



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

The New Earth and the Water of Life

{Scriptures}

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I have stated over the last several weeks that the readings for this Easter Season focus on the early Church and on the revelation of who Jesus is – in particular the glimpses of him in heavenly courts. I thought this week I would focus on the heavenly glory.

The Book of Revelation is the record of a revelation given to St John about future events from a heavenly perspective. The portion we heard comes from nearly the end. It follows on from the account of the dead rising to life again and being judged. For the Bible is clear that we will all be judged by God for our lives and held accountable for how we lived them. The Bible is also clear that believers in Jesus Christ will not be found guilty in that judgement but we have already been given eternal life. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

The judgement of believers then becomes a judgement of rewards given for faithful service. After judgement, John describes this scene. He sees a new heaven and a new earth - creation is recreated and so made fit for God to dwell with mankind. It is not just here in Revelation that we learn of it – Isaiah prophesied:

“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” (Isaiah 65:17)

And so did the Apostle Peter:

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. (2 Peter 3:13-14)

What is described is not what so many of us imagine: saints with haloes sitting on white clouds “arping ‘arping all day long.” This hope of glory is of resurrected people living in resurrected bodies on a new earth. The earth will be recreated and the people of God will have responsibilities and rulership. The rewards of judgement for believers are greater responsibilities! The new earth has structures, there is a new Jerusalem with streets and walls and gates. People will eat and drink in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Jesus said he would drink wine in the heavenly kingdom. There is a river of the water of life flowing through the new Jerusalem which has trees growing by it. These are all very physical descriptions. When God created this earth he said it was very good – there is nothing inherently wrong with the physical creation – just the effects of our rebellion upon it.

I said recently that Paul teaches our resurrection bodies will be more wonderful than these bodies yet related to them in the same way the grown plant relates to the seed. C.S. Lewis explains the relationship between this world and the next at the end of the Narnia books. The end of the world of Narnia has come, they have gone to Aslan's country. Digory explains,

"[The Narnia you have known] was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our world, England and all, is only a shadow or a copy of something in Aslan's real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as the real thing from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream."¹

The consistent Biblical portrayal of the new creation is of great beauty and joy. In that new creation there will be no sin and no consequences of sin. God will tenderly wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning, no more pain or crying. This is perfection restored, this is Eden regained if you will.

But it is better than an ideal creation – but wait there's more! The true glory is that God will live with redeemed humanity in person.

Verse 3: "Look! God's dwelling place [tent] is now among the people, and he will dwell [tabernacle] with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

The word dwelling place is literally tent or tabernacle. And when it says God will dwell with them it is, he will tabernacle with them. We might say he will camp with them except that has an implication of a temporary state to us who are not tent dwellers. The point is God and man will live together. There has been another place in the Bible where it says God dwelt with mankind. John says of Jesus that he came and tabernacled among us.

(John 1:14) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (ESV)

Again the same word for dwelt – it can be translated: he spread his tent.

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."

⁶ 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life."

Then John hears a voice from the throne. Who is this? Who is trustworthy and true? Who is the Alpha and the Omega – the A & the Z – the beginning and the end? It is God Almighty. And if we are not clear, in the next chapter it is specifically stated that the Alpha and the Omega the first and the last is Jesus the Son of God.

He offers the water of life to the thirsty. Are you thirsty for real life, for satisfying purposeful and eternal life? For that is what Jesus offers – to enjoy now and beyond into the afterlife. He offers it for free to those who will follow him.

But what is this water of life?

We keep hearing of it through the New Testament especially. Jesus spoke of it several times. He offered the water of life to the Samaritan woman by the well.

John 4:14 " ... whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Again in John 7:37,

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, Random House, Chapter 15

will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Did you register what Peter said when he recounted going to the house of Cornelius the centurion and how the Holy Spirit fell on the people there as he told them about Jesus?

(Acts 11:15) "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

Peter told of people receiving the water of life – the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who draws us to Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who makes Jesus known to us. We don't need to be afraid of the Holy Spirit – he is God's presence with us.

Several times in his Epistles Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit in us is the guarantee of our inheritance. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the deposit, the down payment of the glory which is to come.

(Ephesians 1:13-14) And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

(2 Corinthians 1:21-22) He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

So when we hear those trustworthy and true words which John recorded in revelation that "...to the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life." That is the glorious fulfilment of the guarantee. Whatever experience we have had already of the Holy Spirit will be far exceeded when we dwell with God in the new creation and we are given the water of life to drink.

If you have experienced anything of God – that is the Holy Spirit – it is the Holy Spirit who is God present to us. But we can know more. We can invite him to come more strongly. We can welcome him more rather than less.

Are you thirsty? Then ask Jesus for a drink of the Holy Spirit! The ancient prayer is "Come, Holy Spirit."