

# Choral Evensong (BCP) – Revelation 21:1-7

Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 21 April 1926 – 8 September 2022

St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney 9 September 2022 A.D.

Many a child has asked: What will we do when we go to heaven? And many an adult has pondered the same thing: What will heaven be like? As the Prayer Book says, "in the midst of life we are in death"... In Buxton... In Buckingham Palace.

Revelation 21 was set as a reading at the death of our Sovereign, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. And as we farewell her, it helps us answer that question.

And the first image used for the new heavens and earth is that of a beautiful bride. Look at vv1-2.

***<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.***

The church in the new creation is compared to a beautiful bride. The wedding of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, has come, and his bride is now here.

Many of us have rejoiced at Royal Weddings. And the longest Royal marriage was between Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, from 20 November 1947 until the Prince's death in 2021, over 73 years. What an example of promise-keeping to us all!

What's strange is that nothing more is said here in the Bible about the wedding. No speeches. No menu from the feast. Perhaps with an image of marriage nothing more needs be said.

There is scarcely a man or woman alive who doesn't know marriage ought to mean the closest intimacy. It means joy. And it means love and faithfulness. The excitement of a wedding day. And the depths of a couple still going strong beyond a Platinum Wedding Anniversary.

That intimacy, that joy is ours with Jesus, to all who call him their Lord and Saviour, as Her Majesty did.

And remarkably earlier in Revelation, we are reminded that our beautiful wedding dress has been purified white by the scarlet blood of the Lamb; his blood shed on the cross for our sin.

The bridal imagery quickly changes into that of a glorious city. V2 calls it the new Jerusalem, which catches all the Bible's hopes for a place of justice and peace. The image tells you heaven is not private or individualistic. Because a city's a place of sociability, of relationships. We gather to mourn together today. It says: all your loved ones who have departed trusting Christ... you will see them again.

The imagery of the rest of this chapter is amazing: streets paved with gold; gemstones mightier than any King has ever worn on a crown; pearls many magnitudes of order larger than the biggest Paspaley pearls that have ever graced Her Majesty's royal neck... You get the picture that heaven is beyond our imaginings.

But most of all, it's about dwelling with God. Come to v3.

***<sup>3</sup> 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.'***

Whatever else heaven will be like, this one thing we know: we'll see Jesus face-to-face.

And the result? V4 says when Jesus comes to take us to the new heaven and earth, there is no more suffering.

***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.’***

Clive James, expatriate Aussie author and critic, died with emphysema. Here’s his last poem published in *The New Yorker*.

*Your death, near now, is of an easy sort.  
So slow a fading out brings no real pain.  
Breath growing short  
Is just uncomfortable. You feel the drain  
Of energy, but thought and sight remain:*

He tries to face death as it closes. He contemplates a newly planted maple tree, with its leaves turning to flame in autumn. And he concludes...

*A final flood of colours will live on  
As my mind dies,  
Burned by my vision of a world that shone  
So brightly at the last, and then was gone.*

One last autumn. And then Mr James seemed to expect extinction.

Friends, Christians know that with the risen Lamb, we will all rise one day, and all those who called Jesus Lord and Saviour will see him again.

No more sorrow. Because the curse is gone. He’ll wipe every tear from our eyes. Kleenex will be out of business. And our eyes will see Clive’s flood of colours live on in the fruit of the tree of life forever.

And this is God’s gift. This is not humans working their way to God by our own flawed efforts or technology or self-education or even religiosity.

The New Jerusalem, v2, comes down from heaven from God, prepared by God as a bride for Jesus. We do not build heaven on earth. It’s his gift to us. All grace.

Her Majesty’s reign has been characterised by incredible devotion to duty over 70 years. At her first Christmas broadcast as Queen, but before her coronation, she said,

*“I want to ask you all, whatever your religion may be, to pray for me on that day ...that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life.”*

God has answered such prayers for 70 years.

But the Queen has also prepared us for this day. We’ve all loved her annual Christmas broadcasts, where she was increasingly open about the purpose her Christian faith has provided.

But Her Majesty has only ever delivered one Easter broadcast. In 2020, at the height of the first wave of Coronavirus pandemic, she said:

*“The discovery of the risen Christ on the first Easter Day gave his followers new hope and fresh purpose, and we can all take heart from this... As dark as death can be – particularly for those suffering with grief – light and life are greater.”*

We give thanks for Her Majesty’s life. And if you wish to see her again, I commend to each one of you the same faith our Queen had in Jesus as “the Light of the World”.

– Sandy Grant, Dean of Sydney