

Sermon

November 23, 2014

Title: Promised Land

Text: Revelation 19:10 – 22:21

Coming Home

The Old House:

The old house had seen better days. It sat beneath a hill on the edge of a beautiful meadow. It had been there longer than anyone could remember. But it was on its last legs.

The roof had been leaking for years. It sagged in the middle, as if the weight of the years had finally proven too much for it. Broken bricks littered the ground around the base of the chimney. Creosote stained the sides of the wall around it. The back porch had pulled away from the rest of the house and was slowly settling into the yard.

Inside things were even worse: doors that refused to close, floors with hills and valleys, drafty windows with rotted frames, water stains on the walls and ceilings. Sparks shot from outlets when appliances were plugged in.

A trip to the cellar revealed that the foundation itself was crumbling away and in many places the sills had rotted through. The furnace leaked fumes throughout the house, the pipes froze in the walls on cold nights, and a host of creatures had made the walls and basement home.

What to do?

This Old World:

This old world we live in is like that old house. God placed us in His good Creation. But the house that we built for ourselves in it is old and decrepit – riddled with violence, injustice, greed and deceit. It may look okay from a distance, but once you get up close you discover that it is rotten from foundation to roof line.

We eke out our existence in it, often in full-scale denial of the depth of our world's brokenness and decay. Like people living in a drafty, falling down house, we get used to fire shooting out of outlets, frigid bedrooms, and a leaky roof. We tell ourselves that with "just a little TLC" everything will be alright. After all, none of us has the means or power to fix our world.

But what if the world's Builder decided that the time had come to make things right? What if He came to restore the house to its former beauty and purpose? What if, instead tearing it down or letting it fall into the ground, He determined to rebuild it from the ground up?

Coming Home Again for the First Time:

Imagine what it would feel like to move out of that old house in the meadow so that it could be restored. The builders would have to virtually take the house apart and rebuild it from the ground up: new foundation, new sills, strengthened walls, new windows and doors, new chimney and furnace, new wiring, plumbing, kitchen. New roof. The works.

Now imagine what it would feel like to move back in! You'd be coming back to the same place – a house sitting beneath a wooded hill on the edge of a lovely meadow. You'd see the same old maple tree out the kitchen window, the same sunset from the front porch. But from the basement to the rafters everything would be brand new. Everything would work the way it was supposed to. Instead of being a firetrap, the house would be a place of warmth and security, even on the coldest winter night.

What would it feel like? Maybe like coming home again for the first time.

Paul said that this is precisely what God intends to do with His ruined Creation. He wrote to the Christians in Rome:

Romans 8:18-21 NIV

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Coming home again for the first time.

The Repair of God's World

A Time to Tear Down:

John's final cycle of visions begins with the tearing out of the evil that has corrupted God's world. The Lamb, now as Messiah King, rides out to do battle with the dragon's counterfeit kingdom. He wields but one weapon: His Word. It was by His Word that God created the heavens and the earth. It is by His Word that He repairs them and makes all things new.

Just as a builder must remove all that is rotten and dangerous from an old house before building it anew, Jesus removes from the world once and for all the hideous monster and its false prophet:

Revelation 19:20 NIV

But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Then the dragon, Satan himself, is imprisoned, and God's faithful witnesses rule for 1000 years. The story is not finished, but already we gain a glimpse of the glory that will be.

Finally, Satan is released and leads one more attempt to dethrone the Creator. The forces of evil gather for battle. But once out in the open, they are defeated.

Revelation 20:10 NIV

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The entire human race is brought before the Creator to stand before Him as Judge and Ruler of His world. At long last, all that is evil and twisted in the world is exposed and removed from God's Creation.

The Two Books:

The repair of the world began with the opening of a scroll. The story ends in much the same way: two scrolls or "books" appear at the Final Judgment of the world. One records our deeds; the other records our citizenship. The privilege of being a citizen of Heaven is God's gift to us, purchased through the death of His Son – the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world. The Book of Deeds tells how we have chosen to live and act in this earthly life.

In many ways, the repair of God's world is already written in these two books. The New Creation is already present – in the lives of those who have placed faith in Jesus and become citizens of Heaven. And everything that we do to build God's Kingdom in this life is a part of that coming New Creation. So, just as the Scroll with the Seven Seals told the mystery of God's restored rule, so too do the contents of the books that are brought forth when God judges His world.

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Journey's End:

The court room scene comes to an end. The great books are rolled up – never to be opened again. John looks up and discovers that he has reached the end of his great Exodus Journey. He has at last come home.

Of this moment, Craig Koester writes:

Readers are like travelers, who climb mountains and cross valleys, who swelter in the day and grope through the darkness at night, contending with plagues, tyrants, and wild beasts only to find themselves back on their front doorstep, looking at the view with new eyes.

Craig R. Koester. Revelation and the End of All Things (p. 172). Kindle Edition.

It was a journey that began and ends with the Creator God and the Lamb. It is a journey that demonstrates God's own self-designation as The Beginning and the End. He is the beginning end not only of Time, but of the long human story in Time. At journey's end God proclaims:

Revelation 21:6 NIV

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.

"The end is not an event, but a person."

G.B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine, p. 266, as cited in Koester, p. 172.

Promised Land:

John's visions take us to a new world:

Revelation 21:1 NIV

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.

They bring us to a new City, the New Jerusalem:

Revelation 21:2 NIV

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

Babylon, the symbol of human arrogance, oppression, greed and violence, is no more. God has now established a city in which Heaven and Earth become one. It is the place where humans and their Creator dwell together:

Revelation 21:3-5 NIV

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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."

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."

John takes us on a tour of the city. In the vision it appears as an immense golden cube. In Solomon's Temple, the innermost and most sacred room was called the Holy of Holies. It formed a perfect cube. Now, instead of a temple within the city, the city itself has become the Holy of Holies – the home of God.

Revelation 21:22-24 NIV

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

Home:

It's a late fall evening when dad drives the family van up to the house under the hill. The tires crunch on the gravel in the driveway as the children press their faces to the windows for their first glimpse of home. The house stands strong and tall against the hill. Every window glows with light. The children burst from the van, run up the walk and through the great front door. They are home.

They find the table set, a turkey just coming out of the oven. It turns out the Mom got here first. And there are more surprises. Each room reveals family and friends, all of whom have come to celebrate the new home.

What if the world's Builder decided that the time had come to make things right? What if He came to restore His world to its former beauty and purpose? What if, instead tearing it down or letting it fall into the ground, He determined to rebuild it from the ground up?

And what if He decided to make it His home, too?

What would that feel like? Maybe it would feel like coming home – for the very first time.

Revelation 22:3-5 NIV

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. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

⁵There 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.

Revelation Study

Session 6

The Sixth Vision Cycle (Revelation 19-22)

