**The New Heavens and New Earth**

**The Word**

Read together Revelation 21:1-22:5

**The Big Idea**

Our vision of eternity has a huge impact on how we live our lives today. As we immerse ourselves in Scripture’s own images of eternal life, we will develop a greater thirst for Christ’s return which can fuel greater faithfulness to him in the here and now.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Our images of eternity are shaped by so many factors: Scripture, artwork, movies, books, Sunday school, etc. Historically, when you picture eternity, what specific images or ideas come to mind? And make an honest assessment: how compelling has your image of eternity been for you?

2. Were there any ideas from Sunday’s message that were genuinely new for you or that pushed against your preconceived notions of eternity?

3. As you consider Revelation 21-22, what specific idea or image is the most compelling to you and why?

4. What is one specific way you can increase your thirst for eternity this week?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. Our image of eternity significantly impacts how we live here and now

1. Some say: “That person is so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good”

2. But the opposite is true: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Eternity. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.” – C.S. Lewis

 B. Many of us have an image of eternity that is boring and uncompelling

 C. In this series, we will let the images of Scripture shape our imagination for eternity

D. We need to make a distinction between heaven now where faithful believers who have died are spiritually with Christ, and the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-24) which is our final dwelling place.

II. Revelation 21-22: the final movement is not up but down

 A. v. 2: A city coming down out of heaven to the new earth

 B. v. 3: Now the dwelling place of God is with people (not vice versa)

C. This is the ultimate answer to Jesus’ prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven”

III. Revelation 21-22: this is not about escape but about resurrection and renewal

A. This is not about an escape from earth to a spiritual heavenly realm, it’s about a new heavens and a new earth

 B. This is the fulfillment of God’s story all along from Genesis 1-Revelation 22

 1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

 a. A material universe teeming with physical creatures

b. Images bearers made from the dust and sent to represent God and partner with him to make a world out of his good earth.

 2. The Fall

 a. Image bearers chose autonomy vs. loving partnership

 b. God pronounced consequences on humans: lives conflict, toil, death

c. God pronounced consequences on creation: curse, futility, death, decay (creation’s destiny bound up with the image bearers)

 3. Redemption

 a. God did not abandon his original plan but rather works to redeem it

 b. Jesus is sent to bear our sin, conquer death, and bring resurrection

 4. Consummation

a. When Jesus returns, we will receive resurrection bodies like his resurrection body (see Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-43)

b. When Jesus returns, the earth will receive its resurrection body just like we do (see Romans 8:19-21 and 2 Peter 3:10-13)

c. Revelation 22:3: no longer any curse

 C. Notice the language of renewal

 1. “I am making all things new” not “I am making all new things” (Rev 21:5)

 2. See also Matthew 19:28 and Acts 3:21)

IV. Revelation 21-22: not a movement back to the beginning but forwards to consummation

A. Notice this is not a return to the garden

 1. The story doesn’t end in a garden but a city

2. We don’t go back to a state of innocence/naivete but rather move forward to a state of maturity and completion

 B. But there are garden elements in this city

 The river flowing through the city (22:1) and the tree of life in the city (22:2)

 C. But the garden has been formed into a civilization/culture

1. God’s plan all along was not to remain in a pristine static garden but rather to “fill the earth and subdue it” by bringing Eden to the whole planet

2. God always intended humanity to work with the untapped potential of creation to build beautiful things out of it

3. Notice the reference to gold in the hills of Eden (Gen 2:12) which are now used to pave the streets of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:21)

 4. There is culture and international presence in this new society (Rev 21:24)

D. And God’s image bearers are finally reigning over his good earth (Rev 22:5) just as he originally intended (Gen 1:28)

V. Conclusion: How can we live today in such a way that we deepen our thirst for eternity?

A. Let the good experiences of this week be a foretaste that points you towards the ultimate fulfilment in eternity

B. Let the bad experiences of this week remind you of all that is not right and cause you to groan and long for eternity when all will be made right