

## **Study 9. The coming glory** **(Revelation 21:1—22:5)**

Christ now lives in his people and this is their 'hope of glory' (Col. 1:27). Peter says we have been born again to a living hope (1 Pt. 1:3). That is, the very presence of Christ with us orients us to the promised future. The glory we have at present must not be minimised, but everything we have points us forward. Faith is the substance of things hoped for (Hb. 11:1). The Christian's faith is a relationship in which, in love we trust Christ for all that is not yet present.

Before looking at the picture of glory given to us in Revelation, we should make a few observations about this hope.

First, there is much that is inglorious, plainly wretched and shameful about our present life. Sickness, poverty, wars and injustice have not yet been abolished; neither have what we call natural disasters. Christians are as deprived and debilitated by these as anyone else. Then, we also have our own wretchedness without complaining about that of others. Any appreciation of present glory must be realistic about what we don't yet have.

Second, the world thinks in terms of progress and believes it can achieve this. The Christian thinks in terms of God's promise of a future and our preparation for participating in this. Progress is what God makes rather than us, and our best chance at 'making' progress may, in fact, be to share in his! In fact, God is interested in progress, in this present world. Don Carson makes this comment:

'...the triumphant spread and growth of Christianity during the past twenty centuries, especially during the past two centuries, are nothing short of astonishing. Moreover, not a few historians judge that Christianity has been one of the dominant influences in the early shaping of modern science and in the rise of democratic forms of government; and these developments, for all their failures, have provided more people with relative wealth and freedom than at any time in the history of the world (D. A. Carson, *How Long O Lord?* p. 137).

Third, given that this present world cannot be the scene of final glory, some believe they should do nothing to improve our present situation. This is to misunderstand what it means to live to God's glory. To the contrary, what Christians do is eternal. Whatever is of love endures (1 Co. 13:4-13). This is precisely God's intention, that we, trusting in him, will let his glory be revealed in our present situations. It is this faith that will be vindicated on the last day. Geoffrey Bingham's song captures this.

When all around is sin and pain,  
And death is near and life is vain,  
Thy glory breaks from out the tomb  
As new life issues from its womb,  
And I am caught to You on high,  
Where strong strong love can never die.

Fourth, final glory will be revealed when Jesus comes, gloriously, and to be glorified in his saints (2 Th. 1:7-10). Jesus insisted that he would return to this earth in 'his glory and the glory of the Father' (Lk. 9:26). He wanted his disciples to see him in the glory that he had with the Father from eternity (Jn. 17:24). Our resurrection, or glorification, is joined with this return.

So we come to the final section of Revelation (21:1—22:5) that describes the church having the glory of God (v. 11), living in the glory of God and the Lamb (v. 23), and of the glory of the nations coming into the City of God (v. 26). This Book begins and ends with the expectation of Christ coming (1:7; 22:7, 12, 20). All that comes between assists us as we wait in hope for the glory to come. Much mystery remains, but the glory of the Lord is finally revealed in his people, and it is this day that must remain clear in our minds. We are not

spectators of this scene; rather, we are the spectacle (Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*).

First, there is a new (*kainos* not *neos*) or renewed heaven and earth (v. 1). It is *new* in that we cannot trust in the present one to provide our eternal home (cf. 2 Pt. 3:10-12), and it is *new* in that there is no crying, death or pain (v. 4; there is no sin either), nor any sea or night (vv. 1, 23-24). But it is *renewed* in that it has continuity with the original creation. Our dead bodies are 'sown' in dishonour but raised in glory; our mortal bodies put on immortality; death is swallowed up in life (1 Co. 15:43, 53-54). The works performed on earth 'follow' us (Rv. 14:13). As it says here (v. 3), the covenant God made with Israel is now fulfilled (Ez. 37:27).

Second, the repeated 'I saw...' (vv. 1-2) focusses us on what has glory in this new heaven and earth—the holy city or Bride of the Lamb. The rest of the chapter is spent describing this. All creation will share in the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rm. 8:21) who comprise this City/Bride. Our renewal will signal the renewal of the entire creation. The earth has always been servant to the need of the Lord's people. It will be set free from its present constraint to be appropriate to our renewed humanity as the sons and daughters of God. Our hope is for nothing less than an entirely renewed heaven and earth (Mt. 19:28; Ac. 3:20-21), and ourselves as its intended overlords (Lk. 19:11-27).

Third, the Church, 'the Bride, the wife of the Lamb', the 'holy city Jerusalem', comes down from heaven, 'from God, having the glory of God' (vv. 2, 10-11). God has been preparing her for this wedding occasion. What has, in fact, been so, is now revealed in splendour: the church has always 'come down', has been comprised of persons newly created and, as people led by the Spirit, being readied for this day. In fact, the word used for radiance is only used elsewhere for the radiance displayed by the witnessing church on earth (Phl. 2:15).

Further detail of the city continues to demonstrate how closely the present is connected with what will be revealed then. Twelve gates (vv. 12-13, 21), each one a pearl, open in all directions and are named for the tribes of Israel because the people who first heard the word of the Lord, have opened their gates to all nations (cf. Lk. 13:28). But an angel prevents anything unclean from entering, only those with their names in the Lamb's book of life.

Otherwise, the jasper wall is impregnable, 65 metres thick (vv. 17-18), and is established on the twelve Apostles (v. 14; cf. Ep. 2:19-22). The people of God are secure in this City of God's people or Christ's Bride. The City itself is a massive cube of gold, 2000 kilometres in every direction (vv. 16-18, 21)! The tabernacle's holy of holies was also a cube, the place where the glory of the Lord dwelt.

Fourth, the City's temple is God and the Lamb (v. 22). There is nowhere to 'go' to get to God! The City's light and lamp are the glory of God and the Lamb (vv. 22-23). As ever, God is our life and the life is the light of men (Jn. 1:4). Everything here receives its life from God and the Lamb.

Fifth, the glory of the nations comes into this city (v. 24). Finally, the only glory of creation will be that which reflects the light of God and the Lamb. But what diversity there will be, as each nation reflects that glory in its unique way!

Sixth, in remembrance of Eden (vv. 1-2),, but now, with no curse (v. 3), the street connecting all the City together is beside the river of the water of life, again, flowing from God and the Lamb, and by the River is the tree of life (or forest of trees either side of the stream?), constantly bearing fruit, and its leaves heal the wounds of all nations.

Finally, the saints, those acknowledged in the Lamb's book of life, truly reign (v. 5), as the Bride of Christ, taken from his side, alongside him, obedient to him, and having his glory. This is the vision given to us so we may wait expectantly, and dilligently, knowing that the future is sure.