

Transforming Hope

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[0 : 00] It is great joy to be here. I shared with many of our young leaders yesterday and emerging leaders that, you know, I counted a privilege in the season of life looking at my 70th birthday being my next one.

You would love my wife, Darlene. She was to be here. We're staring at our 48th anniversary in the face. And in the season to remember the fact that we have had my wife and I, a spiritual mother and father that have lived out finishing well with more joy and more willingness to press into God's story, even in contexts where it's very difficult to minister.

And I'm so thankful that I have seen, have been loved well, continued to be loved well by those that have gone before me. But mere human encouragement is not enough.

And it's why we turn our attention to the last vision in the entire Bible today, a portion of it, Revelation chapter 21, verses one through six. I wanna set the context and then I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna tell you and we're gonna walk through three affirmations from this text.

I have about 28 minutes to give you as much encouragement as we can squeeze out of this text. I told Derek, I honor children's workers, I love those who serve our children and we will be out on time.

[1 : 22] I wish we had three hours to marinate in this text. We have sufficient time by God's ordering. And it is a great, great passage. It's a passage that reminds us that the only command in the entire New Testament that we are called to do more and more and more is to encourage one another.

You ever thought through that before? The only command in the second half of God's remarkable unfolding story is this, encourage one another and all the more as you see the great day of Christ approaching.

In the book of Romans, God himself, among many different titles, reveals himself as the God of encouragement and hope. And hope in Scripture is never just a feeling or a fancy.

It's not the crossing of our fingers. It's not straining hard, hoping something's good's gonna happen and the Bible hope is always seeing, smelling and tasting and remembering God's future into the present.

It's a sure hope. It is a living hope. And it's one that gives us deep and rich encouragement. And again, encouragement in the Bible is far less just an emotional feeling because our feelings can be very fleeting, but it's a core reality.

[2 : 52] It's a core reality that has more in common with peace, not the absence of tears, but the transformation of tears. And John the Apostle, when he received all the visions that comprise the book of Revelation, he was in an incredibly difficult context.

And indeed, it's hard in the States in many ways. It's hard in Scotland, but I would not trade our situations for John the Apostles, right? Derek, you think about it.

Here is a John the Apostle as he writes this final aspect of God's story. He's in his early 80s. He's an octogenarian.

He is on the Isle of Patmos, same man that wrote the Gospel of John and the Three Epistles of John. He is now in a world that seems to be saying, evil's going to win.

The Roman world is just pressing in on the young church. And he, John, has separated some 70 miles across the Aegean Sea from the churches of Asia Minor.

[3 : 56] He's a pastor. He's a lover of God. And what he needs is exactly what we need, not hype, but hope.

And so Revelation is a book that's not meant to confuse us, but to deeply encourage us. The very title of the book means an unveiling, not a concealing.

Revelation is throwing the curtains open on the entire story of God reminding us there is only one hero in the entire Bible.

Many characters, but only one hero. The Lord Jesus Christ. That's why it is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a revelation by Jesus about Jesus.

And John needed that as an 80 year old man. And I need that in my life. And I sense I'm speaking to people that as well need not empty promises, but are resurrected in reigning savior.

[4 : 58] And so you go through the entire book of Revelation and there are cycles of visions. And one of the things we see throughout this book is John himself, as he receives visions of what's really going on in the world, the real story and subtext of all of history, not just in his day when Rome is big and powerful, but in every generation of the people of God.

Three times John has magnificent sightings of what God has promised and he falls down. He falls down in adoration and joy and wonder.

Four times the 24 elders who are also characters in the book of Revelation, really representative, I believe representative of leaders of both covenants, old and new covenants, the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 apostles of the Lamb, they are represented before the throne of God, seeing things as they actually are.

They too, four times seeing more of Jesus as he's revealed in the text, seeing more what's really going on in history. They, the elders fall down in worship.

This is a book of incredible gospel sanity. It's a picture of the living hope that we need. So enough of introduction, let's get right to the text.

[6 : 18] Let me tell you the three things I want us to see briefly this morning in Revelation 21, one through six. We're gonna see the world we intensely crave. The world we intensely crave.

We're gonna see the love we desperately need. And thirdly, we're gonna be invited by God's spirit to see the day for which we greatly ache.

Let me pray briefly. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank you for St. Colombo. Thank you that one day the entire of Scotland, along with the entire earth, will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of our God.

Father, not because we're gonna get the job done, but because you are a faithful God. Every promise you have made, you have made, finds its yes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, would you help us connect with what that means? Some of us are here today, and faith is more, Lord, pressed upon than perhaps any season in our life.

[7 : 23] Fears are numerous, concerns, Lord, we have people we love that are not alive to your grace. We live in a world, Lord, where there's so much meanness, there's so much division, Lord, my own country has never been more divided, never more showing what can indeed happen to the human heart when we don't seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness that is of faith.

Lord, be with us now, we pray, as you were with John, in every generation of believers, through this great and grand text, we pray in Christ's name and for his glory. Amen. I mentioned that this is the last vision in the entire Bible, not just the book of Revelation, because you see the book of Revelation, more than any other, assumes what's gone on before in the Word of God.

This book took 1,500 years to write, 40 different authors, and it's one big unfolding story, and so John, as he writes the Revelation, directly or indirectly, references over 250 quotations and promises in the entire Word of God leading up to his day.

And Jesus, the resurrected Jesus by the Spirit, brings these things together, and so let's just walk through this text. Again, I've given you the three things we wanna consider briefly, and may the Lord be praised and are missed.

First, one of three, the world we intensely crave. Now, the three words I use today, crave, need, and ache for, invite us to connect with our longings.

[9 : 00] We are a deeply longing people. You see, even a part of what frustrates you in life, even a part of what breaks your heart, a part of what generates your tears, a part of what fuels your anger, is not simply brokenness, it's goodness.

We are made in the image of God for a world where everything is right. And that's why when we think about longing, we start with this vision of what John sees barreling towards him in his own imprisonment.

Listen to the word again. John writes, verse one, chapter 21. 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.

Now, how does that one verse summarize for us the world we intensely crave? That one verse brings together so much of the word of God.

What does John the apostle affirm in that first verse? There was a first creation world. There was a world that's described for us in Genesis one and two that actually existed.

[10:08] He's affirming the fact that as followers of Jesus, and some of you may just beginning to explore this story called the gospel of Jesus Christ or biblical faith. You need to hear us say it is a story by God's own revelation that is connected to real stuff.

Our God is a God who creates, who needs nothing. Story, the Bible is God as Trinity Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is famously, gloriously, fabulously content with Him Himself.

But in grand generosity created a world as a revelation of His goodness, His truth, and His beauty into which He placed His first son and daughter, His beloved children to live in a world that we really remember in our bones.

See this phenomenon called DNA, it's not just a matter of molecules and test tubes. We are coded, we are made for what is called the Garden of Eden.

And you see that's a part of what they mean by the longings that we have. A part of what frustrates you is the fact that you know, is anything the way it was really meant to be? What John understands, we all wanted that, we all lament, we are disjointed and disconnected from the world that we really, really want.

[11:32] Well what he sees in this verse is God did not abandon His first creation world. And neither did He write it off. You see when John writes, I saw new heaven and a new earth for the first one had passed away.

He's not describing a story of replacement but of redemption and restoration. See the unfolding story of God is God under no obligation being the generous, good God of intimacy and beauty and connection and calling after His first son and daughter rebelled and the disease of sin and death came into His image bears into the world He made.

He began to tell the story of His commitment, eventually to make all things new, which is a central affirmation of our text which we'll come to in a few moments.

And so John now, he sees it, it's not Rome. It's not, you know, John has lived through Nero in the crazy Roman world of Nero. He's now in Vespusion, he's now in Domitian, excuse me.

And he is seeing what seems to be a voice, a power and evil that's gonna overthrow the story of God and the people of God. And yet God says in the midst of that new heaven and new earth that was promised by the prophets it's coming.

[12:55] Well, what is the language of new heaven and new earth? I've mentioned this, let me affirm it again. It is a picture of purification and restoration. As surely as the Bible says that the bodies that we live in right now, that when we die that God is preserving His people for the day of resurrection and that to be absent from the body is to be immediately present with the Lord.

And yet we hold out for the resurrection of our body. Well, as surely as God is committed to resurrect our body as a part of the grand family that He's redeeming.

So He has promised to bring redemption to His world. Why should that encourage us? For many reasons. It means that for those of us who are followers of Christ mission is about everything we do and the way we live our life.

It's why we wanna be a good neighbors. It's why we wanna pray for downtown Edinburgh as a place where people don't just have a devotional experience of an abstract God in a realm of angels and in hymns.

But to know that we are in a story in which our God is absolutely taking on all the implications of evil.

[14:12] This is what is meant by this first verse. When John writes, I saw new heaven and new earth coming towards Him. For the first is passed away. It is come under the judgment of God and the purification of God and resurrection of life is barreling towards us.

No more sea. The sea in John's revelation does not speak of a great body of water. He's not describing that our future will be a world without oceans and that marvelous sound.

We all love a big waves crashing. The sea in the revelation stands for evil and chaos. And what an affirmation. It means that everything through the book of revelation that has shown men and women living in rebellion to the one true living God who is worthy alone of our worship and our hearts, who alone is committed to our health and our joy and our filling the earth with His goodness.

He, God will not only judge evil, but eventually will eradicate all evil. That means a lot to a lot of you to have that hope.

My wife for the last two years in Nashville, Tennessee has been walking with women coming out of sexual slavery. The Mexican mafia owns human trafficking in Nashville, Tennessee.

[15 : 29] And it is hideous. It is repugnant. That says nothing about Mexico. It says everything about evil. What hope do we have that human trafficking does not get the last word?

What hope do we have that evil as we see it, not just in our world and culture, but at times in our own hearts, that it will be done away with? This bold affirmation, John sees every promise God has made coming towards this day.

This world that we ache for and we can ask ourselves, is it possible? Is it even worth risking hope? And the bold affirmation of scripture is absolutely because the Lamb has prevailed.

The Lamb has triumphed over all evil. Evil has an expiration date. John sees it. He smells it. He's very sensual in the way he describes through his book, what he sees coming.

It's not imaginary. It's not hallucinating. It's very, very actual. That's why the apostle Paul said, if these things have not actually happened, starting with the resurrection of Jesus, we have all people that are most to be pitied.

[16 : 40] But because Jesus has been raised from a real death, we have hope for not just our spirits to continue, but the world in which we live.

We must go on. I'd love to say so much more about each of these. But again, the world we intensely crave, what we deeply crave, John says by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it's coming towards us.

Well, what about the second category that maybe is a little bit more where we do most of our life? What of an affirmation, the love we desperately need, verse two?

How would verse two in this last vision connect us with the need we actually have, need that often gets hijacked by wrong ways of thinking we can find fulfillment?

With a second verse, John goes on, he says, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

[17 : 41] Well, as with the first verse, he's summarizing a lot of biblical story, a lot of biblical promise, a first creation world, the promise to the prophets of new heaven and new earth, restoration and renewal.

As with this second verse, he's summarizing a lot of glorious promise and outworking of God's commitment to be a God of mercy and grace. How are we to understand verse two with this picture of a bride appearing in John's vision?

Well, it's the culmination, it's the consummation of the commitment that God made, even when he first grabbed hold of a pagan moon worshiper in Genesis chapter 12 named Abram.

And I love the telling of the story of Abraham, Abram that became Abraham. And the Bible, the Bible doesn't record that there's just a bunch of seekers.

The Bible basically is telling a story of one seeker who happens to be a great finder. And our God, who has already committed in this story to be a great redeemer, grabs hold of a man named Abram.

[18 : 45] And he makes promises to Abram of land, seed and blessing. God won't take Abram to a land where a nation will be formed. And that nation will become the national womb of the one that we know as the Messiah.

But early into that conversation and commitment to be a generous God towards Abram, he also promises that through this nation, through this Messiah, all families on the face of the earth will be blessed.

And that promise of God having an extraordinarily huge family to love and to enjoy forever, emerges within this beautiful metaphor in the Bible of marriage.

You know, one of the main reasons why you'll never be completely fulfilled in any human marriage is because you're made for the ultimate spouse, Jesus. And it is a mystery and it is wondrous.

But when we see the Bible saying our deepest relational longings, the actual need that God has written into our being, it will find its fullest joy and satisfaction as we're a part of this bride who is made up of men and women from every single race, tribe, tongue, and people group.

[20 : 01] Here's how active God was in John's world. It seems like the church will be extinct even as John is suffering. God is raising from the dead men and women who are streaming into Rome

from the nations, just like he's doing right now.

Oh, so many stories I wish I could tell you guys. Let me tell you a couple of real hopeful ones in terms of this God being generous and loving you with the absolute love that you and I foolishly think can be found in a spouse, a friend, the perfect church, the perfect company, kids that will rise up and call us blessed.

Good luck with that one. Any relational assumption that what you really want can be found apart from intimacy with Jesus, it needs to fall under the weight of God's grace in this declaration.

And God is at work raising men and women to faith in Christ. I have an 80 year old aunt, I wish you could meet her, her name is Aunt Cynthia. She was the daughter of an American general and it felt like that growing up with this aunt in my life.

Everything is just like this. She went through a lot of suffering. I went and preached my father's funeral that made it to 92. I lived through that story of a father that no longer knew my face or name. [21 : 15] He went to heaven through the tragic story of Alzheimer's but at my father's funeral that I preached with great joy knowing he rested in Jesus, my aunt showed up and she was not the same aunt of an American general I remember.

Several months earlier, my aunt happened into a Lutheran church that was preaching the gospel and she was converted. She's 88 today, I was with her last week, planning her funeral for the five time because she said, Scotty, I may outlive you but I want the gospel to be presented in my funeral because I have finally found what I always wanted and never knew where it was.

Two summers ago, my wife and I were speaking in the Canadian Bible camp up in Hamilton, Canada, north of Ontario. I give an introductory talk, this woman comes, I simply share that a part of my wife's story, my story, was finding healing later in life in our marriage.

We both have stories of childhood sexual abuse and God's been very gracious and I was inviting those that week to come and let us chat. Well, a woman seeks me out that afternoon, the first day of the conference.

She says, Scotty, where's Darlene? I hear your story, I have a story like that too. We met this woman whose name is now Grace, that was not on her birth certificate. Here's what she said, here's my story.

[22 : 32] I can't tell you his name but I'm a daughter of an Iraqi Ayatollah. And my father, who is a man of means who really trained me to be a suicide bomber, wanted me to learn English.

So he hired a woman to teach me English. He didn't know that she was a Canadian missionary. She prayed for me before she taught me English. She prayed at the end of the lesson. And after you Americans, she wasn't mean pointing the finger, but she was honest.

After America bombed an orphanage I was running and all the children passed, my heart was so filled with hate. And yet I remembered those prayers and Jesus revealed himself to me.

And I now have found what I always wanted. A daughter of an Iraqi Ayatollah who now lives in Canada, immersed in the Word of God, the story of God praying for her own country.

You and I even have heard some of these stories recently that the conversion growth rate in Iran and Iraq right now is just outpacing what's going on in America.

[23 : 35] My brothers and sisters, as John sees a gathered bride, he remembers the story of God. We should be encouraged. And it's not that we outnumber anybody.

Please don't read the book of Revelation as though it's telling this story. I read the end of the book and we win. No, this isn't a book of triumphalism. It's I read the end of the book and the lamb triumphed even over me and you.

Hallelujah. We're part of this large story of redemption that frames the whole of history. This is what history is all about. God is committed to frame all of history in terms of his commitment to redeem his bride from every nation and make all things new.

We've got five minutes to bring this home. I will try not to talk any faster because I already know I've ramped it up. But look at this text. We not only see the world we intensely crave, we don't not only see the love we desperately need, we see the day for which we greatly ache.

Look at verses very briefly, verses three and four. Here's the day for which we greatly ache. And brothers and sisters from Scotland, America and the uttermost parts of the earth, we all ache.

[24 : 40] We all long. We all feel deeply no matter how we masquerade it, no matter how we foolishly try to medicate our pain. And it's answered here. And here's the day we want and John sees it and holds out the hope for us in this church.

Listen to how the way he describes it, the day for which we greatly ache. Verse three. And I just love the way he's so enthusiastic. He says, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them and they will be his people.

Actually the Greek is plural. They will be his peoples because God, the story of God is an inclusive story. God is into pan national salvation, every nation family.

It's what I love about the position you guys have in downtown Edinburgh. The nation's stream by you every single day. You're an outpost, you're an expression, you're a first fruit of this world that's barreling towards us and this day.

More about this day. Now, and now John's referencing the second coming of Jesus. Now the dwelling of God is with men. He will live with them. They will be his peoples and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[25 : 54] Now look at verse four. The first thing descriptive of our God when he finally sends back his son Jesus to finish the story. Look at this. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Now that's a profound idiom in the Greek. This is not speaking about your favorite grandmother or aunt that always has a convenient hanky to dab your tears on your cheek. I had one of those. Grandmother Ward, Granny Ward, Granny and Paw Paw Ward. Now this isn't about a grandmother wiping off your cheek tears. It's an odd idiom but the Greek actually says, and God will put his finger in your eye and wipe the tear out of your eye.

Now I know that's not delicate. God poking his finger in your eye. Here's what that means. And we need to pause on this one. The pain behind your tears will be redeemed.

This is the God who declares, I will put things right. Dear friends, heaven is not going to be so much finally getting all of your answers.

[26 : 59] It's going to be the resolution of everything that violated the beauty of Eden. Everything that fell the wonder of our God.

Those tears, that pain. That's run through in my own story, the death of a mom when I was 11 years old, killed in a car crash. My father went into such a depression.

He did not speak for her name for 40 years. Never saw my mother's body. I just shut down. Never just never went back to her grave until 40 years later.

Seven years later after my mom was killed in a car wreck, the only person in my life I gave my heart to in high school would risk getting close to her name was Debbie. She too was killed in a car wreck.

And I shut down. And I determined I will never get so close to someone as to risk the pain of love. Four years later, I married to my wife, Darlene. God honored the tears of a little guy who had deep loss, who even earlier than that, as I would discover in my mid 50s, had been sexually abused as an eight-year-old.

[28 : 06] And I'm here just to put that brief statement out there to some of you that think, where was God when this thing happened towards me? I'm not going to give you a time. I'm not going to give you a cliché or a biblical band-aid.

I am going to say, this is the God who promises to redeem the pain. And you long for that day. And so do I. And that's why we alive in union with this Father, Mercy, and God of all comfort, want to be a church for the city, want to be a church for the community, want to be those that don't fix anybody, but simply say, as God's grace and mercy is coming to me in my addiction, in my fear, in my rebellion, and the things that make no freaking sense to me.

He's the one that tolerates my pain. He's the one whose shoulders are broad enough, whose heart is big enough, who's going to sustain that and has paid the ultimate price for the fulfillment of the longings and the pain and the tears that we share.

Two more things, and I'll pray. And then there's some coffee and cookies. That's good stuff. He will wipe away 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.

My brothers and sisters, the world we intensely crave is promised and provided for us by Jesus. The love we desperately need, it's not going to be found in another affair.

[29 : 32] It's not going to be found in marrying seven people that represent the perfect spouse to you. It is going to be found in being in union with Jesus, the ultimate spouse. The day we absolutely greatly ache for, it's coming.

And that's why this text finishes with these two images. Look lastly, and I promise this is the last last. How does this great hope end up? A love, verse 5, a bold declaration.

He who was seated on the throne said, I am making all things new. Not I will make all things new. Right now, this resurrected Jesus is at work.

In your story, in your heart, in your world, in this community, in this church, I am making all things new. Not I'm making all new things.

Not replacement. But I am at work. Brothers and sisters, we have a living hope, a bold declaration. He goes on to say, write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.

[30 : 32] See, we don't need hype. We don't need spin. Right? There's enough spin, masters, masters in the world. We need truth.

And we have it. And that's why along with the bold declaration, we finish with this grand invitation. Look at the last verse of our morning. I love this.

Verse 6, he said to me, it is done. I am the author and the omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of living water.

My last question to you is this. What are you doing with your thirst? What have you done historically with your thirst? I abused so much alcohol as a senior in high school, trying to numb the pain.

Being so deeply insecure, being an introvert in an extroverted world, and it was never enough. I have acted out destructively.

[31 : 32] In 48 years of marriage, assumed that my wife would be enough, that if she loved me well enough, it would be enough. I've got two marvelous children and three grandsons, Finn, Otis, and Otto. They're not enough.

As Blaise Pascal said years, years and years ago, French mathematician and physicist, there is a Jesus-shaped void inside of us that only fits Jesus.

Are you thirsty today? Will you come? Non-believer, come for the first time to the one who loves you, has paid the supreme price for your redemption.

Jesus did not come into this world primarily to be your model to follow, but your substitute to trust. He fulfilled the law of God for you. He's not your second chance. He's the second atom.

He obeyed God in your place. And he took the judgment upon the cross, exhausting the judgment and the separation we deserve. If you've never believed that, why not today?

[32 : 29] If you have believed it, where has your heart drifted in recent seasons, like me? In between resurrection, return of Jesus, we leak grace. We need grace all the time.

And I'm just going to close with a prayer now, inviting believer, non-believer alike. Here's the good news. If you're thirsty, come. Without cost, it's been completely paid for.

Hallelujah would have saved your, hallelujah would have salvation. Let me pray. Father, thank you for a beautiful morning in downtown Edinburgh. Thank you for giving me the gift of this weekend, Lord.

You know how much I needed yesterday and today. You know that nobody needs this story, this grace, this hope, this encouragement more than me. And I thank you, Lord, that you're not a God that exaggerates or lies.

And I thank you that you have secured the day, you have secured the new world, creation world, that we are loved by you, Father, and Jesus beyond all imagining.

[33 : 30] I pray right now for those that have never received, never have risked drinking the free gift of eternal life. Lord, buy your spirit. Within their hearts create a knowledge of need and create, Lord, the faith just to receive, not to promise, but to receive.

And Lord, for believers in this room, through different seasons of life, Lord, just marriage, life, finance, transition, Lord, just the hard diagnosis, Lord, will make this gospel not only true, but real and beautiful in this day and we acknowledge our thirst and come to you, O our generous God, in Jesus' name we pray, with great thanksgiving.

Amen, amen. God be praised.