Tomorrowland – Part Two

# Our Future

# (Revelation 21:1-7)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re in the second week of our series called “Tomorrowland” as we look at facing a future without fear. Now, last week if you missed it, we looked at first Thessalonians chapter 4 and saw the return of Christ, the rapture of the Church, the resurrection of the dead, and the reunion of Christians with God in heaven. And so, today we’re going to look at a crucial moment in our future, because no matter whether Jesus returns in your lifetime or not, the end will come and each one of us will have to stand before God. Now, I don’t know about you, but I find that incredibly exciting, even though I must admit that it’s with a bit of trembling. You see, the Bible tells us, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:7). And so, it’s the promise of being in the presence of God, standing before God, that transforms us and has such a powerful effect on how we live our lives here on earth.

This is actually what we’re created for, this is what we’ve been waiting for, and this is what Jesus promised when he said,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8).

And so, there’s actually no substitute, nothing in the world that can satisfy the believer’s desire to see God, to be in his presence, and to enjoy him forever. And yet what’s interesting is that we live in a society of instant gratification, material comfort, and incredible blessings, all of which tend to create a general lack of interest in heaven. And as believers we must admit that we’re not excluded from this subtle drift away from waiting, seeking, and longing for the glory of heaven because we too often find ourselves more concerned with storing up treasure on earth than we do in heaven. We’re more concerned with right now, with pleasing ourselves, our own future on earth, our investments and retirement packages, than we are with preparing for our future in heaven. And so, today we don’t talk much about heaven because we’re really not that interested; and yet the Bible advises us time and time again to set our affections on things above and not things of the earth. And the reason why is because we don’t want to arouse the Lord’s jealousy (1 Corinthians 10:22). James said it this way,

“Friendship with the world is hatred toward God” (James 4:4).

You may remember, that when God gave his people the 10 Commandments he warned them about idols. You know, an idol is anything that we would pray to, make a priority, or set our affections on before God, and so he said, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5).

The apostle Paul refers to this in his second letter to the church in Corinth. He was fearful that they might be deceived just as Eve was by the serpent, believing in a different Jesus, a different kind of Spirit, a different gospel than the one he preached, and that somehow their pure and undivided devotion to Christ would be corrupted. And so, he says, “I’m jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself.” And now why would he say that? Well, the apostle tells us. He says, because “I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, and that is Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

You see, we’re to have one hope, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6), and so we’re to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. We’re to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. And that’s why the Bible says,

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:1-2).

And so, everything connected to our future, everything that is birthed in our spiritual life, finds its place in the glory of heaven. You see, in heaven, our Father is there, our Savior is there, our Comforter, the Holy Spirit’s there, and our fellow believers are there. Not only that, but the Bible tells us that our name is there, our life is there, our inheritance is there, our home is there, our citizenship is there, our reward is there, our treasure is there, and so everything of lasting value, everything that’s close to our hearts as believers is there in heaven.

That’s why as we consider Tomorrowland, as we look to our future, the Bible says,

“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2).

Yet many of us find ourselves clinging to this life, desperately holding on to it as if it’s all we’ve got. But the Bible says in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse one, “The day of death is better than the day of birth”. The apostle Paul said in Philippians chapter 1, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (1:21). And the reason why is because God’s there. And so, today as we consider our future, who or what should we desire but God? You know, just to think that one day we shall see him as he is, there won’t be any veil, no more mystery, but the complete revelation of God. Our future is filled with the anticipation of the presence of God in heaven and it’s that expectation that changes everything in our lives today and tomorrow because the best is yet to come.

However, according to our culture the future is dismal at best; whether it’s predictions of nuclear holocaust, global warming, or whatever kind of end times scenario, every day you can uncover some kind of ominous prediction that’s been made about the future of the human race. You may remember what it was like as we approached the year 2000. Some of you may even remember reading George Orwell’s classic novel “1984”, but time and time again, books, movies, and TV shows predict panic in the streets, financial collapse, the war of all wars and so on, but the doomsday prophets have all been wrong. And so, you can be pretty sure whether you’re hearing warnings about 1984, 2000, 2012, or whenever the next great date is, more than likely there’s nothing to it. As a matter of fact, Jesus said it this way,

“No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself” (Matthew 24:36, NLT).

And so, how are we to face what feels like an unknowable future regarding the days ahead? Well, we’re going to look to the Word of God, and today we’re looking at Revelation chapter 21, a book that some people say is scary, which I really don’t understand, because what’s so scary about happy endings? What’s so scary about knowing that everything will work out for our good. What’s so scary about knowing that we’ll live forever in an amazing city filled with loving people, beautiful music, and where the streets are paved with gold? You know, it sounds like good news to me, and so we’re talking about our future, Tomorrowland.

Now last week we saw that Christ would return, the dead in Christ will rise first, and immediately following that the Christians would be raptured. We who believe will be caught up into the air, rescued, and snatched away from any harm. And then the Bible tells us, next comes the judgment. Hebrews chapter nine says,

“Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Now, maybe you’re new to Christianity and your like, “Well, I didn’t sign up for that.” But let me assure you it’s not what it sounds like. You see, if you’re a believer and you’ve trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, the Bible tells us, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). There is no condemnation because the judgment of our sins fell upon Jesus Christ, our offenses were nailed to his cross, and so we’re made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ. He’s our “Get out of jail free card” and so what’s this judgment?

Well, here’s what I want you to understand, although your good deeds don’t qualify you for heaven, what you do on earth will determine how you’re rewarded in heaven. And so, there’s a judgment of believers after the rapture, after we’re caught up to heaven, and the Bible tells us in second Corinthians chapter 5,

“We (believers) must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

And so, this is a judgment for Christians only, it’s not a judgment of salvation or damnation, because as a believer that judgment already fell upon Jesus Christ. This is a judgment, a determination of your rewards. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). This is the awards ceremony for those who would win the race. That’s why the Bible says, “Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24), because this is where your Heavenly Father’s going to reward you for your faithfulness on earth. Jesus said it this way in Matthew chapter 25,

“Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

And as Jesus welcomes you and embraces you with those nail scarred hands I believe it will be tremendously humbling. As we see him with our eyes, as our faith becomes sight, we’ll recognize that we don’t deserve anything, that he deserves it all, and it’ll lead us to worship him knowing that he’s the one who’s worthy of all the honor and glory. But that time is not yet, and God is patient not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

And so, next on the prophetic calendar comes what’s known as the Tribulation, a seven-year period in which the whole world’s going to be shaken, and the second three and a half years will be far worse than the first. A demonic ruler known as the antichrist will rise up during this time, there will be a great battle between the wicked unbelieving and God, but God wins and Satan is thrown into the bottomless pit where he’s bound for 1000 years. During this thousand-year period, Christ returns with us, with his church, to rule and reign in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of this thousand-year reign of Christ comes what’s called the second resurrection, this is for non-Christians, and now they’ll be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment before God establishes the New Heaven and the New Earth. Now I know that was quite a bit of introduction, because we’ve traversed many chapters of Scripture to get here, but I wanted to stay on task and let you know that number one, God’s going to make everything new.

## 1. Make Everything New

Now as I said earlier, when we talk about heaven, we’re talking about something that has great implications for how we live our lives today. And so, as we come to Revelation chapter 21 and the subject of heaven, I pray that it would rekindle your passion for God, because this passage gives us a glimpse of the believer’s future. This is what’s going to take place after the final judgment and the apostle John now an old man banished to the island of Patmos has this vision. He tells us in verse one,

“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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:1-3).

And so, here God is establishing something brand-new. He gives us through John, a vision of the new heaven and new earth, one without the curse of sin, and I imagine it’s going to be just like in the beginning, in the garden of Eden. You know, when Adam and Eve walked with God, when they had that uninterrupted fellowship in paradise, before they fell to temptation and brought the curse of sin on creation. And so, I imagine that this new creation, this the new heaven and new earth, will be indescribably better than your favorite place, your best memory or greatest moment on earth. You can be assured of that because the Bible tells us,

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This is going to be so awesome, it’s what Christ desires for his church, and so he’s doing something new. He’s creating new life, building better relationships, and giving us a new future. God’s here and he’s making everything new. That’s what John heard in verse five,

“He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5).

And so, this is the power of God, he’s restoring that which has been damaged. He’s beginning today, but at this time he’s giving you a new hope, a new life, a new heart, and a new future. And then, the second thing I want you to see is that when God makes everything new, he does it in such a way that he’ll quench your deepest thirst.

## 2. Quench Your Deepest Thirst

God promises us a life of deep and lasting satisfaction. It’s a promise that God has made again and again throughout Scripture saying, “Come, all of you who are thirsty, come to the waters…” (Isaiah 55:1). It’s a promise Jesus made when he spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria. He said,

“Everyone who drinks this water…” Referring to natural water… "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).

In another place, it says that when Jesus was at a festival, he stood up and proclaimed,

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:37-38).

How many of you know what it’s like to be thirsty? I mean really thirsty. Do you remember what that first taste the water was like? It’s pretty incredible isn’t it? Well, that’s how the Bible describes the life that God promises his people. You can anticipate it, you can hope for it, because God wants you to expect good things from his gracious hand. In Revelation chapter 21, we read in verse four,

“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." 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." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life” (Revelation 21:4-6).

Those of you that are thirsty and hurting, you need to know that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no more pain, no more suffering. And so, if you’ve watched someone you love suffering physically, or maybe you have headaches, struggle with sickness, or experienced divorce and loneliness, there will be no mourning, crying, or pain. It’s done away with and you’ll never ever suffer again. You see, God is out to create something new in your life, something that satisfies you to the deepest part of your soul, and here’s the third thing I want you to see. God’s promise means that he’ll make everything that you had to experience, everything that you had to go through, he will make it all worthwhile.

## 3. Make It All Worthwhile

That’s why it always pays to persevere, because God’s going to make it all worthwhile. In this life you may lose some battles, but the only way to win is to stay in the game. It’s easy to quit when things get tough, but we need to persevere, to press on, and to overcome, because God’s going to make it all worthwhile. Verse seven tells us,

“He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Revelation 21:7).

On that day when our immortal bodies are clothed in righteousness, when we’re walking with God, having fellowship with him, he’s going to be satisfied, because his plan will be complete. This was his plan before the creation of the world. He’s always intended to restore all things to himself. And so, it begins the moment you call upon Christ, it’s realized as you stand before the one who was crowned with thorns, and he welcomes you into the heaven that he went to prepare for you.

The problem is that there’s a common misconception today. Many people believe that when you die you go to heaven, that heaven is the default destination, and so when someone passes away it’s often said, “They’re in a better place now.” And I understand that it helps us feel better when someone we love departs from this earth, but we need to know that hell is the default destination. Jesus couldn’t have said it any clearer than he did in Matthew chapter 7. He said,

“Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus said, struggle, wrestle, and squeeze your way in through the narrow gate, don’t take the wide gate, don’t go with the crowd, don’t take the broad road, take the narrow road that leads to life. You see, the tragedy is that so many people want to believe that heaven is the default destination but it’s not. The default destination is hell and that’s why there’s a second judgment known as the Great White Throne Judgment. This is the judgment for those who go through the wide gate, those who follow the broad road, and Jesus said that many enter through it. This is important to understand, because if anyone’s sins aren’t covered by Christ, if they haven’t called upon Jesus’ name, they’re going to be judged by what they’ve done and not by the work of Jesus. And so, the Bible says if their name isn’t found in the Book of Life, the default destination is the Lake of Fire with Satan and the demons.

Now some of you are probably thinking that that’s not fair. You know, God sending people to hell, but let me assure you that God is 100% fair. For example, maybe you’ve known someone who did something terrible to someone else and there weren’t any consequences for what they did. You know, maybe they sexually or physically abused somebody, maybe they destroyed someone’s family, their livelihood, or their future, and as you looked on you realized, “That’s not fair, they should have to pay for that.” Well that’s exactly what happens at the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation chapter 20, verse 11 and following. God renders his judgment for all the sin, for all of history and he says, “This is the payment for the sins that aren’t covered by my Son Jesus Christ. Because you chose not to believe in my Son, because you didn’t trust him, you don’t have his righteousness and therefore you’re guilty and here’s the punishment for sin.” And that punishment for sin has always been death and that’s why when Jesus took our sin, he died our death, and so, not only is that fair, but that’s what we call justice.

You see, what’s not fair is that the only reason why Christians are in heaven is because Jesus took the punishment for our sins upon himself. He was innocent and we’re guilty. We deserve to die and he doesn’t. It’s not fair, but that’s what gets me so excited.

It’s not fair that he was innocent and suffered on my behalf. It’s not fair that even though I’m guilty I’m clothed in his righteousness. It’s not fair that his grace covered my sins, but that’s why it’s called good news. I haven’t been treated as my sins deserve, but God is that good, and therefore more than anything else I want to worship him and live a life worthy of his rewards in heaven.

As we close in prayer, let’s look to God with expectation, knowing that he’s creating new things, he’ll satisfy our deepest longings, and when we overcome we’ll be blessed.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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