

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Revelation 21:1-7 on November 15, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: It's the End of the World...And I Feel Fine!

Today's Focus: Free at Last!

"The Best Is Yet To Come"

Last week Caleb preached about how to make it safely home to heaven. Simply hear God's Word and believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior! That's how you get to heaven. Well today I get to talk about why you or I would want to go there. This is going to be fun!

Our text today comes from what is one of my favorite chapters of the Bible. It's chapter 21 of the last book in the Bible—the book of Revelation. And the thing to always keep in mind about the book of Revelation is that it's a book filled with symbolic, picture language. And it's sort of like watching the highlights of a football game where you see the key, game changing plays replayed from different camera angles. Except the scene we're looking at today is actually the celebration that awaits the winners at the end.

The battle has been hard fought. The outcome has been secured. Christ has won. The church is safe. Satan and his unholy teammates have been defeated. Now it's time for the championship trophy presentation. It's time for the party to start. And what we're going to see is simply this: **the best is yet to come!** For all who overcome this world with all its anti-Christian forces, for all who persevere through their struggles against sin and don't give up, for all who die with saving faith in Jesus Christ...**the best is yet to come!** And so no matter what we face, be it sickness, tragedy, financial ruin, heartbreak, or pain... be it even the end of the world...we can say "I feel fine." *It's the end of the world...and I feel fine!*

But let's just be honest today too. Before we can so easily say u-rah-rah "It's the End of the world...and I feel fine" let's just be honest...you don't always feel fine, do you?

Do you feel fine seeing the pictures of carnage from Paris, France after 129 people were murdered Friday night in a terrorist attack carried out by radical Muslims and suicide bombers? Do you feel fine hearing about ordinary people being gunned down on an evening when they went out to a concert or to a soccer match or to restaurants? I do not feel fine about this.

My heart sank this week as I heard about a young pastor's wife who was shot and killed in their home in Indiana. They had moved to Indianapolis to start a church from scratch. They had just announced that she was 12 weeks pregnant. It appears to be just that someone motivated by greed wanted to get into their home and get their stuff. She was shot in the head while their 15 month son was upstairs in his crib. I do not feel fine about this.

Last Sunday a 10 year old boy named Kevin Little died here in Milwaukee. Did you hear about this? The students at St Jacobi Lutheran school know about this because he was the cousin of one of the students there. Kevin Little died in a house fire that was set by an arsonist. Instead of racing outside to safety, Kevin went upstairs to the second floor to try and save his little 2 year old cousin. That's where Milwaukee firefighters found Kevin on top of his cousin Taenajah shielding her from their flames on the floor between two beds. Kevin died last a week ago 20 days afterwards. It's a heroic story but there is no happy outcome here. What a sad world where selfless, brave 10 year old little boys die trying to save their dying 2 year old cousin. I do not feel fine about this. What is wrong with this world???

Well uniquely, the Bible actually tells us. It calls out the problem. Our world is under the curse of sin. The curse of sin is what causes death. Death is not just a mechanism that advances the cause of Darwinism in a world of arbitrary, senseless chance where there is no such thing as right or wrong. Deep down we know better. Death is not good, not by a longshot. It's bad through and through. It's a destructive thing that strikes eventually even those we love most and best. It's evidence that something has gone horribly wrong here. It's just that hardly anybody will accurately diagnose the problem. Only once in a while when things happen like what happened in Paris Friday night do you hear people talk in objective, universal terms about good and evil, right and wrong. But this is when, without even knowing it, people are correctly identifying the presence of sin.

What does this mean? Practically the presence of sin shows up in all sorts of ways in our world. It's the reason we cannot truly fix all the problems that bother us. It's the reason for example that people always get overly excited about one political candidate or another. We're going to eliminate poverty. We're going to prevent violent crime. We're going to save the environment.. We're going to secure our borders. We're going to do away with all hate and racism. We're going to eventually cure the ills of society through technology and education and science. People think, "If we just get so-and-so into office, they'll be able to fix things. They'll restore America."

But just think, over the last 100 years...we still have widespread poverty even though we have seen an increase in socialism. We still have greed even as raw capitalism has gone by the wayside. We called World War I "The war to end all wars" and most historians agree that this quite effectively sowed the seeds of World War II. We have tried to police the globe and still we have enemies. Why are people surprised? Have we forgotten that sin exists? We got rid of Saddam Hussein and we got Bin Laden. We got rid of Bin Laden and now we got ISIS. Anybody really think we're going to re-create the Garden of Eden in the Middle East?

Now I'm not trying to say that we shouldn't care about any of this. It's just that the real problem we all have in common in this world is the presence of sin. We cannot create our

paradise here because we live under the curse. And what it means is that this country and this world cannot be our true home. It simply cannot be if we are to have any true hope. Our greatest hopes in other words cannot be met here. Our deepest longings cannot be satisfied here. Our highest aspirations cannot come to fruition here. Why? Because in point of fact we are just passing through, for our true citizenship is in heaven. Have we forgotten this? Would Jesus Christ himself really waste his time on Facebook complaining about the coffee cups at Starbucks as if this was the real curse? I mean if that's the best some Christians can do these days instead of actually sharing the victory of the Jesus Christ who conquered sin when took its curse upon himself through his painful death on the cross then perhaps we've forgotten that **the best is yet to come!** Perhaps we need to be reminded that heaven is our real home. Our greatest hopes cannot be met here because this world, our world is under the curse of sin, apart from Jesus Christ.

You know this personally, don't you? Just when you think you've found the perfect person to spend the rest of your life with, it somehow doesn't work out. Just when you think you've found the perfect job, someone else gets it instead of you. Just when you've worked really hard to get better and acquire new skills, you end up getting not making the cut. Just when you think you've found the perfect church, you discover the people there are sinners too starting with the pastor. Just when you get your hopes up about something or someone, something ends up causing you disproportionate amounts of hurt and pain. And even when things seem to be going just great, in those blissful moments of life so few and far between where you think, "I wish this could last forever!" it never happens, does it? Those perfect moments never seem to linger more than a few moments. It's like a breath crystallized in the cold winter air. Try and grasp it and it's gone. What futility! Frustration! This is life under the curse.

But dear friends in Christ, God has something in store for you and me who groan under the weight of this curse here on earth. He has a glimpse for us today of something better, in fact the best of all possible places. It's nothing less than Paradise through Jesus Christ who has himself taken away the curse. The Apostle John says,

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. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And 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 death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ *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."*

6 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Friends, **the best is yet to come!** God gives us here a high-def picture of what heaven is like. And did you notice how he described it? First of all he describes it as a place at least somewhat like we know now. In other words heaven as you imagine it should not be just some ethereal, purely spiritual existence but will be a physical existence much like this one except it will be brand new. The word "new" here in the Greek language of the Bible implies something brand new in quality. Something so new we have never even experienced it here before like if you were trying to imagine 3D movies in color with surround sound when you've only watched silent movies in black and white.

That's why heaven is described more often in terms of what won't be there. Did you notice that? Because everything about our experience here and now is marred with sin. Our experience now is only under the curse. But friends, **the best is yet to come!** One day there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain because Jesus Christ is making all things new. He is making all things new because he died on the cross to pay for all our sins. As the sinless Son of God He paid the price to set us free from the baggage of our sinful weaknesses. Just imagine what it will be like to not have to carry around your old sinful nature anymore! To not have your own sinful nature mess up your most intimate relationships and your best experiences. To never have your expectations set sky high only to experience them coming down with a crash. To never have to struggle against temptation anymore, to not have to feel anxiety over your weaknesses anymore, to never have to deal with sin anymore, to never have to weep at a funeral anymore of a loved who you feel like you've lost. Because Jesus rose from the grave, he has swallowed up the curse of death in victory. So the cemetery is not going to be our body's final resting place. It's only a brief stop on a resurrection journey which will be take place on the last day when Jesus returns, glorifies our resurrected bodies, and reunites them with our souls to dwell in the presence of God with all the saints who've gone before and who will follow us because of their faith in Jesus.

I know right now it's hard to believe. Sometimes it feels like God is so far away and our sinful nature is ever present and at hand and this all sounds like the distant echo of a song from another land. But that's why my favorite promise here is this—that God will dwell with us. *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.* Friends, now we live by faith. I don't see God. I don't feel God. Yet now I see by faith. There is no other way. But one day I shall see by sight. No one will ask anymore, "Where is God?" because the answer will be obvious. He

will be right there in front of us and this will be our great joy—basking in the light of His glory. This is why heaven will never be boring and we won't need anything else to be happy.

It's hard to imagine a world where people aren't stumbling over each other pushing and shoving their way into Walmart to get the black Friday deals they think they need to be happy but in heaven we will be perfectly happy because we will be in the presence of the eternal God. It's like every day will be Christmas. All our needs will be met in him. All our longings fulfilled. All our dreams come true. **The best is yet to come!** And in the happiness of heaven there will not even be a taste of bitterness to spoil the moment. It won't just linger, it will last forever. Can you imagine? The happiness of heaven will be only happiness, absolute contentment, and permanent security forever. **The best is yet to come!**

Doesn't this make you thirsty? Because you know only those who are thirsty will be looking for a drink. But if you're thirsty, if the curse of sin has left your soul parched and dry, then these words of God are for you today: *To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.* Friends, if you're ready...drink up! Drink deeply of God's free grace given and poured out for you through your Savior Jesus Christ. Because of the victory that he has won, **the best is yet to come!**

One day we won't feel the need to experience God's presence because we'll have tangible, visible evidence. And in the meantime he promises to graciously deal with us through his word and sacraments. It's through these tools that God draws us near to us strengthening our faith, richly and daily forgiving our sins, and equipping us for whatever the future holds until he calls us home to heaven.

Dear Jesus, thank you for vanquishing our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the power of Satan. And thank you for holding before our eyes this glimpse of the celebration scene that will never end for all eternity. We praise your holy name and humbly ask that you would preserve us and all we love unto eternal life. In love, do whatever is necessary to bring us safely home and keep us from setting our hopes on anything that would prevent us from making it there. We look forward with eager anticipation to a new life with no more curse and where everything sad will come untrue. We love you, Jesus, because you have shown your love for us. Amen.