

No More Sea

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 August 2009

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Before turning to, I would like if you will turn with me to three words. Well, it's not quite three words but I'm making it three words. In Revelation chapter 21, the first verse which can introduce the whole theme, 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. So the three words I'm going to use are no more sea.

As the first of the seven no mores, and if you see later on in verse 4, there's some no mores and then there's some more no mores in Revelation 22.

We're going to look at each of these over the next number of weeks. Where is God today? Is it all just a delusion being Christian?

The church is so small, it can't possibly be genuine. I thought it was supposed to be a victorious life, the Christian life. What about Jesus second coming? It's hundreds of years since it was announced and there's no sign of it.

It can't possibly be true that Jesus is coming back. How is it that we are persecuted as Christians and people are so aggressive towards the Christian faith?

[1 : 2 8] All we seek to do is we're ordinary people who follow Jesus Christ and who seek to serve Him. I wonder if these are some questions that you ask, you've asked, or you hear being asked by your fellow Christians.

I'm sure they are. I've certainly asked them. Well these were the kind of questions that were being asked undoubtedly by the small band of Christians to whom this revelation was given by John.

This is a real message from God to a real people who asked real questions and who were persecuted for their faith and were struggling in their faith.

We're written to a group of seven churches in Asia, probably around just under 100 years after Jesus, under the Emperor's commission.

John who wrote, who was given the revelation, was exiled on an island, the island of Patmos. So he knew and understood all these kind of questions as well.

[2 : 4 9] And God gave John on a Sunday morning this revelation. And it was given to John to give to the seven churches for their encouragement, a small band of believers, for their challenge to help them in their faith to stand firm when it was difficult to be a Christian.

And I don't think it's any easier today. Let's forget the Christian heritage. Let's forget the Christian past. Let's stop mourning for the loss of a Christian nation and recognise and know and see that we are living in equally difficult days to be a Christian when it's a struggle, when we're going against the tide and when we might ask lots of questions about the truth and the gospel and where Jesus is and what his message is for us.

But this is not only a living and vibrant message for these seven churches, but as it comes from God and is anointed by God's Spirit, is a message that still is abiding relevance for ourselves.

And I hope that over the next few weeks we'll see that. I hope you'll not think this is kind of pie in the sky till we die, kind of theology, when we're just escapist and looking towards heaven and forgetting, sadly, sorry, the stake in the plate while we wait.

But we have that reality and we have that truth that there's a gospel here now. But I want us to look at Revelation or introduce this theme today by reminding us a little bit of this Revelation because the revelations are really difficult book. It's a very difficult book of the Bible.

[4 : 27] And I read the whole chapter, although we only looked at three words, because it gives us a flavour of what Revelation is like. And it is quite difficult. And it's difficult language.

And it's difficult imagery and it's difficult ideas, some of the earlier chapters particularly, after the letters to the seven churches. But Revelation is both prophetic and apocalyptic.

That's just what Revelation means, apocalyptic. It's the same word in English. That means that it points forward, where God has generally in the book, pointing forward to future events.

And he does so mainly using images and pictures. There's a certain genre of literature in the Bible called apocalyptic literature.

It wasn't just in the Bible, it was wider than just the Bible. It was kind of a text that was full of images and full of pictures.

[5 : 30] You see it in parts of Daniel and you see it in a lot of Ezekiel, where God speaks a message and speaks to the people, but uses amazing pictures, amazing imagery that is speaking to us about literal truth, but using images and pictures for us.

It shouldn't be difficult, we talk about this being a very visual age, and you shouldn't preach sermons and you shouldn't read from the Bible. It should all be very visual and should all be about stories, which I've got a lot of sympathy for that as well.

But the young people here today shouldn't have, in the sense, have any problem with Revelation, because you live in an age of digital imagery anyway. And a lot of the films that people see are full of the most outrageous imaginations and imagery that is brought to life in fantastic ways.

And so, in a sense, that's really what Revelation is, bringing the digital age right back into the New Testament. It's God using pictures and images to tell us different truth.

So it's mainly vision. There's also a word where God speaks directly and inverted commas, and that's very clear. You know, you think particularly of the letters to the seven churches at the beginning, and some of the other quotes that are given are clear, teaching.

[6 : 53] But a lot of it is vision. Some of it is easy, some of it is difficult, and I wouldn't pretend to understand a lot of the distinctive imagery of Revelation.

But can I say that there's a central message that comes through? Well, it's kind of three pronged, but it is one central message.

And the central message of this revelation to the churches is, first of all, that Christ is key to all of human destiny.

Your destiny? And mine. You may not think that. You may think Christ is a complete irrelevance. But God says in this book that Christ is key to human destiny.

If you look back at Revelation 5, we'll flick through a couple of verses just before we move on. In Revelation 5 and verse 6, we have this picture. Well, first of all, we have the letter to the seven churches.

[7 : 51] Then we go into the imagery, okay? So we go into the pictures, we go into the digital mastery of revelation, and we have the throne in heaven. So at the very centre of this picture of the future, it begins with the throne in heaven.

So God, in other words, is at the very centre of humanity and of the future from Christ's first coming to second coming. Then we're in Revelation 5, verse 6.

Then I saw a lamb in an image looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne. And that's just a picture of Jesus Christ, who's the lamb of God, you know, that other biblical image, who is at the centre of the throne, as if slain.

You know, the lamb who's slain before the foundation of the world. It shows before the foundation of the world to be the saviour of God's people. It's a picture of the crucified saviour who's at the centre of the throne.

And this lamb is worthy to open, we're told, the seven seals. And these seven seals are basically just human destiny being unfolded. And he alone is worthy to unpack them, as it were.

[9 : 08] And the message is that Jesus Christ is at the centre of all human destiny. And what we are beginning to have is a big picture, okay?

We live in a day, I think, which is very microscopic, in many words. It's a strange world we live in, because the Internet has made the whole world our playground.

And we can be in touch with a thousand different people all over the world. But in a sense, our world has become very microscopic. It's become very me, my kind of world, and my friends, and my centre, and everything that is about me, so that, you know, we become the centre of this big universe.

But Revelation speaks about a big picture, and about a bigger sweep that is being brought to bear, so that Jesus Christ is the centre of every human destiny.

And then, I suppose, from chapter, going back to chapter 4, where we have the throne of heaven being central, that God is sovereign over all things.

[10 : 15] And this Revelation, it speaks about lots of different events, I think, throughout history. It speaks about, in other words, it's kind of like a curtain that's drawn back, and it gives us behind the scenes, Luke.

And it's saying to us, as it was saying to the first churches in Asia, things are not as they seem. I know it doesn't look like Christianity is victorious.

Everyone's telling us this is a post-Christian generation. But God's saying, Luke, things are not as they seem. There's a spiritual dimension which I'm revealing here, which is unseen, which reveals my sovereignty.

So Jesus Christ, the cross, is absolutely central to the whole of human destiny, your destiny and mine. It's the central pivotal of it. If you had a drawing pen, and you were asked by someone, what is the centre of human history?

What's the most central pivotal time, place, person, you would point it on the hill of Calvary. For all of humanity, Christ is central.

[11 : 27] God is sovereign. But also the message is that Christians, a small beleaguered group of believers in Asia, have a great future, a great secured future.

And John and the Holy Spirit through him is saying, live that Christian future now, start that Christian future now, and look forward to an even greater future in heaven.

So I'm going to focus on heaven. I've given a little bit of introduction today. I won't be doing that every week into the book of Revelation. A very, very brief one. But we're going to be looking at heaven in August.

I don't for a moment want it to be escapism, which it has been in the past for some Christians who have said, well, I'll just have to live out my Christian life here and grit my teeth.

And I don't care about anyone else around me because I'm going to heaven. I don't mean it to be that kind of hopeless escapism. I'm not meaning it to be that. And I want to dispel the whole idea of heaven as somewhere that's whitewashed with brilliant white emulsion that is clouds and harp and boring and unreal, because the Bible doesn't give that picture of heaven.

[12 : 42] And I don't even want to call it heaven in some ways. I want to call it the new heavens and the new earth, which the Bible speaks much more about with regard to the future. A radical transformation, a radical change.

I want you to be, as I want to be inspired by what the revelation is saying to us, I want us to question our own attitudes and perspectives as Christians, and I want us to be able to stand firm in the faith.

And if you're not a Christian, I want you to be challenged to see that this isn't kind of, fluffy, wishful thinking theology, but this is the message that is given by the living God, who knows the end from the beginning, and it's given for us to remind us of who he is, his greatness, his glory.

And what a great thing it is to be a Christian and to be engulfed by his shadow, and he loves us. So then, I'm going to look at no more sea, no longer NEC.

What on earth is that about? What on earth is that about? And I want, first of all, a couple of things, first of all, to look at what it would have meant for the original people who would have read this, because sometimes it gives us much more of an insight into what God was saying.

[13 : 59] No more sea. I know some fishermen who'd be most horrified to think that in heaven there's no more sea, they love the sea, and people who live by the sea say, well, no more sea in heaven, that's terrible.

I want them to be sea in heaven, because I love the sea. So let's unpack a little bit of what it means. A couple of things. First of all, we need to remember that it's a book, it's an apocalyptic literature, which means that it's full of images and full of pictures.

And this is one of the images, this is one of the pictures. It's using an idea to get across a spiritual truth, okay? But I think even more than that, when it says there's no longer any sea, John, or the Holy Spirit who's spoken to John, is saying that there will be a massive change in the future.

There will be a massive change. Now, I don't know how much John or the original readers knew about the volume of sea that there was in the world. But as we look down from space, we see planet Earth.

70% of planet Earth is covered by sea, or sorry, is covered by water, of which 97% is sea, is ocean.

[15 : 13] So whatever else is being said, we've been reminded that if there's to be no more sea, whatever exactly that means, God is introducing the fact that in the last day when the New Heavens and the New Earth are revealed, or transferred, created for us, it will be a massive change, cataclysmic change, and Revelation speaks all about that.

There will be a cataclysmic change. So there's some really interesting stuff about the water, about sea, in the Bible. Because John is definitely speaking symbolically. We know that because he does talk about, he doesn't say there's no more water in heaven to use images.

There's the river of life, flows from the throne, there's the sea of glass. There's different references to water, not even to sea, but he says there's no more sea in a specific way that would have been understood by those who read it.

You see, biblically, from the Old Testament through to the New Testament, the sea had very negative connotations for most people, particularly for the Jew.

There was a real negative idea that lay behind the idea of the oceans, of the seas. And they would have understood this, and they would have understood that heaven would have to be a place where there wasn't any sea, if it was to be a place of perfection.

[16 : 40] What did the sea symbolise in the Bible? What does it very often symbolise? Well, it symbolises chaos. In Isaiah 57, I'm just going to look at one or two references.

In Isaiah 57 and verse 20, we're told, but the wicked are like the tossing sea which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

There's this whole image of this piece of chaos, of instability. The sea, the oceans being subject to constant change. If you've ever stood on a cliffside, the seas are just swelling and they're moving, and they're moving with the tides they're coming in and they're out, they're subject to the winds, and there's a chaoticness about them.

If you've sailed on boats or in sailing craft or in kayaks, you'll understand that. Fundamentals, instability and chaotic nature of the sea.

And when you come back to land, the land is very stable and very secure, unlike the sea. It's sometimes linked with the kind of rumbling chaos that was in the universe before God began to create and bring stability and order and reason to the world.

[18 : 02] So there's a chaotic nature of sea, but there's also very clearly in the Bible, sea is associated with the abyss or with the deep, with a place of judgment, with a place of darkness.

You know, it goes right back against to Noah and the flood where that became a symbol of judgment, God's judgment on people. Joan had been thrown out of the boat as a symbol, a sign, as it were, of the judgment even of the people on the boat to God's displeasure with him.

And then there's some very interesting, couple of really interesting images or pictures in the New Testament. There's Luke's Gospel where Jesus heals the demoniac and he puts the demons into the pigs, or no, sorry, that's wrong, where the demons ask for permission to go into the pigs and Jesus allows them so to do.

And when they do, the pigs run wild over the cliff edge into the sea. And remember their plea to Jesus was, please don't send us into the abyss.

And yet, whether they had no control over the pigs or not, we don't know, but they ended up, as it were, under God's judgment being cast into the sea. And there's also another really interesting verse in Luke.

[19 : 23] I think it's 1124 which talks about demons, I mean taken out of a man. And wandering around the waterless places of the earth, looking for rest. And it's as if they want to avoid at all costs being thrown into the deep, thrown into the abyss.

And Daniel speaks about the beast, you know, in his apocalyptic literature, the beast is coming out from the sea, beasts of judgment and evilness that go with it.

So it's associated with judgment and darkness. It's also, of course, for them and for us, associated with bitterness. You thirsty? You ever gone down to Portobello Beach and tried to drink the water?

But you wouldn't anyway, even if it was fresh water. But you wouldn't drink sea water because it doesn't slake your thirst. It is dissatisfying at that level. It is bitter.

But it also spoke of separation, as it does for us. The sea separates, it divides continent from continent, island from island, person from person. That would have been keenly known and felt by John, the writer of Reir, the one tomb revelation was given as he was exiled on the island of Patmos.

[20 : 38] He was known all about separation and subsuming all these kind of images and covering them all as fear. The sea was associated with fear.

You know, something that was more powerful than we were. Something that is unruly, unpredictable, scary. And we get that sometimes in news headlines just now.

People talk about global warming and the sea levels rising and how that is a cause of fear and consternation and concern where islands and peoples and cities will be submerged under a rising sea level.

So there are all kinds of images that lie behind the fact that there is no more sea in heaven. And the people would have understood that when they were being given this revelation.

So that is a little bit of how it would have been a comforting, hopeful word for the seven churches in Asia. No more judgment, no more darkness, no more separation, no more fear, no more unpredictability.

[21 : 45] Even though their lives seem to be so chaotic as a persecuted church. But now the message still goes out to us today. No more sea. How do we apply that to the 21st century Christian?

Or how do we apply it to the 21st century truth for ourselves? That in heaven we look forward to a fact that there is this image of being no longer any sea. What is the truth that lies behind that for us?

Well we must look at it through the prism of Jesus Christ and Calvary. The lamb that is slain in the centre of the throne.

All of the Bible through Calvary. We must look at the Ten Commandments we shall look at tonight through Calvary. We must look at every truth, every aspect, every prohibition, every command through the eyes of Calvary and through the eyes of the God so loving the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

And so we see and recognise that God can say that in this new heavens and new earth there is no more sea and what it symbolises because Christ walked into the eye of the storm at Calvary.

[22 : 54] That is what He did. He and Calvary is the key to our hope of eternal life because the cross is at the very middle of humanity and at the very middle of this universe and at the very middle of our need.

Because the crosses where Jesus Christ faced up to all that sea in the Bible symbolises separation, death, judgement, sin, fear and all that goes with it and dealt with it on the cross.

And that is really a big picture isn't it? You say well that is a big spiritual picture. It is a massive one and I am sure that is true but it is a big picture with intimate implications isn't it?

Because we sung at the beginning didn't we about the Creator God who heals the broken heart. So we have these big universal spiritual truths about evil being defeated and death being destroyed on the cross but it has intimate implications to you and me who face fear and separation and death and rejection by God unless we deal with our sins before Him.

And He offers to be our saviour. It is ever relevant for us because He is the saviour who doesn't break the bruised reed and who doesn't snuff out the smoldering candle.

[24 : 17] So we always have in Revelation big picture, big sweeping, massive truth but we find it right beside intimate reality of what it means for us in our lives.

Calvary, the lamb that is slain in the centre of the throne has implications not just for the world but for you and for me for our day to day living.

And as Christians the cross should be central to our day to day living because it is the only perspective that helps us to live life to the full and to live life as He intended and to know the perspective that He gives.

So Christ in Calvary is where we find the spiritual journey into the eye of the storm on our behalf. It deals with our death, it deals with our brokenness, it deals with our failure, it deals with our doubt, it deals with our dissatisfaction, it deals with our ugliness.

And I mean internal ugliness which has an external implication for us, the eye of the storm. And for the Christian in Revelation and for the Christian now, the reality of no more see reminds us not only of what Christ has done but for us now as Christians that the storm is weathered.

[25 : 45] Christ went into the eye of the storm so that in the storms of life that we face we can weather them. Nobody has ever said that Christianity is going to be a cakewalk.

Nobody said that come to Christ in your life will be absolutely problem free and easy and perfect. Certainly no one in the Bible has said that. We don't believe in a health, wealth and prosperity gospel.

But we believe that in the storms of life Christ is with us and they can only be weathered ultimately in relationship with Christ.

Think of the people to whom this book was written, the struggles they faced, the difficulties they had. It's no different for us today, we're still in a battle, our faith will be tested.

We have remaining sin that we struggle against in our hearts, we struggle with doubt and with fear and with unbelief. But this revelation has been given to remind us that we can weather the storm and we can keep on going as Christians.

[26 : 55] And we have the strength through Christ to persevere and to be victorious and to live even in difficulties for His glory. Because we're no longer separated from His love, we know peace in our hearts.

It isn't just a random chaos that our lives are experiencing and God will give us His peace and His strength and His love day to day.

And I want us to take Christ into every day of our lives. Now you will face tomorrow more, if you're not already facing Him today, you'll face tomorrow morning difficult struggles as a Christian.

Well you know, I do, I'm sure you will also. What are we going to do with Him? Are we going to be embittered towards God? Are we going to throw it away and say, well, where's this Christ who's supposed to return? I haven't seen Him.

He's not here, nobody believes anymore. What are we going to do? Are we going to honour Him and glorify Him by a simple, childlike faith and walk through the difficulties and share what has transformed our lives with the people who we love who don't know Him?

[28 : 10] I was thinking that this morning, just as I was looking over the sermon thinking, do I really believe the Gospel? That it's transformed my life and it speaks about this future of a new heavens and the earth.

If I'm unwilling to share it with the people who I love who don't know Christ. Or is it just, well, this is just what I do with my life, this is my lifestyle choice, you do what you want, it's okay.

Or is it so, is Christ at the centre of the throne of the universe? Is God sovereign over all things? Or is He just the wee sovereign God over this free church, over this building so that when we get out of here, well, it doesn't really matter what we do or what we believe or what we think.

And everyone can live their own lives and, you know, be as it may, case a ra, ra, do whatever you want. Is that the kind of faith that we have today?

It's very easy for us to have that kind of insular faith that is fine and strong within the building or within the Christian community.

[29 : 16] But it doesn't have a message for our beloved, dear friends who don't know Him. So it helps us keep, and lastly, and very briefly, and it's a bit bizarre really just to end up speaking about heaven at the very close of the sermon.

But the future is, of course, as well, where it says no more seed, that for the believer this storm has changed into a calm in heaven. The storms weather just now. We are victorious. We can't give up our Christian faith in our heritage, but because this great future is a new heavens and a new earth where the storm has changed into a calm.

No more seed. It means what? Great peace in a new heavens and a new earth. You know, people who are not Christians, people who are not believers have this great desire for peace. How is it going to come?

Peace and reconciliation and harmony. We all want that. We all want love. We all want life to the full. Christ says it's through trust and belief in what He is going to do. The seed, before the throne, it says in Revelation 4, will be like glass.

The picture is of peace, no longer chaos. No more negative changes as the old preacher's spurgeon would say to wreck our hopes and drown our joys.

[30 : 36] None of that. Most of us are scared of what tomorrow might bring because we know changes will come and changes that are negative. Not speaking about positive changes, but there are a lot of changes that are negative and that drown our joys and swamp our hopes.

There will be none of that in this place where there is no more seed. Also a place where there is no more judgment and no more punishment for sin. It will have gone. It will have been dealt with. The great redemptive work of Christ will be sealed.

Those who haven't fallen in with Christ will not be part of that. Is that not awful? Is it not terrifying? Whereas Christ says now is the time. Now is where we invite and now is where we live for and now is where we pray for all of our friends who are not Christians to come into know that peace and that reconciliation, which He says is absolutely crucial for us.

It will be a satisfying place. No longer drinking and not having our thirst slaked by terrible bitter salt water. But it will be a place, heaven, of great satisfaction. Of great, where our bodies will be so transformed that heaven will meet all our needs and our needs will be met and all that has to be offered there. A place of great satisfaction, a place of no separation.

Separation is a terrible thing in this world. A genuine separation from people we love. Terrible. And it's one of the most horrible things about a funeral or about death of a loved one. Separation. Really bad thing.

[32 : 20] And Christ says on that day, no more separation was symbolised by no more sea. No more separation from those that are God's people, from the community of believers, but above all from that intimate and close fellowship with Jesus Christ. And no more fear.

Fear drives so much of what we are and what we do. Fear of failure, fear of not being loved, fear of the future, fear of not being accepted, whatever else it is.

No more fear. Can you imagine a place of no more fear? The Bible says it's a place of perfect love. Perfect love casts out fear. And therefore we have this great picture, tangible, real, absolutely relevant picture of the future that God is promising to those who trust in Him.

Beyond this life, but particularly beyond the duration of this world, where there will be a massive and cataclysmic change and the introduction of the new heavens and the new earth will be made.

Are we part of that? And are we living our lives in the hope and in the inspiration that it gives us and in the humble trust that enables us to live lives of gentleness and respect, where we share that with those who have no ultimate future and can't know peace and satisfaction and life to the full in a spiritual sense.

[33 : 50] I mean, let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word, for the hope of heaven and for the imagery there of no more sea.

And we don't know exactly what it will be like, but Lord, we look forward to the truths that are expressed in the image and the hopes and the future that will be free from so much that wrecks our joy and hope in this life.

We thank You that it's not wishful thinking, that it's not just meaningless rhetoric from a religious fraternity who were seeking to somehow brainwash its people into persevering, but it comes from the resurrected Savior, the living Savior, the Savior for whom all of these truths are given authority from His victory on the cross.

May we not distance the cross from the centre of our lives and may we not easily succumb to the rhetoric of a postmodern and post-Christian generation which mocks and derides such faith.

But may we take this faith and vibrantly live it in a transformational way in our day-to-day lives, and may this church reflect a living and real faith in a living and real Savior.

[35 : 36] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.