

The Perfected Kingdom

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Well, at last, we've made it to the perfected kingdom. Not in reality, but in our study of Robert Vaughn's book,!

We're still in that last days of the kingdom of God. And what's the agenda for this stage of the kingdom?

What's going on during this phase that we now live in? Evangelization. How far? Just to Israel? To the world, to the nations.

And so Vaughn Roberts calls this the proclaimed kingdom, or the stage of the kingdom that is marked by the proclamation of the gospel, that the kingdom is to expand into every nation and gather people from all the nations, language and people groups, into this great kingdom of God.

And so God is being patient. And as soon as the last person that the Father in eternity past gave to His Son to redeem, as soon as that last person repents and trusts in Christ, is united to Jesus, Jesus will return.

[1:35] And all of history will be over. The judgment will happen. Heaven and hell assigned to people. And then will come the perfected kingdom. The end of this age, the beginning of the eternal age.

So when our king comes, the perfected kingdom will come with Him. Now, as we have taken an overview of the Bible then, we've been following the kingdom of God in its various stages.

It began with the patterned kingdom in Genesis 1 and 2, and it went right through the Bible. We've now come to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. And this is a book of a series of visions that God gave to the Apostle John to prepare the church to endure under great persecutions.

The style of literature is called apocalyptic, in which truth is conveyed in symbols. These symbols were never meant to be interpreted literally.

It is apocalyptic language, and so we need to be careful not to press a literalism where the very form of revelation is telling us these are symbols.

[2:58] The book's name gives us a clue into its purpose. It's a revelation, an unveiling, a revealing. And here in the last book, we have God pulling back the curtain to reveal what's going on behind the scenes down through human history.

Well, there's this great conflict between the forces of darkness and of light, of good and evil. And as we saw, the purpose of the book is to encourage believers to persevere in this conflict because they will experience both its persecutions and its sufferings.

And so, after the introduction in the book of Revelation and the first two, chapters two and three, that are the letters to the churches and telling them to remain faithful, we have a vision of the throne.

Look at Revelation chapter 4 and verse 2, verses 1 and 2. So, Christ has sent his letters to seven churches in Asia Minor, praising them, correcting them as needed, urging them to overcome, be overcomers and not falter under persecution.

And then we have this. After this, chapter 4, I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven, and the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

[4:42] At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. Now, here's the comforting message for the people of God, that the Lord God omnipotent is reigning.

He is reigning. History may appear chaotic and completely out of control. The church may suffer greatly at the hands of wicked men. Evil might even appear to be triumphing and might, in some

senses, be triumphing in situations.

And yet, the thing God wants his people to be sure of is that whatever is happening on earth, the king reigns on the throne of the universe, and everything is happening according to his purpose. His plan is being fulfilled. He's directing history, bringing about his purposes on earth just as he has planned. God is the one who reigns, not men.

And then in chapter 5 and verse 6, we see that our Lord Jesus is also on this throne. Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

[5:58] So God the Father and God the Son are now seen on this throne. Jesus Christ, having died and risen and ascended, is now enthroned with his Father as the king of the universe.

And the response of the elders in John's vision is to fall down and worship the land. And we too below must do the same by faith. Because though we do not see with physical eyes, by faith we see Jesus now crowned with glory and honor.

That's something we see. We're convinced of it. And so we worship him. And that helps us as we live in a world so full of evil and that is so chaotic.

Well the next visions are a series of God's judgments. There's first seven seals, there's seven trumpets, there's seven bowls. And each of these seven series take us through this period that we are now living in, the last days.

From the first coming of Christ right up to the second coming of Christ. And so it takes you through that cycle. And then it takes you through that cycle again.

[7:08] And then again. This cycle of replaying history is what we have here. These seven seals and seven trumpets and seven bowls keep cycling through this period of the kingdom of God.

It's not as if the bowls, the seven bowls follow the seven trumpets and those follow the seven seals. It's not like this is all one long series of events.

But it's rather that they are all describing the same time period from Christ's first coming to his second coming. And believers in the midst of this persecution that is so dominant in these bowls and trumpets and seals is that we must remind ourselves of the vision of the throne with which the book began.

If we're to persevere and remain faithful through all the catastrophes and hardships and judgments that are going to fall upon the earth, we are going to need to trust in the reality that our God is reigning.

But this cycle of replaying history does not go on forever in the book. When we come toward the end of the book, the last chapters of the book take us to the very end of the age.

[8:29] So yes, we see this recycling of from Christ's first coming to his second coming. But when we come down to chapter 17, we're pushed right into the end of the age and we are shown what is going to happen when the Lord Jesus returns.

Now we've seen glimpses of that every time that cycle is played. It ends with Christ's return and it comes in judgment upon his enemies and blessing for his people. But now we're there for the last time.

And now it's drawn out. And now we're shown what's going to happen when Christ returns. The last chapters will show us that when our king returns, he will destroy evil.

He will call everyone to judgment. He will assign all men and angels to heaven or hell. And he will establish his eternal kingdom, a new heavens and a new earth for his people forever.

Now you've seen makeover shows of old houses that are renovated and made new. It's out with the old first and then in with the new. And the first thing is to gut the place to demolish what you don't want there anymore.

[9:47] And so with God's remaking of the universe, the old must go before the new comes. And down through history, there have been many attempts at utopia, many attempts at the perfect society where everyone is living in harmony with each other.

Sometimes driven by philosophies, sometimes by political movements, sometimes even by educational theories. But every one of these efforts of man at utopia has failed.

Indeed, human history is the account of man's failures at seeking to establish utopia. Utopia, the perfect society with perfect harmony. It's a history.

Human history is a history of man's failure to fix things. And why have they failed? Because they don't deal effectively with the root problem. What's wrong with society?

What's wrong with the world is evil. And if you can't get rid of evil, you can't fix the problem. You can't bring in the new until you get rid of the old.

[10:58] But the power of evil originating with Satan and his fellow demons now permeates the race. It's found in the hearts of every son and daughter of Adam.

And it's too much for man to fix. That's the one overarching lesson of human history. But man's failure is leading to God's success when Jesus Christ will return.

It will be seen that he deals effectively with evil. He removes it entirely from his universe so that he might indeed bring in the new. And that's what we've been memorizing in Revelation 21, 4 and 5. The old order of things has passed away. You see, we get rid of the old order and the one seated on the throne said, I am making everything new.

First, the old order passed away and as it passes away what comes in its wake is the new. And that's where we're headed. Now, Revelation 17 to 20 uses picture language to show how God will remove the old.

[12:04] How he will destroy the powers of evil. Notice Revelation 17 and verse 5 introduces us to a woman and she has these different names.

Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, the mother of the abominations of the earth. Now, I told you that the language of Revelation is symbolic.

Babylon is a symbol in Revelation. It has already played a large part in biblical history, hasn't it? We go all the way back to Genesis chapter 11.

Very early in the Bible, Babylon arose on the scene as it is the location of the Tower of Babel, the monument of human arrogance and independence and rebellion against God.

Then Babylon is seen as the capital city of the whole reigning world empire that ruled the world, that vanquished Judah, the people of God, that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of God and took God's people into exile far from home.

[13:20] Babylon, you see, has figured large in God's plan. And now we meet it at the end.

Babylon symbolizes the world, corporate flesh, fallen humanity organized in its hostility against Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

Christ's kingdom is not built in a vacuum. It's built in a place where evil reigns, where Satan reigns, and where the world joins forces with Satan in its hostility against Christ and His kingdom.

This is Babylon. This is the world. And it's seen as a spiritual prostitute. Why a prostitute? Because she lures people away from the worship and giving their hearts devotion to the one who deserves it. The rightful owner of their devotion, the true and living God. And the world lures people away from worshiping, loving, serving the living true God.

Just like Judah of old then, we are in exile. Judah was in Babylon. We are in Babylon. We are in the world. We're far from home. Our home, heaven.

[14:33] And we're having to live here in this foreign land, just as the people of God had to live in Babylon. And yet, though we're in the world, we must not be of the world, Jesus says.

We must not join it. We must not belong to it. We must not embrace its ideology, its values, its agenda, its priorities.

We're in it, but not of it. And since we're in it, we'll be tempted to compromise. We'll be pressured to go along with the majority, but we must not be moved either by the world's allurements and temptations nor by its threats and its persecutions.

And we'll find both in this world. Then we come to Revelation 18. And the good news of Revelation 18 is that this world is heading for destruction.

Verse 2, an angel announces the good news, fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. She's become a home for demons, a haunt for every evil spirit.

[15:46] But she's going to fall and fall hard. And John sees this in vision and hears this angel announce this good news. And the angel says in verse 8, she will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

Verse 21, with such violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. You're never going to be able to find the world again.

Remember, it's out with the old and it's out for good. Never again will you find the world. This humanity organized in hostility against our king.

Verses 23 and 24, by your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints and of all who have been killed on earth.

You see, the world has not liked the presence of God's people and has slain them, has persecuted them, and God's judgment now falls upon this world.

[16:53] The proud world, organized in stubborn independence from God, is going to collapse in a moment, and all those who live for this world will weep and mourn their loss.

Verse 10, Woe, woe, O great city, O Babylon city of power, in one hour your doom has come.

In one moment, the Lord is coming, and he will destroy this world. And what we find is that it's not only the world that's destroyed, remember, it's out with evil.

So the world is evil, it's in opposition to the king, it has to go, but so do Satan and his demons. And chapter 20 and verse 10 tell us that they, the instigators of evil, are also judged and thrown into the lake of burning sulfur to be tormented day and night forever and ever.

and verse 15 says that everyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

[18:05] Out with the old, evil must be purged from the earth, completely purged, for the new order to come in. So once everything evil has been judged and removed, then the promise of the new heaven and the new earth will be a reality.

The old order of things has passed away, see, I am making everything new. So Revelation 21 and 22 describe this whole new world.

This has been our memory verses, this whole memory pack, it's Revelation section from 21 and 22. We need to fix our eyes on that hope set before us.

This is where we're going. We're going to see this. Those eyes sitting there this morning will see these things in reality, not just the symbols, but we'll see the realities. And Vaughn Roberts points us to three new things in Revelation 21 and 22.

It's a whole new world. And he says there's a new creation, there's a new Jerusalem, and there's a new temple. So first the new creation, Revelation 21, 1.

[19:13] Then I saw a new heaven, and a new earth, for the first heaven had passed away, and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. Now the word heaven here, I believe, just refers to the sky.

We have that phrase in Genesis 1, 1, don't we? That in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. sky, that which is above the earth, and that which is the earth.

And it makes up the universe, that's the entire universe. The heavens and the earth is the biblical phrase for the entire cosmos, the universe. And so what Revelation 21 is promising is a whole new universe.

The whole thing will be made new. in the beginning God created all things perfectly, but man's sins spoiled it all. It spoiled man's body, it spoiled man's soul, it spoiled man's environment.

So in restoring all things in this makeover at the end, God will restore to perfection the whole thing. Man's soul, man's body, and man's environment, the entire universe.

[20:30] We sometimes speak, and rightly so, of God's saving souls, but we must never think of that in terms of God just saves this inner, immaterial part of man.

No, he saves the whole being. We are body, soul creatures, and he saves our bodies as well as our souls. They will be raised in power, just made like Christ's glorious body.

Vaughn Roberts writes in his book, An elderly lady hobbled into church recently and said to me, you don't happen to know where I can find a pair of new legs, do you?

I replied, not in this world, but you'll get them in the next. Do you mind waiting for a while? And she said, no, that's worth waiting for. There's a lot worth waiting for, but one of the things is our bodies. God will renovate the whole universe, soul, body, body, and the entire environment of man. Look at Romans chapter 8, a familiar passage, and yet it shows us again that this new creation is going to be a new creation of the soul of man.

[21:43] We will see Jesus and be made like him in our souls. There will be absolutely no sin. In our bodies, they too will be alleviated from all evil and become perfect like Christ's glorious body, and then our environment, Romans 8, 19 through 21.

For creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed, for the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

So when God returns and the children of God experience the glorious freedom of a perfect body and soul, the whole creation is going to join in that liberation and be freed from the curse of sin and the frustration, the frustrating cycle of life followed by death, life followed by death.

That's the cycle of the created order. It will be broken forever. There will be no more death for the old order of things has passed away. And part of the new is to live forever.

That pattern of the kingdom, as the world first came from God's hand in the beginning, that was destroyed by sin, is to be fully restored. And that's why the picture of the perfected kingdom in Revelation 21 and 22 makes use of some of the very elements that were first found in the garden.

[23:23] There was a river in the middle of the garden. And what do we find in Revelation 22? We find a river flowing down the middle of the great city, the middle of the great street in the city.

So, there's a garden, there's a garden city with a river flowing through it and there's the tree of life. Where did you first meet up with the tree of life? It was back in the pattern, wasn't it?

And so we see the pattern, now, once again, brought to earth in perfection. The perfected kingdom will be a whole new creation.

There's a second new thing found in these two chapters and it's the new Jerusalem. It's the next verse, Revelation 21:2 then. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

Robert says this is not a new vision, different from the new creation. We shouldn't think of them as different, but rather to see that the new creation is now being portrayed as a city.

[24:31] Babylon was a city and it symbolized man's attempt to create the perfect world by his own efforts. And that city had its beginning where? Here on earth with man and it tried to reach up toward the heavens and it was total failure.

But here in contrast is God's city, the new Jerusalem. It's been made where? In heaven. And it comes down. It's not man's attempts to come up to God and to heaven.

No, this city comes down from God. He alone can do this. It's his work. And so heaven is described as a city. Why? What's the important thing behind this whole symbol of a city?

because we're not to think of a secluded spot away from all people, just me and my dog and my fishing pole or something. No, God didn't make us that way.

He means for us not to be a scattered people, an individualized people, all alone people, isolated from one another, but rather to be the gathered people of God, gathered in community, all united in Christ, all kinds of people from all the ages, all joined together in perfect harmony to the praise of Jesus.

[25:48] I'm not saying by that that you can't find a pole and go out fishing and find a secluded spot in heaven, but the picture that is being given us here now is of a city and we're meant to appreciate that God is going to bring together the scattered peoples of the earth into one city to live together with our Lord, whites and blacks, who could not live together on earth, Arabs and Jews who could not live together on earth, living together in perfect harmony.

This is the power of the cross to bring together what sin had divided and we see that in the new Jerusalem, the holy city.

Yes, it's going to be a new creation, a new Jerusalem, and thirdly, a new temple. Verse 3 of Revelation 21, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. The dwelling of God with men, that's the concept of the temple, isn't it? In the Old Testament, God lived with his people in the temple.

His presence was with Israel in the temple, in the most holy place. And then in the first in the tabernacle, then in the temple, in the holy of holies, in the promised land.

[27:12] God's presence with his people. But this is all to be fulfilled in Christ. And right now, we are the temple of God, aren't we?

Through the work of Christ, in this present phase of the kingdom, the spirit of God is dwelling in us and makes us together a temple for the spirit of God.

We are that temple. But our experience of God's presence is still limited. Would you say amen to that? Even in our holiest times, our best worship services, our experience of the presence of God is still limited, still clouded, and we long to know more of it.

And Revelation 21.3 is saying one day we will. God himself will dwell with his people in a way that he is not now dwelling with his people.

Now, John sees this city that we just described as a cube. Height, width, depth, it's all the same dimension. You know, there was a box like that in the Old Testament.

[28 : 29] Do you know what it was? It was the holy of holies. It, too, the very central place of the temple. It was a cube, and John sees a vision in this new city, the new Jerusalem.

It, too, is a cube, just like the holy place where God dwelt with his people. The image is saying that now the whole holy city is the dwelling place of God.

It is the holy of holies. The new creation is a city, is a temple. There will be no special place in the new creation where God's presence will be concentrated as if we've got to go into a holy building if we want to meet with him.

Rather, the whole created world, the new heavens and new earth will be that temple, the dwelling place of God with men. And that's why John says in verse 22 of Revelation 21, I did not see a temple in the city.

There's always been a temple in the holy city since it was first built by Solomon, other than the times that it was destroyed. But Jerusalem and temple, those two always go to hand.

[29 : 38] And now we're seeing this new city, the new Jerusalem, and there's no temple. And John tells us why, verse 22, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple, and they're living with men.

And their presence fills the whole new creation in a way that it cannot now, because he cannot dwell with evil now.

Evil is still present in the universe, but when the universe is swept clean of evil, God's presence will fill the heavens and the earth in a way that we've not yet seen it.

And the whole universe will be the temple. Remember Ezekiel's prophecy of a new temple? After the old temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, Ezekiel, at the end of his prophecy, talks about a new temple that's to be built.

And the very end of the book of Ezekiel ends with the new Jerusalem. And the name of the city from that time on will be the Lord is there.

[30 : 48] That's the temple. No longer just a little box behind the curtain in the location in Jerusalem in some temple, some physical building.

Now the whole new creation is the new Jerusalem, is the dwelling place of God. And so the name of the city from that time on will be the Lord is there.

We'll know his presence in a whole new way. So that's where we're headed, a new creation, a new Jerusalem, a new temple. We will live in it forever and ever.

So class, for one last time, what is the kingdom of God? God's people in God's place, God's rule and blessing.

And so it will be forever and ever. God's people, who? Believers in Christ from every nation. The redeemed of all the ages, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

[31 : 51] God's people. Where? In God's place, the new creation, which is the new Jerusalem, which is the new temple. God dwelling with man.

How? Under God's rule and blessing. And in that day, everyone of God's people in God's place, every last one on the whole universe, will be living submissively and joyfully under God's rule, obedient, serving God's rule.

So, they will enjoy God's blessing to perfection. Their obedience will be perfect, and the experience of the blessing will be perfect. And then will be fulfilled that prayer that our Lord has had his church praying for 2,000 years now.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, where? On earth. How? as it is in heaven. And in the perfected kingdom, the will of God will be done here on earth perfectly, just as it is being done in heaven.

And forever and ever, Jesus shall reign. The throne of God and the Lamb is the center of everything. That's the symbol of God's rule. He rules, He reigns.

[33 : 10] There's the throne. And from that throne flows what? A river. A river of what? Of life.

And wherever the river goes, life and blessing springs up. Such fruitfulness that a tree is bearing fruit every month. We've never seen that since Eden.

But we're going to see great fruitfulness, the curse removed from the earth, and perfect blessing. You see, under God's rule, under His reign from the throne, and everyone submitting to it, there will be perfect blessing.

Now all that's still to come. That's the last P, the perfected kingdom. We're still under the proclamation stage of the kingdom. But the New Testament ends in the way that the Old Testament ended.

How did the Old Testament end? Looking forward to the coming of the King. And how are we living? How does the New Testament end? With us looking forward to the coming of the King.

[34:15] And so at the very end of Revelation 22, King Jesus assures His people, yes, I am coming soon. And if we have any idea of the kingdom He's bringing when He comes, we will pray along with the church, even so, Lord, come quickly.

And that's how the Bible ends. And until then, we never let out of sight the agenda of the kingdom that we're living in. It's proclamation.

Tell as many people as you can, as much as you can, about Jesus Christ, the King, and His great salvation that they might be saved and brought into this everlasting kingdom of our Lord.

So that's the big picture. And it's come full circle. And I've given you two helpful handouts from Vaughan Roberts. The first is a chart of boxes.

And it just traces out God's people, God's place, under God's rule and blessing. You have that on the left hand side. That's the definition of the kingdom of God. And then you have each stage in redemptive history as that kingdom, God bringing His kingdom to earth unfolds.

[35:28] You have it moving right across the page until we end where we are today with the perfected kingdom. Who's God's people? Multinational family of God. God's place, the new creation, the new Jerusalem, the new temple, God's rule and blessing.

You have God's rule represented in the throne of God and the Lamb and God's blessing, His perfect blessing, and so on. That's a helpful one shot at the whole flow of redemptive history.

The other side of the handout is more of a timeline. And that shows you as well, down in the bottom you see the eight stages of the kingdom, all the way from the patterned kingdom to the perfected kingdom.

But it also helps you see at least the main portions of scripture that deal with each one of those in the redemptive flow of revelation. And so you see what books are especially honing in on the promise of the kingdom, the prophecy of the kingdom, the partial fulfillment, and so on.

I made it small enough that you could just stick that in your Bible and use it as a guide so wherever you're reading you can look on there and see now what's the big picture in this book?

[36:41] We're in this period of the partial kingdom so I'm going to see hints of the coming kingdom here in David. So I'm reading about David's kingdom because it was partially fulfilled in David's.

I see I'm reading there in 1 Samuel. So I'm going to be looking for the big picture about Christ's coming and the way the kingdom will be when he comes and so on.

So that's the handout from Vaughn Roberts. Our time's gone. No time for questions. Let's enjoy our king today. Let the people of Zion rejoice in their king.

We're dismissed.