

Talk Number One

God promises the world we all want



There is an old song, which goes: *'If I ruled the world, every day would be the first day of spring, and every heart would have a new song to sing.'* I don't know who wrote it, but I do know it's not true!

If you ruled the world, what kind of place would it be? And would it be a good place for other people to live in? If you ruled the world, perhaps it wouldn't be a very organised world because you are not a very organised person. Everything would be left until the last minute, which would make it an infuriating world for organised people to live in! If you ruled the world, perhaps you would ensure that no one would like bananas, leaving them all for you to eat. Perhaps everyone would have to play football even if they did not like the game. But you would always have to win of course, because you rule the world!

The world the person sitting next to you or talking to you wants might be quite different. They might want a world in which no one plays football and everyone arranges flowers. When we talk about our personal likes and dislikes, there probably isn't a world we all want.

But when we think about it more seriously, there are common themes to our hopes and dreams. Maybe there is a world we all want after all?

Isn't the world we all want a world in which there is no sickness, no sorrow, and no death? Isn't it a world where there is no poverty, no drought and no destruction or devastation? The world we all want is a world where everyone has more than enough food and more than enough water. The world we all want is a world in which we can all enjoy ourselves and reach our full potential. It's a place where we don't grow old and frail; where we don't have to cope with failing memories and bodies; where we never lose those we love; where we are never hurt by others, nor hurt others ourselves.

The last two chapters of the Bible tell us that there is such a world. It paints a remarkably attractive and compelling picture for us. Look at Revelation 21:4 and 22:1-3a. As we talk about this world, don't you find yourself longing for that world? I do! I want that world *so* much. There are fleeting moments when I may fondly imagine that I live in such a world, but they are very fleeting! Most of the time I know very well that *this* world isn't *that* world: this world isn't the world we all want. It is precisely at that moment of realisation that I long for such a world. In fact, the more intense the pain, the more desperate the longing for a world where the pain will be gone.

As the Bible describes this world we all we want, it's claiming that this is the world God promises us.

1. God promises the world we all want

Look at what it says in 21:5 and 22:6. It's a bold promise.

This world isn't going to come about by violent revolutions. It's not going to be created by economic systems. It's not going to happen because philosophers persuade us to dream about it, or because politicians talk us into it, or because we vote for it. Capitalism, socialism, fascism and communism cannot deliver this world. Self-help groups, hypnotism and psychotherapy cannot bring this world into existence. Neither acts of terrorism nor UN resolutions will achieve it.

What the Bible claims is that only God can bring this world, this awesome world we all want, into existence. It also claims that God has made the promise to do precisely that.

Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to make sure someone either understood what you were trying to say or simply believed it? Perhaps you prefaced your comment with the words, "*You really need to listen to this*". Or maybe you said, "*Honestly. No, really!*" The more important the statement, the more determined you would be about conveying it to the other person. This is exactly what the speaker in Revelation 21 and 22 does. He makes a point of emphasising the reliability of this promise by repeating the phrase, "*These words are faithful and true*". At the end of descriptions of something so beautiful, breath-taking and which satisfy our deepest longings, he wants to make sure we do not make the mistake of dismissing them as fantasy: These words are faithful and true! It's like he's saying "Listen up! You'd better believe this!"

Because, let's be honest: it does sound too good to be true. Whatever God claims, surely any reasonable person realises that it's a pipe dream. Maybe we can get lost in our dreams for a few moments. Maybe the world we read about in Revelation 21 and 22 is the kind of world to daydream about when we've got some time to fly off with Peter Pan to NeverNever Land, but we soon have to face reality again and come down to earth. Often with a bump! It could be something as ordinary as seeing dirt and litter on the streets; or feeling a hint of fear as we walk down a dimly-lit road; or as we feel the pain of a headache; or hear tragic news from a friend; or experience the loss of someone we love. Then we realise that, as good as all of this sounds, it's not going to happen.

But before we dismiss such a dream, please turn briefly to somewhere else in the Bible, because we may be surprised!

2. There was a time when we glimpsed the world all want

There was a time in history when it existed. Look at Mark 5:21-43. This book of the Bible is not talking about something that may happen in the future. It's describing something that has already happened. It's talking about an historical event. It was written by a man called Mark who knew people who had seen these events and who probably saw some of them himself.

Mark tells us about a man called Jesus who lived in Israel about 2000 years ago. He was an amazing individual, who made an amazing impact upon history. We'll learn more about him as we go through this course.

In Mark 5 we see Jesus as a miracle worker. He healed a woman with a serious health problem. She was also a woman with a serious social problem. In her world her condition meant that she would have been an outcast. She would not have been

allowed to have contact with people. She really shouldn't have been there at all! She had spent all her money on doctors (v. 26). Now there was no more hope of a cure. Until Jesus came along! She was convinced that if she could just touch his clothes, she would be made completely well (v. 28). And that is what happened (v. 34).

Mark goes on to tell us of a young girl who is raised from the dead. Everyone was convinced they had lost her (v. 38). But Jesus simply speaks to her and she comes back to life (vv. 41-42). In Revelation we read about a world with '*no more death or mourning or crying or pain*' (21:4). And here it is! The young girl is brought back from death. The mourning and crying stops.

In Mark's account of the life of Jesus we discover that Jesus:

- calmed storms that threatened lives (see 4:39)
- exercised authority over evil spirits who held people in their vicious grip (see 5:8, 15)
- healed people of their illness even when no-one else could help them (5:29)
- overcame death (5:41-42)
- satisfied the hungry (6:41-42)

Isn't that remarkable? If what Mark is saying is true, then Jesus has the power to create the world we all want. Unlike the description of the world we all want in Revelation, which is about the future, the account of the life of Jesus is an historical document. In other words, it doesn't simply describe what might be. It claims to tell us what has been.

Of course, it was only a glimpse of that world. Even as Jesus was giving life back to the girl thousands of other people in the world were dying. So the world we all want did not exist fully. But it was the real thing. It was as though a curtain was pulled back and we were allowed to see a glimpse of that world.

Have you ever tasted food as it's being cooked by someone who is a particularly gifted chef? Have you ever sneaked into the kitchen and dipped a spoon into whatever was cooking? If you have, you will have an advantage over the other people eating because you know how good the meal is going to be. That sneak preview will tantalise your taste buds! As you wait for the meal you will find your mouth watering as you anticipate the full meal. In fact, you will find yourself growing impatient as you wait. It's a bit like that with all that Jesus did. It was a foretaste, a hint and a promise of the world we all want! As we read about it we may find ourselves thinking, "I want that world, and I want it now"!

The promises God makes in Revelation (21:5 and 22:6) don't seem quite so unbelievable if the events described by Mark actually happened. The world we all want isn't a fantasy or merely a dream. God has not only promised it as a future event, he has also given us a glimpse of it in history. The world we all want can be the world we all live in. The Bible tells us that it all depends on Jesus - on what he did and what we do with him.

In our next session, we'll explore the world Jesus gave us an insight to in some more details. We'll see how his world is actually pretty much the world we all want. But we'll also see how for all its promise, there is an unpleasant surprise waiting for us!