

Sermon Notes

THE CHIEF END OF GOD, OR "WHY AM I HERE?" (Rev. 21:1-5)

Tom Koontz

Given at Blacksburg Christian Fellowship, Blacksburg, VA December. 31, 2017

<http://www.blacksburgchristianfellowship.org>

We have come to the end of another year. If you are an optimist, we have come to the beginning of a new year. Whether we look forward or backward, we might have the same question we had last year at this time: Why? Why am I here? Why has God been so good to me to give me life everlasting? Or maybe you are asking, "Why have I suffered so much?"

When we were young—which for all of us was only yesterday—we all asked those enduring questions: Why am I here? and Who am I? When my wife asked if I had a title for the sermon, I told her, "The Chief End of God." She raised her eyebrows. I added, "The Chief End of God, or 'Why am I here?'"

The end of a well written story reveals why a murderer murders, a lover loves, or a hero fights against all odds to win the race. This morning I invite you stand with me in the presence of God to hear the end of our story, which is really the beginning of life everlasting. Hear these words that are faithful and true. May they be a lamp unto your feet for the coming year.

¹And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, ⁴and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." (Rev. 21:1-5)

PRAYER

By the time of chapter 21 in the book of Revelation judgments have been poured out on the earth from the announcement of trumpets and the pouring out of bowls, all precipitated by the Lamb of God being found worthy to loose the seals on God's scroll. As a result, a beast rose from the sea speaking great blasphemies. Another beast rose from the earth, the false prophet, deceiving the people of the earth. Heaven opened and Christ appeared on a white horse. He and the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen—white and clean—captured the beast and the false prophet and cast them into the lake of fire. Satan is bound for a thousand years before he too is cast into the lake of fire.

The Great White Throne Judgment takes place after which Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. John then sees a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

(V. 1) The new creation John sees in chapter 21 was foretold by Isaiah. Isaiah wrote, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa. 65:17, also Ps. 102:25-27).

Some believe the new heavens and new earth require the annihilation of the old heavens and earth, making a new creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. However, Paul told the Romans that the creation is anxiously longing, waiting eagerly, for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19). It is difficult to imagine that the creation would anxiously look forward to its annihilation.

Paul also told the church in Rome, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." The pains of a new birth are not the same as the pains of destruction. In our new birth, we were crucified in Christ, we died, we passed away, and it is no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us. We are new creatures in Christ (Gal. 2:20), and I suspect this is true of the new creation.

We may be disappointed to hear there is no longer any sea. Sitting on the beach is heavenly for many of us. For the Israelites the sea was a symbol for cosmic evil. Idolatrous peoples came from the sea (18:10-19). It was the place of the dead (20:13). Within the context of Revelation, the sea represents a cesspool of evil out of which rises the Beast in chapter 13. That sea, the sea that threatens tribulation for God's people, is no more.

(V. 2) Between the new heaven and the new earth John sees the holy city. Whereas the old Jerusalem was often charged with playing the harlot, the new Jerusalem is holy as God is holy for God Himself dwells there. She is made ready as a bride for her husband, another fulfillment of Isaiah (Isa. 61:10). Rev. 19:7-8 identifies the bride as being clothed in white linen—clean and white—of the saints. The bride is the chosen people of God.

Verse 15 tells us an angel measures the holy city just as an angel measured the temple in Ezekiel 40:3. The footprint of the new Jerusalem is fifteen hundred miles on each side. That is greater than the distance from Jerusalem to Rome. The new Jerusalem is so large it will absorb Rome, the church's oppressor. And the new Jerusalem is as tall as it is wide. It is a cube.

(V. 3) The new Jerusalem shares the same proportions, balance, and symmetry as the Holy of Holies, where God had dwelt with the Israelites in the tabernacle. The Holy of Holies was also a cube. The voice from the throne reminds us of their shared geometries: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." This is a fulfillment of many O.T. prophecies like Jeremiah 31:33, "I will be their God and they shall be my people."

Ezekiel reveals the heart and soul of the new Jerusalem when he writes, “The name of the city from that day shall be, ‘The Lord is there’” (Ezekiel 48:35). The paradise Adam and Eve were banished from—expelled from God’s presence—has been regained. Immediate fellowship with God has been restored. We will be His people for real, forever, and He Himself will be among us.

(V. 4) Have you ever had anyone wipe away your tears? Your mom? Maybe your wife or your husband? It is an intimate and very caring act. Imagine God condescending to kneel down, look you in the eyes, and wipe away your tears. That’s what John sees, and it will be the end of all crying.

Then the voice from the throne promises the impossible: there shall no longer be death. That is unimaginable. If it seems too good to be true, the proverb goes, it probably is. But we hear from the throne of God—God Himself—that there will be no death, no tears, no mourning, no crying, no pain. There are no cemeteries, no morgues, no murders, no disease, no pain killers.

(V. 5) The voice from the throne confirms that what John has seen is true: it is reality. God is making everything new, fulfilling several more of Isaiah’s prophecies (43:19; 65:17; 66:22). And His words are faithful and true. It is one thing to believe in God. It is a different faith to believe God, to believe He will make everything new.

The reason we take note that these events were foretold by Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and others is to see the unity and continuity in the Scriptures and that God keeps His word. The new Jerusalem and the new creation are no mistake. God had no plan “B” in case sin had somehow messed up Paradise.

God doesn’t do anything without a purpose. There are no contingencies with God. He doesn’t do anything because we make Him do it. He does nothing under compulsion. We are not His counselor. He is completely free. The Psalms tell us that He does only what pleases Him (Ps. 115:3; 135:6). Job said of God, “I know you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). He would not be much of a God, if we could thwart His purposes.

R.C. Sproul said, there cannot be a maverick molecule in the universe. If there is one molecule outside God’s sovereign control, all guarantees are off. How could we ever trust God to cause everything to work for our good if there is one molecule, one person, one event that successfully opposes Him? We might as well go home and make a toast to a hopeless year.

Everything God does, He does for one purpose: to display His glory. In this He will not fail. The heavens declare the glory of God. Their expanse declares the work of His hands. It is the nature of the Trinity to be giving, like a fountain of goodness, overflowing. If God displays His own glory in all that He makes and in all His purposes, it is because He seeks to have Himself diffused and expressed,¹ which is to say that He wants to share His life and His goodness.

¹ Michael Reeves. *Delighting in the Trinity* (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL.) pg. 47.

Jonathan Edwards wrote God's pleasure in communicating Himself, "is rather a pleasure in diffusing and communicating to the creature, than in receiving from the creature."² This is a far cry from idols and false gods. God loves to make His excellencies known, not only in the physical creation but also by His word.

The book of Hebrews tells us that after God spoke long ago to the fathers and to the prophets, in these last days He has communicated His glory to us through His Son. Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature. What is God's nature that Jesus represents? Jesus communicates His Father's glory through the redemption of sinners with the goal that they should participate in the unity and the glory of the Trinity.

Jesus prayed for us just before He was taken to the cross. He said that the glory which His Father had given to Him He had given to us that we would be one as He and His Father are one, in unity. His glory unites us. He asked, "I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." (Jn. 17:22-24)

In the beginning God made Adam out of the dust, giving him dominion over the earth. Adam was king. God made a bride for the king and placed them in Paradise to be in fellowship with God. Like every well told love story, conflict enters, tearing apart the lovers. Eve is tempted and Adam goes against the purposes of His maker. God curses the couple and the ground. Adam dies never achieving his dominion over the earth, and it looks like the story cannot end well.

This morning we read the end of that story. We see the second Adam, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. We see His bride dressed in fine linen—white and clean—holy and adorned with beauty for her King. Paradise is regained. As Job said, God's purpose was never thwarted, and the climax to the story is so much greater than anyone could have imagined.

Jonathan Edwards wrote that God had one purpose in making all things, in allowing sin, and death and tears and mourning and pain. Edwards wrote, that the creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end: that God might procure a spouse for his Son.³ And He would need to procure that spouse from among miserable fallen creatures. Not the angels. Not the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, or fish of the sea. Not the living creatures of heaven, the seraphim or the cherubim. But man, the only creature into whom God breathed His spirit and impressed His image.

² Jonathan Edwards, "Ethical Writings," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 8:459.

³ Jonathan Edwards, "The Miscellanies," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 23:178.

It would be easy to think too much of ourselves at this point, thinking that there must be something that makes us worthy of God's affections. Man is not the center of God's world. God is. We are creatures; He is the creator. Romans teaches us that none of us are righteous. None of us understood. None of us sought Him. We had turned aside. We had become useless, never doing anything good.

But God has a plan. People from every nation, tongue, tribe, and people—not just Jews—are to make up His Son's bride and enter into His glory, to be one with Him. And He wrote us a love letter to explain His intentions. It is the greatest love letter ever received, ever imagined, ever experienced by mortals: His Word in Scriptures and in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

Gentlemen, have you ever written a love letter that was spurned? Were you ever so infatuated by that cute girl in your class that she held your attention all day long and your heart all night? You tried to sit with her in the cafeteria, but she was always able to get away with her friends. Maybe you walked by, or rode your bike by her house with the hope of catching a glimpse of her, and if providence really smiled on you, maybe she would be outside and you would get to talk with her. Maybe you could take her to Starbucks and share a coffee or tea. Unable to reach her, maybe you wrote her a letter, a poem (maybe some borrowed verse).

But she still didn't acknowledge you. Maybe she even mocked your letter. If she spoke your name it was in cursing rather than caring. She wouldn't walk home from school with you, or sit beside you on the bus. She ignored you like you didn't exist. She wouldn't go to the game with you or to any of the dances. And when you walked by her house (which you did too often), the little darling was curled up in the fetal position hiding in her closet screaming at her mother, "Don't you let him in, don't you dare let him in!"

Is that your reaction to God? This morning His eye is on you. He has written you a love letter. He has communicated to you—this morning—of His everlasting love, but you deny He exists. You would rather curse His name than respect it. You certainly wouldn't be caught dead in Starbucks with him. What would your friends think? And that letter of His? You'll never read it. You deny He wrote it; you mock its passion, and you will never believe that He is as faithful or true as He says. No one is. Deep inside, you know He is too good for you, and if He ever really got to know you, He would dump you.

But that is precisely why He calls you, why He has written, why He has come by. He is glorified in and delights in redeeming you. It was for the joy set before Him that He applied His life to affliction, treachery, and crucifixion to save you from His Father's wrath. He will never dump you. But He will transform you and make you holy and precious in His sight.

Michelangelo could look at a piece of marble and see the figure within struggling to be free, figures like Moses or David. With his stone cutting tools he

set David and Moses free from the quarry from which they had been cut. He was a creative genius, but God is the infinite genius.

Peter writes that we are living stones, being built up into a spiritual house, John's new Jerusalem (1 Pet. 2:5). In these days we often cry out in pain as God, the divine sculptor, afflicts us with His hammer, chisels, and rasps as He sets free the image of His Son from our stony hearts. Being changed from one degree of glory to another in this life can be painful.

Suffering is not without reason, even when we can't immediately understand why. God's purposes for suffering are as unique as each individual is unique. For some He uses the chisel of affliction. For others it is the rasp of sickness. Some of us need to have our pride hammered off, while others are polished in grit. We are being chiseled, dressed, and polished for the new Jerusalem.

The book of 1 Kings records that when Solomon built the temple the sound of the axe and hammer or any other iron tool was not heard at the temple site. All the cutting and shaping of the temple stones were done at the quarry (1 Kgs. 6:7). This morning we who are alive remain in God's quarry being cut and shaped and polished into perfect proportions fit for His house, His temple, His new and holy Jerusalem. When it is time for us to be carried away to the new Jerusalem the ax will be sheathed, the hammer will slip back into the belt, and the iron tools will be stored. There will be no more death. He will wipe away every tear. There will be no mourning, no crying, no pain.

God gave Adam and Eve marriage in the Garden as a reminder of what His ultimate goal is: a bride for the King. We are fallen creatures, and even the best of our marriages are imperfect. It is because marriage is the hope of our future, and the instrument of God's glory that the world hates it so, trying to tear it apart, aborting the fruit of it, and perverting its origins. But there is forgiveness for our failure to live up to His image. He is faithful and true, merciful and gracious, so that when we confess and repent of our sin He will forgive us.

In chapter 19 John saw a scarlet woman on a scarlet beast. She represented Babylon, the Mother of Harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints. She was the great city that reigns over the kings of the earth. God did not forget her sins. In the same measure that she glorified herself, she was given torment and sorrow: death and mourning and famine. And heaven exulted over her fall.

If God's chief end in creation is to glorify Himself, and if man's chief end is to glorify God, and if God's purposes will never be thwarted, then you will glorify God. The question remains, how will you glorify God? Will you glorify Him as His beloved bride His chosen city, holy and exulted? Or, instead of the bride of Christ, will you remain in the city of Babylon and play the harlot? Will you glorify God's righteous justice or will you glorify His merciful grace?

In Revelation 22, there is a river in the new Jerusalem, the river of the water of life, clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb. If you

are thirsty for life, come to the Lamb and drink. Repent, unload your burden, and rejoice.

If we have repented, if we trust in Jesus, if we are believers, our Father looks at us in His Son. He sees us washed in His sin-atonement blood and adorned in His perfect righteousness. Despite what we saw in the mirror this morning, He sees us handsome and beautiful in Christ.

When God made creation from nothing it was a great work. All things came into being through Christ, but Christ did a greater work when He obtained you for His bride. God became man. He overcame the devil, the world, and even His own flesh, which at one point wished the cup of His Father's wrath would pass from Him. He laid down His life for His wife. He poured out His soul on the cross for her. He won His bride by conquest. He defeated all His enemies for her *because that is who He is*: transcendentally faithful, perfectly trustworthy.

The only means by which He could show you who He really is—beautiful in mercy, amazing grace, holy righteousness, perfect justice—was to display Himself in and through the wretched, miserable, evil conditions of our fallen world. Otherwise He could not have saved you, and you could not have seen the glory of God, or the holiness of God on the cross. So, the radiance of God's glory became man, died for your sin, buried it to be seen no more, and rose again that you would rise with Him, be His bride, share His throne, and inherit His kingdom. It is all grace and grace alone. He came to defeat death for you, to wipe away your tears, to do away with mourning and crying and pain.

God's last word on the church, you and me, is in Rev. 21 as the bride of Christ. At the end of it all that is why He has made you. That is why you are here. That is why He died for you: to be His spouse, to be His glory, to be His lover as He has loved you. In the coming year let Paul's words to the Ephesians be your prayer: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

⁴ Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth... (Rev. 1:4-5)

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and that you cite references appropriately. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Blacksburg Christian Fellowship, Blacksburg, VA.