**The earth’s environment – restored and perfected in Christ**

Text: Revelation 22:1-7

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 11:1-9; Revelation 22:1-7

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 145, 509, 335, 429, 432, 264, 32, 458

**Series:** Caring for creation (#3 of 3)

**Theme:** The future garden city home for God’s people

**Proposition:** Focus on the future to come as you live in the present with hope and without fear.

**Introduction**

Last week, in both the morning and evening services, we focussed on the earth’s environment, ‘glorious, damaged and to be restored’, and then ‘worked and kept by faithful stewards’. Today’s perspective is a future one – looking forward to the end of this age, when Christ will return, this first earth will pass away, and a new earth will be made (Rev 21:1).

God has repeatedly promised the reconstruction of all His creation (Isaiah 11:6-9; 35; 65:17-25; 41:18-20, Eze 47:1-12; Hosea 2:14-23; Col 1:20; Eph 1:10). It will be a place of restored ecology and complete harmony: pictured with images and symbols in Isaiah chapter 11: the wolf and lamb dwell together, the calf and the young lion live in peace, the cow and the bear share the same paddock (Isaiah 11:6-9). The barren places will be fruitful again (Isaiah 35:1). The waterways will be pure and unpolluted (Rev 22:1). The vegetation will be productive and healthy (Rev 22:2). The New Earth is God’s ultimate solution to the current environmental crisis which faces this planet.

Until the end of this age God has promised to faithfully sustain the ‘*seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night*’ (Gen 8:22). We can be confident that although it is damaged, this earth will not pass away until Christ comes again. Therefore, we do not need to fear pollution, species loss, deforestation or lack of sufficient clean water or food, but we do need to be active in caring for the creation now, whilst keeping our focus on Christ who when He returns will restore and bring to perfection this world. What will this new earth be like? We’ll see today under three headings:

1. The living garden city
2. The promised garden city
3. The glorious garden city
4. **The Living Garden City**

The natural environments of New Zealand are beautiful places. Here within this city of Christchurch we have large green spaces, the Botanic Gardens, Mona Vale, and many leafy streets. The Avon and Heathcote rivers wind their way through our city. Christchurch has been known as New Zealand’s ‘garden city’. There is generally a good water supply here, which is essential for plants, animals and human beings to survive and thrive. However, nitrite contamination of ground water in Canterbury is one of the environmental consequences of some of the farming practices on the Plains. In many parts of the world today people drink contaminated water which can lead to sickness and death.

The new earth will be a place with abundant fresh water which runs right through the city of the New Jerusalem. Here is the revelation which God gave to John: v1-2 *‘Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”*

Brothers and sisters, our future, permanent, home is revealed in Scripture as a well-watered garden city. The holy city, the tabernacle of God is combined with a vibrant living natural environment. The imagery of water producing life runs through Scripture: Of the person who delights in the Word of God: *“He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither”* (Psalm 1:3a); Of God’s covenant love towards His children: *“They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light”* (Psalm 36:8-9).

The prophet Ezekiel was used to life in the dry-arid lands of Middle East. He was given a vision of a life-giving river of water (Eze 47:1-12). He saw a river flowing out from the temple: ankle-deep, then knee-deep, then waist-deep to become a river that could not be passed through. Wherever the river went, there was abundant life.

This is like the flowing water in our text ‘*the river of the water of life, bright as crystal*’ (22:1). Notice that the river goes right through the middle of the street of the New Jerusalem. Now some people prefer country living, some city dwelling. Here on the new earth both are present together in complete harmony. The very best of rural and urban environments, with none of the downsides of either. People living together in a pure place.

Our future home is a well-watered living garden city. A paradise where the throne of God is the source for the river flowing out and watering the tree of life. This tree was present in the midst of the garden of Eden (Gen 2:9) Eden was a paradise lost with the result of separation from God and the loss of eternal life. The new earth is a paradise restored in Christ, close relationship with God and the fullness of eternal life.

The twelve kinds of fruit on the tree of life symbolise completeness. Yielding fruit each calendar month indicates a continuous supply of healthy life-giving food. The picture here is of abundant life that never ends. The leaves are for the ‘healing of the nations’ which symbolises the complete absence of any physical or spiritual want. Here there is complete provision and full satisfaction.

Do you remember when Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well and said to her: *“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life"* (John 4:14). We do not have to wait until the New Heavens and New Earth for this life-giving water; in fact, we must not. This water must be drunk and the fruit of tree of life eaten now in this life by coming to Christ who offers us the spiritual nutrition that we need. For this is what secures an inheritance in this future garden city

Jesus said *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves”. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.* (John 6:53-56).

Lord’s Supper points back to, and confirms the complete provision and full satisfaction of, Christ’s death. Lord’s Supper also points forward to and confirms the general resurrection of God’s people who will live forever in the promised land of the New Earth, which brings us to the second point.

1. **The Promised Garden City**

In most great stories, many different plot lines and themes which have been unresolved, come together and are completed in the last few chapters. It’s not surprising that this is exactly what we find in the Bible, which is truly the greatest story ever told. It is an unfolding narrative in which we are all an integral part. This garden city is the final fulfilment of God’s many promises, being revealed in the last chapters of the Bible where many lines of promise come together in the grand finale of God’s unfolding plan of redemption.

The greatest story begins in a garden, then comes sin and the curse of God. This is a curse on man and woman, and on the earth itself. Now look at the future garden city in verse 3 *There will no longer be anything accursed.* The curse of Genesis 3 following from the fall of mankind is gone. That is precisely why there is no more pain, crying, mourning, or death in the New Earth.

The promise of being with Christ in the flesh is fulfilled in the New Earth: verse 4 *they will see His face.* Moses only saw the back of God (Ex 33:18-23). Job looked forward in hope to the day when He, in his resurrected flesh, would see God (Job 19:25-27). The Apostle Paul looked forward to being able to see God face to face (1 Cor 13:12). Here the covenant promise of God “I will be your God and you will be my people” is finally fulfilled in completeness. *"And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail”* (Isaiah 58:11). Here God’s promise to King David is perfectly realised: *"Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."'* (2 Sam 7:16). Did you spot it in verse 3? “*The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him*”.

In our future home, God will be the same as He is today, has always been but we will be different! We shall be like Him, His image completely restored in us. The process of transformation which is currently underway (2 Cor 3:18). will then be complete. We will truly be holy as He is holy. The name of God will be stamped on the forehead of His people – not a literal mark, but a symbolic one. His name indicates His character. The metaphor stresses both ownership and likeness (1 John 3:2). (cf. followers of the beast who bore his mark on their foreheads in Rev 13:16). Jesus said to Philip “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:19). We will see Jesus, the Lamb of God, in his physical body in the promised garden city. Then we will be completely satisfied, completely whole, completely happy, forever and ever and ever. Friend, are you weary and burdened today? Come to Jesus. Ultimately, He is the only solution to all your problems.

Brother and sisters: Do you long for the place that Jesus has gone ahead to prepare for you? (John 14:3). What is the first promise in the Bible? In the beginning, God said “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). Then what happened? there was light! and God saw that the light was good, which brings us to our third point:

**3. The Glorious Garden City**

You may have some solar-powered LED lights in your garden. Over time they fade if there is no sunshine. This coming garden city is illuminated forever! The character of light is to reveal and to give understanding, whereas the nature of darkness is to hide, obscure, deceive, and to harbour impurity. The garden city to come is a place of light where “*night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever*” (v5). God Himself is light (Ps 27:1; 1 Tim 6:15-16). Christ, the image of the invisible God, is the Light of the world (John 8:12).

The New Jerusalem is a holy city aglow; a huge jewel intricately designed by God to wonderfully reflect his glory in the most dazzling way possible. The city is magnificent beyond description, extravagant in opulence and beauty. As the symbolic city is illuminated, so is the garden. This is a glorious garden because it is full of the Glory of God. This is a place of worship for God’s servants (v3b). Temple, city and garden are combined in a perfect complete whole. Brothers and sisters, this is our home to come, secured by Christ Jesus. He is Immanuel, the living tabernacle of God. The true Temple.

But remember that he was cast from the city of Jerusalem to be crucified outside the city walls. Betrayed and arrested in a garden; Gethsemane; a place of agony (Matt 26:36-46). Christ suffered and died and was buried in a dark place to secure our home with Him in the light. A glorious, living garden city as promised faithfully by God, delivered in Christ. Eternal life is already present in us brothers and sisters, but we are not yet what we will be one day be in the New Heavens and New Earth.

I’ve often wondered why the Lord hasn’t given us more details about the New Earth and what life will be like for people living there. We have a couple of chapters at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation which uses symbolic images to reveal truth, rather than literal descriptions. In addition, there are prophesies throughout Scripture which reveal aspects of the new earth yet to come. We’ll see some of these in this message. Overall God hasn’t said so very much about the future earth.

There is endless scope for speculation here, but little profit and much danger in trying to fill in what we might wrongly think of as ‘gaps’ with the thoughts and imaginations of our own hearts. It was the English author C.S. Lewis who said that: “*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. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this*”.

If we are to actively engage with the ‘creation mandate’ which calls us to exercise a God-like care for the natural environment now, we are most effective when we have the world to come in view. In this way we can live:

* Without fear of destructive environmental changes.
* With an active care for the natural world around us without making idols out of anything that God has made.
* With a willingness to explain to others why this world is ‘groaning’ and why there is so much suffering so that we can present Christ who is the only way to gain access to the New Earth. He is the One who will restore this world to the clean, pure, unpolluted, sin-free, pain-free, suffering-free, death-free paradise it was created to be.

“*Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rev 22:20)

AMEN.