

A New Heaven and a New Earth

“Happily Ever After”

Revelation 21

I grew up loving fairy tales. I wanted to be the knight in shining armor. But the whole concept of the Fairytale has come under attack in recent years.

People have lost the idea of a “happily ever after”. It has been replaced with the “dystopian story”.

Dystopian is a contrast with Utopian.

In Dystopian stories societal problems are often beyond redemption. Societies are in decline. Themes of oppression and environmental ruin and technological control abound.

Life is difficult. And the sooner you except that it is difficult, the better off you will be.

Rachna Nayak writes:

During the ups and downs that you face
in the process of growing old,
you realize life is not a fairytale,
its not the story that you were told.

The problems in life are sometimes tough,
it takes time to get them burned.
Unlike, the problems in stories,
that vanish when the pages are turned.

It is only in fairytales,
that life appears magical and bliss,
because once you have lost the love of your life,
you can't get them back by sharing a kiss.

In life, there is no superhero,
who for you would fight the devil.
All you can do is fight for yourself
or run from the evil.

So fight with the circumstances,
if the going is tough.
Don't wait for the magic to happen,
cause reality is a little rough.

Life is not easy as a fairytale
it has the shades that are light and darker.
All you can do is love, have faith , stay strong,
and remember that there is never “A happily ever after”.

There is a lot of realism in that poem. There are no “happily ever after” stories in this life.
Even the best stories in real life are full of pain and tragedy.

But I am not ready to throw out the traditional fairy tale and replace it with the dystopian story altogether.

In a paraphrase of a longer G.K. Chesterton quote on fairy tales we read:

“Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed.”

— G.K. Chesterton

Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him for a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors had a limit, that these shapeless enemies have enemies in the knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than darkness, and stronger than strong fear.”

— G.K. Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles

The fairy tale is grounded in hope. And it fuels hope. It fuels the hope that there is such a thing as good. And the Good will in the end overcome the evil.

Many fairy tales roughly parallel the “Real Hope” that we are given in Scripture.

The Hero must go on a quest.

He must face evil enemies and conquer them for the purpose of saving the “damsel in distress.”

And happily ever after is defined by a marriage between the Prince and the Damsel in Distress.

In Genesis, the world in which we live is plunged into chaos. Evil abounds, death reigns. The rest of the Bible presents Jesus as the Hero who conquers sin and death and redeems for himself a bride.

And Revelation closes with Jesus marrying His Bride and living “happily ever after.”

Do not get me wrong. I am not saying that the Bible is a fairy tale. I am saying that fairy tales borrow the hope of the Bible and use it to their own ends.

The message of the Bible is that God came into the fallen world that seemed “beyond redemption”. Jesus takes on human flesh to become the hero that no other man could be.

And the hope of the Bible is that Jesus wins. And He wins for the sake of His people. As Christians, we do not expect “happily ever after” in this life. But we are willing to live and die for the ideal, because we know that Jesus will indeed bring about the ideal.

A life of faith is continuing to believe in a world full of suffering and pain that God has purchased with His blood something better, a perfect world in which evil no longer exists.

Hebrews 11:13-16 ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Brothers and sisters, here at the end, we are given a beautiful picture of that homeland, of that city. We are emphatically told, “Happily Ever After” will happen for all who trust in Christ.

Read Revelation 21:1-3.

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.

The Bible begins with these words:

ESV Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The Bible ends with “a new heaven and a new earth.”

The first heaven and the first earth will pass away.

The passing away of this present creation is not a complete annihilation of it. God will not start from scratch. He loves this present creation. Part of redemption that flows from the blood of Christ is the redemption of the creation. The New heaven and the New Earth spring forth from the original creation. But the effects of the fall are no more, not just the corruption of sin, but also everything that is associated with death and dying.

We are told that in this new creation “The sea is no more.”

The absence of the sea should not be taken to mean that there are no bodies of water.

We must remember how the Bible uses the concept of sea to teach theological truth.

The sea is a place that is uninhabitable by man.

The sea portrays unbelieving nations in contrast to the kingdom of God.

The sea is the place from which the Evil Beast comes forth.

It is the place of chaos and rebellion to God.

Once you understand this, it makes perfect sense that the sea would be no more.

Evil and chaos have met their end.

The present creation is flawed. We can and should strive to make it a better place. But nothing that we do will remove the effects of the Fall. Only Jesus can do this when He speaks for the New heaven and the New earth into existence.

For your happily ever after to exist, Jesus must create a new heaven and a new earth from the ashes of the old.

One application of this is that you should not look to this life to bring you perfection. The demand for perfection in this life can lead you into sin. Rather than experiencing contentment with the good that God has provided, you are constantly on a quest for more.

Or you might lose the drive to work hard to make the world just a little bit better because you tell yourself, "What is the point?" I cannot make it perfect.

God wants us to work hard to better this world.

But He also wants us to accept that this world will never be perfect.

We accept less than perfect because we know that He is bringing the perfect.

What is the perfect?

God does not allow us to create our own idea of "happily ever after."

The shape of perfection must conform to God.

The contours of perfection are revealed to us.

God uses what He calls good here in this life to point our hearts to the ultimate good that awaits.

² And
 I saw the holy city,
 new Jerusalem,
 coming down out of heaven from God,
 prepared as a bride
 adorned for her husband.

One image of happily ever after is of a city.

As someone who loves the country, this challenges me.

But God wants us to see the beauty of a city. Many parts working together to make a better whole. Everyone living under one common rule and one Ruler.

Of course, the New Jerusalem will not have traffic jams.
But as soon as we are told about a city coming down from heaven, we are also given another image, that of a Bride.

The city is a Bride.

It is not easy to mash together the images of a city and a Bride.
But there they are.

The New Jerusalem and the Bride are one and the same.

The fairytale ending of a Prince and his Bride getting married and living happily ever after follows the biblical ideal.

We see here the importance of maintaining marriage as the goal of our existence. Even though no marriage will reach this goal in this life, we must maintain our love of the ideal. God has ordained human marriage so that we might dream of the intimacy and glory of our eternal marriage: Christ with the Church.

ESV **Isaiah 62:5** For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

One of the tragedies of our present time is that the ideal of marriage has either been lost or redefined. When the dream of our highest happiness coming from the union of one man and one woman is lost, we will struggle to see the beauty of this eternal marriage.

It is no wonder that fewer and fewer people are getting married. They no longer see marriage as having the capacity of producing the greatest happiness.

Marriages have always fallen short of the ideal. But we must not discard the ideal.

Marriage is between one woman (the Church) and one man (The Lord Jesus Christ), eternally (since death will never part them).

Whether you are in a good marriage or a bad marriage, or in no marriage at all. God presents to you “marriage” as the pinnacle of the glorious life that you will enjoy throughout all eternity.

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.

What is the heart and soul of marriage? It is oneness. It is two people living in perfect fellowship.

In the Garden, Adam walked and talked with God.
True fellowship existed between them.
That fellowship was broken by sin.
But in redemption, that fellowship is again restored, and even deepened.

We only experience a snippet of the fellowship we will know on that day.
The Creator will dwell with His people. The King and His Bride will belong to one another eternally.
They will be joined in perfect fellowship, a fellowship of which Adam's was only a foreshadow.

At the very heart of "happily ever after" is our knowing God as He knows us.
We will delight in Him.
And He will delight in us.

It is OK to wonder how this can be. All you have ever known is the reality in which you find yourself. And it is often more like the dystopian story than the fairytale.

We are not supposed to know fully how it will all come to pass.
We are only to be certain that it will come to pass.

Read Revelation 21:4-8.

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."

No death
No mourning
No crying
No pain
Every tear wiped away by Jesus.

Every tear.

For this to happen, Jesus must fully know our every tear.
Not just the presence of our tears, but the specific cause of every one of our tears.
It is a lie from the pit of hell that Jesus does not care about the trials of your life.
He has not forgotten you.
He is not indifferent to your struggle.
He knows you like no other.

And when you see Him face to face, He will wipe away every tear.
You will feel His deep compassion and empathy. But you will also know the release of
never experiencing such pain and sorrow again.

I am a man. I have a deep desire to be strong and to protect others from pain.
But the truth is that I too am a child, needing the protection and strength of my Lord and
Savior.

I too look forward to Jesus wiping away my tears.

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."

We are told that these words of "happily ever after" are trustworthy and true.
They are not wishful thinking.
They are trustworthy and true.
They are written down to inspire your faith and courage in the face of every evil.
The battles that you are facing often seem overwhelming.
You will have moments of despair.
But keep your eyes fixed upon Jesus.
Remain in the battle. Do not abandon your hope!
Keep fighting to conquer your sin and to become like Jesus in His character of love.

Hebrews 10:39 ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of
those who have faith and preserve their souls.

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.

Jesus cried on the cross, "It is finished."

Now He says to John, and to you who place your trust in Him, "It is done."

Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega.

He is the beginning and the end of Redemption.

He is the beginning and the end of your salvation.

Jesus promises to lose none of those who come to Him.

He promises to fully satisfy the thirst of the thirsty.

Many people do not hunger for the water that Jesus gives.

They have dug their own wells, thinking that they can find their own water.

They do not believe that Jesus is the only fountain of life.

But for those who are thirsty, Jesus gives from the spring of the water of life without payment.

If Jesus required us to pay, the payment would be too high.

The payment is the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is free to us because Jesus has already paid the price.

But while it is freely given, it is only given to those who have the courage to believe.

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."

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,
11 having the glory of God,
its radiance
like a most rare jewel,
like a jasper,
clear as crystal.

12 It had a great, high wall,
with twelve gates,
and
at the gates twelve angels,
and
on the gates the names
of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed-
13 on the east three gates,
on the north three gates,
on the south three gates,
and
on the west three gates.

14 And
the wall of the city had twelve foundations,
and
on them were the twelve names
of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And
the one who spoke with me
had a measuring rod of gold
to measure
the city
and
its gates
and
walls.

16 The city lies foursquare;
its length the same as its width.
And
he measured the city with his rod,
12,000 stadia.
Its length and width and height are equal.

17 He also measured its wall,
144 cubits
by human measurement,

18 which is also an angel's measurement.
The wall was built of jasper,
 while the city was pure gold,
 clear as glass.

19 The foundations of the wall of the city
 were adorned with every kind of jewel.
 The first was jasper,
 the second sapphire,
 the third agate,
 the fourth emerald,

20 the fifth onyx,
 the sixth carnelian,
 the seventh chrysolite,
 the eighth beryl,
 the ninth topaz,
 the tenth chrysoprase,
 the eleventh jacinth,
 the twelfth amethyst.

21 And
the twelve gates were twelve pearls,
each of the gates made of a single pearl,
 and
the street of the city was pure gold,
 transparent as glass.

The most important thing that you must keep in mind is that this New Jerusalem is the Bride. And the Bride is the Church of the Old and New Testaments.

When God designed the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, on what did He base their design?

He based their design on the heavenly Jerusalem. The Bride that John is seeing now.

Exodus 25:40 ⁴⁰ And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

Hebrews 8:5 ⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

The measurements, the materials, the furniture... all symbolize realities that are fulfilled in the Bride when she is seen in all her glory.

In the New Jerusalem, the Bride, the Church of the Old and New Testaments, we are seeing the "glory of God".

the glory of God,
 its radiance
 like a most rare jewel,
 like a jasper,
 clear as crystal.

Dr. Kelly writes that this “seems to be a way of saying that the lovely attributes of God’s own being are what gives this city its shape, solidity, and splendor, at which we shall wish to gaze for all eternity; always new, always beautiful.” Kelly 413.

This is unthinkable! It is the stuff of fairytales. The glory that we often say is only found in God, is now seen in the Church.

You have no glory of your own. But in the end, you will perfectly bear the glory of God. Does that not give you courage to remain in the fight?

Next, we see that the city has a high wall with 12 gates and 12 foundations.

The wall symbolizes that the city is perfectly protected. There is no danger that can harm her anymore. The gates symbolize the freedom of activity in and out of the city. The gates are open. The city is no longer under siege.

We see in the gates and in the foundations that the city includes people of both the Old and New Testament. There are not two separate cities. There is only one Jerusalem, of whom we are members by faith in God’s promised Messiah – Jesus Christ.

Next, we see that the city is a cube.
The ESV says “foursquare”.

The city is in the same shape as the Holy of Holies.

1 Kings 6:20 ²⁰ The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, and he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid an altar of cedar.

The city is 12,000 stadia in length and width.

The number 12 is combined with 1,000 symbolizing the perfection of the city.

We are not supposed to take this number literally. But it is helpful to understand the massiveness of these dimensions.

12,000 stadia works out to almost 1,500 miles. This is roughly half the size of the United States.

To think of it literally really detracts from the symbolism.

Earlier we saw the image of the complete Church as being 144,000.
The square of 12,000 is 144,000.

John is symbolically seeing the Church in all her glory.

Next, we see that each of the foundations are a distinct precious jewel.

These jewels roughly parallel the jewels that the High Priest wore on his breastplate.
They are not exact. But there is no doubt that the imagery comes from Exodus.

Exodus 28:17-20 ¹⁷ You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row; ¹⁸ and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; ¹⁹ and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; ²⁰ and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold filigree.

It is fruitless to try to find individual meaning in the various stones. They simply represent the varied beauty of the Church. We all bear the glory of God. But we are also distinct in how we bear that glory.

The gates of the city are seen as single pearls.

We are to see in the pearls the beauty and glory of God.

The heavenly city has streets made of gold.

Gold symbolizes the value and the purity and the preciousness of this city.

The entire city is precious to God.

The fact that the gold is transparent reminds us that the entire city exists above the "sea of glass". We are no longer separate from the holiness of God.

Read Revelation 21:22.

²² And
 I saw no temple in the city,
 for its temple is
 the Lord God the Almighty
 and
 the Lamb.

John is surprised by what he sees in verse 22.

The temple was the crowning jewel of the Old Jerusalem.

To think of a perfect Jerusalem without a temple would have been unthinkable.

How could we have a perfect Jerusalem with no temple?

John tells us.

"The temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."

The temple symbolized the throne of God on earth.
The Holy of Holies is where God's Holy Presence on earth existed.
But while this Holy of Holies symbolized the presence of God, it also symbolized that the presence of God was not yet fully manifest.

Only the High Priest, and only once a year, could enter the Holy of Holies.
In the New Jerusalem, the presence of God fills the entire city.
You are that city.
The fullness of God filling all His people, from the least to the greatest.

What is the key to your happiness?
The presence of God.

John Calvin recognized this:

"... the summit of happiness (is) to enjoy the presence of God."

Institutes 3.9.4

What is man's chief end?

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him.

You have peace with God now through Justification.
But you are only faintly experiencing the presence of Christ.
When you experience the presence of Christ in all its fullness, you will be perfectly happy.

This is what God has been doing throughout all the history of redemption. He is making a way for you to experience His glorious presence.

Read Revelation 21:23-24.

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,

In this creation, we need light. The Sun is the primary source of light.
If the Sun were to cease to shine, all life on this planet would end.
John is being told that life will no longer depend upon the Sun. It will depend solely on the light emanating from God's presence, and the presence of the Lamb.

God wants us to experience many of His good gifts in this life.
But they will always be mixed with sorrow and pain.

In truth, we need the Dystopian story and the Fairytale. The Dystopian story reminds us that this world will never be perfect. But the Fairytale reminds us of the perfection that is coming and gives us a yearning for the good.

As we seek to be forces of good in this life, we are called to wait for our Knight in Shining Armor to return to rescue us and to marry us and to give us our “happily ever after.”