

Notice the Lord says, “It is done!” The term carries with it absolute finality. At the
cross, Jesus said, “It is finished!” That was in reference to His redemptive work,
and it was a word that emphasized something in the past that had come to an
end—His suffering to bring atonement for sin.

When God declares, “It is done,” He is pointing forward to a permanent condition
that has fully arrived. It is in the perfect indicative tense. It verifies that God’s
promises are sure, so much so that He can express things yet future as
completed events with enduring results.
The end of the beginning that John writes about it here, it is about the sure fulfillment of the plan of God, and it is about the bright future of the people of God. Notice also that it is about—

3. **A home FOREVER in the presence of God (21:7-8)**

There’s something about home, isn’t there? It seems like all of our lives, we are simply trying to make it back home. Those of you who have adult children with their own kids, just this past week, what did you do but try to re-create home as they all came back for Christmas? There is something within us that longs for home.

The new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem that will one day come down from heaven from God, this is the ‘forever home’ of the children of God. Listen to the promise from God:

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

The word ‘heritage’ means to inherit something. All that John has described is the inheritance of believers.

In his book, “Be Victorious,” Warren Wiersbe tells the story of how after the great Chicago fire of 1871, the preacher D.L. Moody went back to survey the damage of his house. A neighbor came by and said to him, “I hear you lost everything.” Moody said, “Well, you heard wrong. I have a whole lot more left than I lost.” The friend asked, “What do you mean? I didn’t know you were that rich.” Moody then opened his Bible and read to him Revelation 21:7—“He who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God.”

The New Jerusalem is the inheritance of God’s children.
Now I know that I’ve spent this sermon talking about the joy of heaven and the bright future that belongs to believers. I would be telling you only part of the story if I failed to mention the future of unbelievers, however.

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 sulfur, which is the second death.

Heaven is the forever home of the believer, but hell is the forever home of the unbeliever. Be warned!

Hell is just as much a reality as heaven. Unfortunately, so many of our pulpits have fallen silent about the subject. Whether you realize it or not, Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in the Bible. He believed that:

• Hell is a real place

“Don’t fear those who kill the body,” Jesus said, “rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28; see also 5:29-30; 23:15,33; Luke 10:15; 16:23).

• Hell is a place of judgment

In several of His parables, Jesus clearly and emphatically taught of a final judgment and the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous. The unrighteous will be condemned to a place of blazing fire and utter darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (See Matt. 13:24-30,36-43, 47-50; 22:1-14; 25:14-46.) Jesus called this place “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Hell is not a place where people are tormented by the devil; it is where those who reject God will suffer the same fate as the devil and his demons. It is the place of final judgment.

• Hell is forever
Jesus spoke of hell as “eternal fire” (Matt. 25:41) and “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46). In Matthew 25:46, the same word—eternal—is used to describe eternal life for the righteous and the eternal punishment of hell for the unrighteous. According to Jesus, hell will be eternal.

- Hell is more terrible than we can imagine

The images of fire (Matt. 25:41), darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), the weeping and gnashing of teeth ” (Matt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28), and being cut into pieces speak of the horror of hell.

And just as heaven is more wonderful than our finite minds can comprehend, hell is more horrible than our finite minds comprehend.

So what are we to do with what the Bible says about hell? For believers, the reality of hell is an impetus to evangelism and missions—it is a reminder to us of what is at stake with the gospel. Praise God that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, but may we as believers be gripped with the urgency of the gospel message!

Charles Spurgeon—“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”

Conclusion:

What Satan tried to destroy has been rescued and reclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is a ‘scarlet thread’ that connects creation to its future recreation.

It is only fitting that the Bible ends with an invitation and a motivation. The invitation is to receive Christ now; the motivation is that Christ is coming soon.
Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming soon.” He says it three different times. He is coming soon! The cry of the church is, “Even so come, Lord Jesus!” Come quickly. That’s how the Bible ends.

(credit David Platt) “The Chronicles of Narnia” end with this paragraph:

C.S. Lewis—“As Aslan spoke, he no longer looked to them like a lion, but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful, that I cannot write them. For us, this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after, but for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now, at last, they were beginning Chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

That’s it. God’s people in God’s place for God’s purpose. It will happen. This is what we have to look forward to, brothers and sisters!

Now, as Christ’s redeemed disciples, we are commanded to go into the world and make disciples. We’ve come full circle. The original commission to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with image bearers is now made possible through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The last two chapters of the Bible serve as the confidence for our mission—we’re on the winning side!

For those of us in Christ, this world is all the evil that we will ever know. And for those who are not in Christ, and die in that lost condition, this world is all the good that they will ever know.

Let’s share good news with a world that needs to hear it.