

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Eternity in Light of the Resurrection

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”¹ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death⁵ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵He 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.”

⁶He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Revelation 21:1-8

The crux of any faith/belief system is the perspective it brings to 3 keys areas or questions: Where did we come from (origins)? Why are we here (meaning of life)? And where is it all headed (end times; i.e. what does the future hold)? Every faith/religion has some narrative that explains and answers those questions. Of course, the most important over-arching question/concern for us to ask, regardless of what belief system we’re approaching or coming from is: how can we know if any answers to these questions are true and accurate?

The Christian answer to these questions is that there is a Creator God, made up of Three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit, who out of the overflowing love they share with one another created the universe. Unique to this creation was humankind, made in the image of this Trinitarian God, whose distinctive job it was/is to manage planet earth on God’s behalf. Due to human lack of trust, corruption, and mismanagement (i.e. sin), life on this planet has been twisted and distorted. But out of faithful love, God had/has a plan of rescue, redemption, and renewal. The Bible tells the story of all this, and how God used a particular family (Abraham and his descendants) to bring about His rescue plan, by bringing from them, and for all the world, a Rescuer, who was none other than God Himself. But even the very Presence of God did not fix the corruption of humankind...for humans killed God. But God ultimately triumphed

by rising from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus (God incarnate) is both the means of rescue, redemption, and renewal, as well as the prototype (first fruits—see I Corinthians 15:20-23).

In a nutshell, this is the Christian story (clearly there are many more details in Scripture if we want a fuller picture). How do we know it's true? What, specifically, do we place our confidence in as we consider the merits of the story? Simply and beautifully, the lynch pin of it all is the resurrection of Jesus. If it's a historical fact, it validates all the claims of Scripture and we can bank on what that means for the present and holds for the future. If it is not true...then at best it's a nice fairy tale, and we must search for other viable answers to the questions of origin, meaning, and future expectations.

Obviously, since we're a church, we're running with the premise that it's true. The focus this week, in our continued series on the implications of the Resurrection, is our hope for eternity. The final two chapters of Revelation give us a picture of what the future holds.

Please allow me to share some thoughts from Brian Zahnd's book, *"Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God"*, Chapter 9 entitled "City of the Lamb", which is a commentary of sorts on the final two chapters of Revelation:

"The last two chapters of Revelation are a creative composite of many passages from the Old Testament. John weaves a tapestry of images borrowed from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. The culmination of John's artistry is a stunning vision of hope."

"The final eschatological vision in the book of Revelation is the answer to the church's constant prayer: 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'...the tragic divorce between heaven and earth is now reconciled by the Lamb....John calls his vision of a flourishing human society healed by Jesus New Jerusalem. It's a New Jerusalem because, though it's a new thing in salvation history, it has continuity with what God was doing all along through the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets...Today is it the task of every local church to be a kind of suburb (or village, if you prefer) of the New Jerusalem here and now."

"It's important to understand that John doesn't depict New Jerusalem as belonging purely to a distant future but as a present reality in the process of becoming. New Jerusalem is both present and still arriving; it's now and now yet...And where do we find New Jerusalem? Wherever we find people banding together with the intention of following the Lamb in the new way of being human...Wherever churches enact a healing presence in broken communities, New Jerusalem is there. New Jerusalem is both a symbolic prophetic vision and a tangible present reality...Those who choose the peaceable way of the Lamb become citizens of New Jerusalem. The bride of the Lamb as the citizenry of New Jerusalem is to be an agent of healing for both people and planet."

Q. Generally speaking, do you look to the future with hope, peace, and optimism, or dread, anxiety, and pessimism? Why do you feel/think the way you do? What does resurrection (both Jesus' and the promise of our own) have to say to that?

- Q. Do you think most people know/understand the Christian story? Why or why not?**
- Q. What caused you to “buy in to” the Christian story? (Or, if you haven’t, what are your particular hang ups or sticking points?)**
- Q. How, when, or in what ways have you experienced loss and grief? How has resurrection and the hope of eternity given you perspective on that?**
- Q. As we consider the idea that as Christians we are working with God to bring the reality of the Kingdom into fuller fruition (or, as we are helping build the New Jerusalem with God), what excites you about that? What discourages you about that? What’s your role in that? What the role of your Christ-centered community (i.e. Home Group, Riverside, etc.) in that?**
- Q. Working toward Kingdom advancement; of helping build the New Jerusalem; or spreading the Gospel (however you prefer to say it), is hard work, it’s not always welcomed, and sometimes is strongly opposed to the point of persecution. Add to that the curveballs that life can throw at us (illness, financial reversals, relational challenges, etc.), and our motivation to keep going can get sapped. How does the hope of eternity (based upon the resurrection) help us to deal with suffering (in its various forms) and give us motivation to press on? How have you experienced this?**
- Q. How have you seen (either personally or in others) when thinking about “heaven” or “eternity” the tendency to fixate on secondary/peripheral issues? (The illustration in the sermon was focusing on wedding decorations and details as opposed to the bride and groom covenanting together.)**
- Q. How does having a proper and accurate understanding/vision of the past, present, and future, practically benefit us? How do we make matters of faith, spirit, and theology less theoretical and more concrete?**
- Q. What is your reaction to God’s words, “I am making everything new.”? What does it make you think, feel, question, expect, etc.? Ultimately, do you trust those words? How is that trust affecting your life?**