



12

WEEK TWELVE

THE NECESSITY OF CHURCH

OUR CASE STUDY

Revelation 21:1-10, 14, 22-27

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 And he said to

me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God... 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will

bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.



1. What does this passage tell us about how heaven (the spiritual) and earth (the physical) will be experienced when God fully establishes His kingdom?

2. What does one have to do to receive the “heritage” (to be God’s son)?

3. What is the job description (or the role that is played) by the people whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life?

THE HISTORIC— UNIVERSAL CHURCH

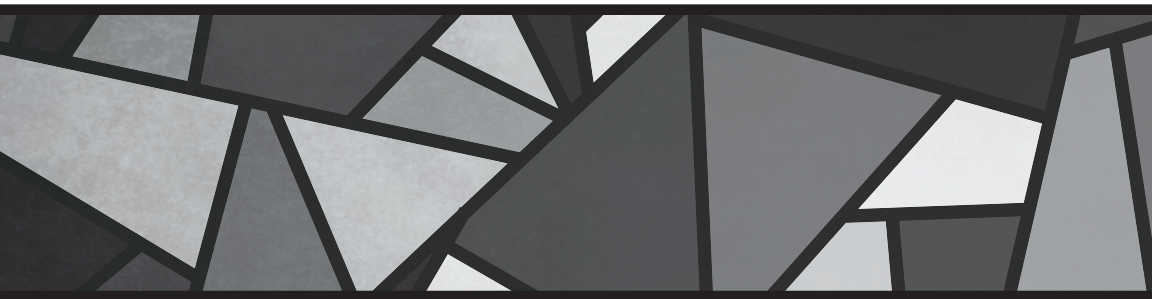
John: “Can I ask you something? Is this heaven?”

Ray: “...It’s Iowa...is there a heaven?”

John: “Oh yeah, it’s the place where dreams come true.”

This iconic line comes at the end of the famous 1980s movie *Field of Dreams*, a movie about Ray Kinsella, an Iowa farmer who is called to turn his cornfield into a baseball diamond, only to then have the ghosts of great players from the early 1900s come back and play ball. This story culminates in an encounter Ray has with the ghost of his father, John Kinsella, a frustrated baseball player with whom Ray had a strained relationship. As Ray was engaging with a younger version of his father, John was in awe of what he’s experiencing at this special ballfield. As John was trying to make sense of this special environment, he asked Ray the famous question, “Is this heaven?” While there are obviously many theological issues in this Hollywood blockbuster, we can actually connect an aspect of the Christian hope to this encounter and see how the church plays the role of the sacred baseball diamond.

In the previous weeks, we’ve learned that the local church is the way God manifests His presence on earth, and so when the world experiences God’s church, it experiences a small taste of heaven. This is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians to let them know that their (the local congregation’s) bodies were collectively the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor. 3:16–17**). In the Old Testament period, God manifested His presence among His people in the holy of holies, when only the high priest had access to Him one



day a year. But now, beginning in the New Testament era, God's presence is present within all believers (**Ezek. 36:26–27**). This means that wherever the local church is gathered, the Temple of God is located. And this gives us a foretaste of the New Creation—the New Heavens and the New Earth—where God will perfectly dwell with all His people and among all of His creation.

In *Field of Dreams*, that special baseball field in Iowa was giving those men a glimpse of heaven—a chance to walk out of the cornfield as ghosts and play a real game on a beautifully manicured field, and to play ball the way it's supposed to be played—purely. They did return to the cornfield at the end of the day (and returned to their ghostly states), but for a few hours, those men were able to gather and engage in the thing that they longed for more than anything else. For a few wonderful hours each day, they experienced “heaven.”¹ In a much truer way, this is what the local church is able to offer the world: an experience of the New Heavens and the New Earth in which all things are made new, and where God is dwelling with His people in a way we've never experienced before. The local church gets to expose the world to the Kingdom of God.

¹ Once again, we must overemphasize that what Hollywood is portraying here as “heaven” actually has zero point of contact to the biblical concept of heaven. We are merely making the connection that even in the secular Hollywood industry there's a longing to be connected to something greater than ourselves, and that experience is what the local church offers the world.

One of the best ways to see how the gospel affects the world is by looking at what we'll call **Redemptive-History**. This comes in 4-parts: *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Re-creation*:

Part 1: Creation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth (and then everything else)...and once He created humankind, He looked at it all and declared that it was very good (**Gen. 1:31**). God created a special temple called the Garden, and then He placed Adam and Eve inside of it. Their job was to serve and protect the Garden-temple (**Gen. 2:15**). They had free rein (along with free reign) and could do anything with the exception of eating from one of the trees (**Gen. 2:16–17**).

Part 2: Fall

But *then*...Adam and Eve couldn't control themselves and did the *ONE* thing they weren't allowed. So, God expelled them from the Garden-temple (**Gen. 3:23**). They no longer shared in the special relationship they had with God. Death was real. Humankind now had a hatred towards God that was not originally part of our design. Things were bad, and we would not be able to (nor would we want to) be reconciled.

Part 3: Redemption

This is what God has done in Jesus. Because humans were unable to rescue themselves from their predicament, God had to provide the solution. By the faithful life, death, resurrection, and ascension of God's Messiah Jesus, God has redeemed the world to Himself. He has reconciled rebel sinners to Himself (**2 Cor. 5:18**). He has made Jesus King over all things (**Matt. 28:18**) and invites rebels to not only become citizens of this Kingdom but to co-reign with King Jesus (**2 Tim. 2:11–13**).

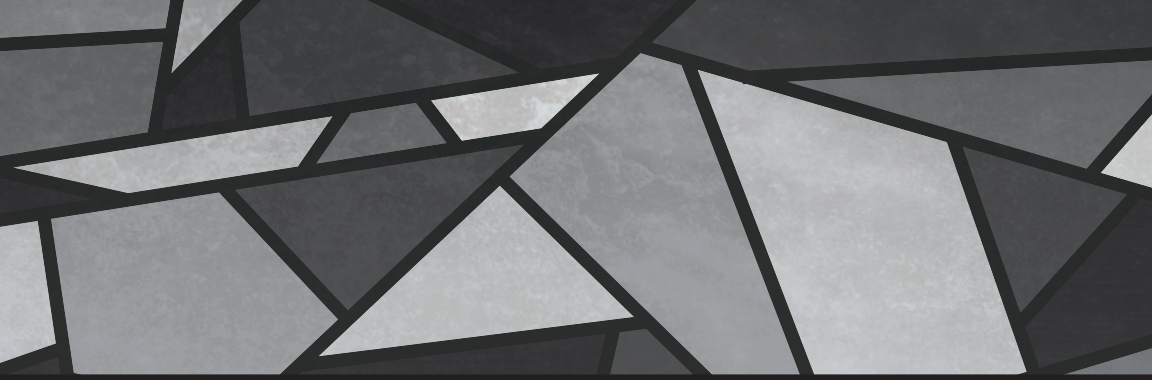
Part 4: Re-creation

This is what God will do. This is the great hope for which the world cries out (**Rom. 8:18-25**). This is what we read about in Revelation 21–22. While we have not yet experienced this in its fullness, there is an aspect of this that we do get to experience as the local church. Through the local church, we experience a foretaste of New Creation and provide hope and encouragement to one another. We do this by being “on mission.”

When we hear the word *mission* we oftentimes limit it to things like building houses on a weekend trip to Mexico, or other things that long-term “missionaries” do. For the majority of the local church, mission is something that we don’t feel is on our job description. This is why we need to expand our view of mission and let the Bible define it. One biblical scholar defines mission as “all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose.”² Mission involves all the activities that God’s people are able to engage and participate in. Mission is literally what the local church is called to do at all times—and that might never involve a weekend trip to Mexico.

The starting point of mission happens in the local church—specifically, our weekly gathering. It’s here in which the saints gather and sing praises to God. This corporate singing reminds us of the eternal worship in which we will present to God in the New Heavens (**Rev. 4–5**). It’s in the weekly gathering that we pray for one another, which reminds us that not only is our dependence upon God, but that God is active in hearing our petitions, and that one day He will be enthroned at the center of His creation, where we’ll have no more limited access to Him (**Rev. 21:3–4, 22–26**). And it is in the local church in which the word of God is proclaimed, reminding us of whose world we live in: the promise-making and promise-keeping God of Israel, who sent His Son to redeem it and reign over (and also with) it!

² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Zondervan, 2010) p. 25




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experience a foretaste of New
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THE MODERN- LOCAL CHURCH

There will come a day when all God's people will have access to Him in a way they could have only dreamt about in this present age. There will come a day when we won't have physical pain or get up out of a chair without making a grunting noise. There will come a day when anxiety will not cripple us. There will come a day in which everything will be exactly as it is supposed to be—this is known as “righteousness.” There will come a day when *mission* will be no more, as the purpose of the local church is no longer to reach the unbelieving world, because God will have reconciled all those that are His. However, there will never come a day in which worship ceases, in fact, it will only intensify.

On that day when God makes all things new, the Lamb—Jesus the Messiah—will be presented His Bride, the church. At that moment, a cosmic wedding ceremony will take place in which we will be united to Him in a way we have never experienced before. We will live in a perfect Garden-Temple that is the New Earth, yet it's also the New Heaven because it is the place in which God will dwell with His people in an unfiltered, unveiled, perfectly exposed, and transparent way. The New Earth will be perfectly filled with the glory of God, and all His people (the church) will experience life the way it was intended to be—perfect, with nothing unclean in existence.



This is our hope. This is what we strive for. This is what God has made available to us through Jesus. And when we gather together as a local congregation, we are reminding ourselves, as well as showing the world, what can be expected when God fully consecrates His Kingdom! When we gather as a church, we can ask ourselves, “Is this heaven?” and can reply, “No, it’s Brentwood...but this is a taste of what heaven is like!”

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Responding Questions

1. **Personal Assessment:** Is the book of Revelation something you read with joy? Do you see the beauty of it? Chapters 21–22 are obviously amazing, but what about all the encouraging words through the first 20 chapters?

What exhortations do the followers of Jesus receive?

How are we to overcome just as He did?

Would you read through the book again this week, but instead of trying to “decode” everything, just look for things like: What does Jesus the King do? What are His people called to do? What does worship look like (good worship or false worship)?

2. Group Conversation & Reflection: We live in a unique time in American-Christian history as Christian “sub-culture” has never been stronger. What are ways that this 12-week study has challenged the way you think about the local church?

What are things that you’ve assumed (or been taught) that might need to be re-thought?

3. **Action Steps:** If what we've discussed is true, and the gathered local church is a foretaste of heaven, both for church members among themselves and for the world (as we are a light), how should this affect our attitude towards how we live now, and how we gather now?

EXHORTATION

Church—Let us carry on in our faith. Let us conquer the evil of this present age as we anticipate the day when the Lord makes all things new. Let us gather as God's people, reflecting His love and image to the world, in the hopes that countless millions will see our light and turn to the true Light, that they would live in a New Heaven that has no need for light because the Father and Son serve as its power source.

