

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

WONDER

Revelation 21:1-27 // Craig Smith

October 03, 2016

CRAIG: Good morning. Okay, buckle up. We're closing out the Wonder series today, and I said what we're looking at in the series is the big story, which kinda runs from the first page to the last page of scripture. So far we've only dealt with, like, the first two pages of scripture. So we gotta lotta material to cover today. Now actually what we're gonna do this morning is we're gonna kinda jump to the end, and there's...here's the reason we're able to do that, because the story in Scripture...see, the Bible's not a collection of stories, it's not a collection of individual tales, it's God's one story that's just gonna unfold progressively as we go. And so we don't actually have to cover every little bit and piece of it but we want that big picture. As we go forward from this point, typically the way that I preach is I really like to work my way through a book and you might call it verse by verse or I call it paragraph by paragraph teaching, and we're gonna actually get a chance to start that next week, but I wanted to start when... my sorta tenure here as senior pastor with making sure that we're all in the same page with the story, because any other study we do in God's Word has to fit inside this bigger story and I think it's important that we get what that is.

So if you've got your Bible, I wanna go and ask you to turn with me to the last book of the Bible, also pretty easy one to find even if you're not familiar with it. We're gonna start this morning in Revelation 21. Now while you're turning there, let me just catch us up in case you're new or you just need a little bit of a reminder, what we've seen so far is this, God's King and we're His image, which means that God is great beyond our conception, but we were given this inconceivable privilege which is that we were called, we were created, we were designed for the purpose of making God's presence known and felt in creation. We're His image. It's not a characteristic, it's not a particular thing we do, it's what we are we are, we're the image of God. We were made to make God's presence known and felt in creation. That's what we're designed for. It's an incredible reality, but the reality is also that we kinda messed up, and we saw last week Adam and Eve, but the reality is that what we see them do is the same thing that you and I do on a regular basis which is we kind of write our own stories. We have our own sense of, "Well, I think this would be good for me," and so we begin to write our own stories, but the reality is because we are made as the image of God, our greatest good is always to be found in the pursuit of His purposes.

His is the story we need to be in if we ever wanna get this good that we hunger after. And when we decide to write our own stories, even though we think we're pursuing good, we end up getting something very, very different. And what we saw last week is that that insistence on writing our own stories, what we call sin, is responsible for a break in our relationship with God, it's a break in our relationship with each other, it's a break in relation with creation itself, all creation groans under our sin. And so in a very real sense, God had to do something significant to get us back into the story, we couldn't just do it on our own. And so as we saw last week, you know, even though Adam and Eve attempted to cover up what they were doing and to keep going down in their own story path, He said, "No that's not gonna work, something more drastic has to happen." And so He sacrificed animals and He clothed them, and that was a picture of the Gospel itself, that there had to be this shedding of blood, there had to be death to pay for what they had introduced. And so we saw there that God in His incredible love and mercy was willing to meet us in the midst of the mess we'd created and to offer us redemption. So we've seen what we've been designed for, we've also seen what we've been delivered from, but as we talk about we we're delivered from, we have to remember that God always delivers us from something in order to ready us for something. You hear me?

Anything God delivers us from is because He's preparing us for something. And if you've been delivered from something, whether it's sin, that means that you're back into God's story and He's got something for you. If it's deliveries from addictions, the chances are He wants to use your delivery from addiction to help other people experience what that kinda freedom could look like. But whatever it is that God delivers us from, He's always getting us ready for something else. And so this morning, what we wanna talk about is what is it? What are we designed for, what are we delivered for, and ultimately, what are we destined for? What



does this story look like as it plays itself out? And of course you're in a church, right? You know that, right? It's weird, we got this great coffee shop here, and as I'm getting a feel for things, as I walk around during the week, I've realized there are people who are here walking around with a cup of coffee going, "What is this place? It's good coffee, but what is this place?" And they came here because of the coffee, they didn't realize it was a church. So I'm just checking. Like, you're just like, "These are weird seats for a coffee shop." Okay, you're in a church, so, you know, join the rest of us there. And because you know you're in a church, you kinda know that we, you know, we know the end of the story, right? The end of the story takes us to a place, starts with an "H" ends with an "N", and we call it Heaven, right? But do we know what that really means? I'm not sure that most of us do. In fact, I'm not sure that the way that we've presented Heaven is all that biblical.

I was at a youth conference several years ago and I had a chance in the afternoon to do a tough question seminar, and I basically...I just said, "You can come, you can ask any question you want. I don't promise to have an answer to everything, I'm not that smart, but I'll at least try to help you, you know, maybe give you a few things to help as you think through that question." And there's several hundred students and we had a blast, we went for about an hour. At the end of the hour I said, you know, "It's free time now, you don't want to stay here, but I don't mind sticking around, so if you wanna keep asking questions, we can keep doing that." There were a couple hundreds kids who stayed, and we went through a second hour. In fact, we were most of the way through the third hour, and I finally sorta called things to a halt and I said, "Okay, my turn." And what I wanted to know is this, "Why are so many of your questions about Heaven?" Because it'd been this recurring theme and, like, every question you could imagine about Heaven has been asked. Everything from, "Do I get to climb on the clouds," to "Is my dog gonna be there," and far more profound, but it was just this huge theme of Heaven and I was really intrigued by that.

So I said, "I wanna know, why all the questions about Heaven?" Nobody said anything. So I just sorta let it sit there until it got really uncomfortable. And finally this young lady said, "Okay, I'll go." And she said this as she led, and she said, "Please don't think I'm evil." And my thought was, I didn't. Well I'm gonna back up now, I don't know where this is going. She goes, "Please don't think I'm evil." She goes, "I know..." and you could see the anguish in her face as she shared what was really going on her heart. She said, "I know Heaven's gonna be great, I know it is." She said, "I know the worship's gonna be awesome. I know the..." this is her actual words. She said, "I know the angel band's gonna be kicking." She goes, "It just seems like maybe after awhile, you know, after, like, I don't know, like, a thousand years or so, it might get a little bit." Yeah. She wouldn't say it though. So I had to fill and I said, "Boring?" And let me tell you what every student in that room went, "Uh-huh."

And my heart kinda broke because I realized at that moment that somehow as the church, we failed, because we have told God's story in a way that it not only fails to motivate but in some cases it actually frightens, and that's not the story God tells us. And if you are here this morning and even though you'd never wanna admit it to a whole roomful of church people, if you've ever wondered about this Heaven business and you've thought to yourself, "I know it's gonna be good. I guess when I get there I'll like it," I got good news for you, if you struggle with that thought, you haven't heard the real story. I think most people have this idea and it's interesting, you can talk to people in the church or you can talk to people outside the church and you get basically the same sorta pictures, like, "What do we do?" Well, streets of gold, pearly gates, 24/7 singing. And if we really modernize it, maybe the angels have electric harps, I don't know, but...and I think there's a lot of people who kinda go, "Yeah, lotta singing. I mean, I like singing and I get...hopefully there'll be new songs," right? Like, in my head when I talk to people that have this kinda picture, the song I immediately go back to is the song...it really was one of the very first huge contemporary Christian worship songs, and it was so played, and it was the song "Lord I Lift Your Name On High". Anybody remember that one? If you don't, God bless you. But if you do, you know I'm...it's like we played that thing into the ground.

And I think a lotta people have this sorta picture that, you know, Heaven is everybody's kinda standing around and there's an angel leader going, "Come on everybody, 'Lord I Lift Your Name On High', just one more time." And we're like, "Oh my gosh, I wanna die. But I'm already dead. And there's no way out of it now." Listen, if that's your picture, that's not God story, okay? That is not the picture of the story that God paints for us is of a life that's bigger not smaller, is of a worship that is far more profound and far more varied and creative than what we tend to think of as worship here and now. And the really great news is when you



begin to get a picture of what it is that God has destined us for, we also begin to recognize that we're allowed to start that story right here right now. So what does God say about the end of the story?

Revelation 21 begins this way, "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' because the first Heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." And if you are familiar at all with the way Genesis begins, if you were here a couple weeks ago, you may remember that those words have already been said mostly, right? The first words in Scripture is, "In the beginning, God created," what? "The heavens and the earth." And as we said, that's a big overview statement. It's kind of a way of describing the whole package. It's a way of saying God made what? He made everything. And here what John says is I looked and God made everything new. The only thing that slightly odd is this business about there was no longer any sea. And my understanding is that probably is to be understood figurative. I think there still is an ocean because God makes everything new. The reason it says there is no sea is because in the Book of Revelation, the sea is symbolic for the place from which evil arises. I mean, one of the more vivid images from the Book of Revelation is the beast. And the beast actually...I mean, he's opposed to God's people, he's, you know, he's this instrument of Satan, but the beast rises up, does anybody know where from? Yeah, he rises up from the sea. Consistently in Revelation, the sea is symbolic of the place from which evil arises. And so I think what we're being told here is that place that evil comes from, it's gone.

It's not only that the evil is gone, the source of evil's gone, and so it's never gonna go bad again. It's never gonna turn around. We're never gonna lose track of the story again because the source of it is gone, and God has made it all new. And he says, I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down out of the Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." And that bride is the church, that's us. And I know as a guy, the idea of being compared to a bride is just vaguely uncomfortable, right? But this is God's way of saying, "You're not just a group of people, you're Mine." And it's not just a generalized abstract possession, this is a deeply personal thing. God looks at His people and He says, "You're Mine and I love you, and I'm excited about you, I'm thrilled with you." I remember that moment when I got married, I made a huge mistake, I decided to play a song I'd written for [inaudible 00:12:40] before the ceremony started. Huge mistake. I was playing it and she came out on the balcony in the back of this church and I could see her, and, like, lyrics gone, piano notes gone, but it was replaced by tremendous excitement, like she's my bride, it was an incredible thing. And that's the reason that you get this kind of imagery going on. Jesus looks at His people and He says, "You're Mine," and He's excited, He's thrilled. "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 and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away 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.'"

Remember, if you're here last week, you may remember we talked about that heartbreaking moment where up to that point when God had come into the garden, His children had run towards Him, they'd run for Him. But when sin entered in and that broken relationship happened, when they heard God in the garden, they ran from Him, and how heartbreaking that must've been. But here we see that reversed. God is with His people and there's no longer anybody running from Him, and every tear's wiped away. Anybody here feel like you've had enough of tears? Yeah, they're coming to an end. You have a finite number of tears, you're gonna run out. You might have a few more to shed, but there's a definite cap on the number of tears that you're ever going to cry. "There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, because the old order of things has passed away. And He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' And then He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" And here's the thing, anything that God says, anything that Jesus says is trustworthy and true. Why have to write it down? And their answer is that when God ever says anything about His words like, this is trustworthy, this is true, that's not supposed to cause you to doubt the other thing, it's supposed to make you grab hold of those particular things. It's God's way of saying, "You need to get grip on this one." This is absolute. This is not a possibility, this is not a potential, this is the way it's gonna be, and between here and then, there's gonna be some rough waters. So grab hold of tight to this thing because it will sustain you through this. So these are trustworthy and true words, so grab hold.

"And He said to me: 'It's done. Yeah we're still in process, but it's done. This is the way it's gonna be. I'm the Alpha and the Omega,'" the first and the last letter in the Greek alphabet, which is to say, "The beginning and the End. I'm everything. To the



thirsty, I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all of this, and I'll be their God and they'll be my children. The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all the liars, they will all be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. That's the second death." Two key things here, the first is understand this victorious language. I think when we hear the word "victory", we immediately think of somebody who has worked really hard to do something, and that's not what God is saying here. This victorious language is consistently used in Revelation to talk about those people who hold onto Jesus in spite of the temptation to let go. It's not about people who have done a bunch of good deeds, it's not people who have worked really hard to earn their position in God's Kingdom, it's just the people who have said, "I'm staying in His story. In spite of the temptation to go off and write my own, I'm sticking with Him, I'm holding onto Jesus." Victorious are those who have remained faithful, not people who have conquered, but people who have held tight.

Conversely this other list, the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile and so on, all of those words are used in the Book of Revelation for people who have decided to abandon their hold on Jesus and let go, and they've gotten out of the track of His story and they've gone over to another story because of the pressure that's come in. One of the pressures that was common in that era was that the Roman Empire said, "Hey, you can have your Jesus, that's fine, but you gotta worship the Roman Emperor too." And they would set up the statues. And they said, "If you don't bow down and worship the Roman Emperor, if you don't bow down to this idol, you're not gonna be able to do business. In fact, we might kill you." And that's where the cowardly goes, "Yeah, okay, I'm...I'll let go of this Jesus business and I'll bow down," and that's the idolaters. All those words are used throughout Revelation to talk about people who let go of Jesus when the pressure got intense. Which raises the second important issue, this kind of is you "Choose Your Own Adventure" story. It's just that there's only one path that's gonna lead to a good conclusion. The only way to get to the end of the story and go, "This is a great story," is to cling to Jesus, to stay in His story. There are nearly infinite number of other ways to write your own story, but none of them end well. And that's an understatement. To say they don't end well is a tremendous understatement, even as much as to say that it does end well if you'll stick with Jesus, that's an understatement. The story doesn't just end well if you stick with Jesus, it ends unbelievably.

"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of the seven last plagues he came and he said to me, 'Come, and I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'" I'll show you this church that he's so excited about. "And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high." You gotta get up high to be able to see the fullness of what God's laying out. "And he showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of the Heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with 12 gates, and with 12 angels at the gates. And on the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, three on the west. Wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them with the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. Now the angel who had talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length," which is about 1,400 miles. So it's a good sized city. "And as wide and high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, it was a 144 cubits thick," it's about 200 feet. "The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst." And at this point, I think a natural question is, what am I supposed to do with that, right? I mean, obviously these are all precious materials, they're expensive, but what's the significance of that? And over the years I've heard different people try to ascribe different kinds of significance's to each and every one of these particular kinds of materials, but I think that misses the point.

Here is what I think the point is, this heavenly city, it's the place where the church comes together and God is preparing a place that's off the hook. I mean, the city's got bling, right? Like, it's kinda over the top, it's ridiculous. I mean, He's decorated with every possible thing, and that's the point. The point is that God is going overboard in His excitement in preparing this place, because that's how much He loves us. So it's just...yeah, it's over the top, it's incredible. It's a little bit like, I remember when my kids were little, they're still this way, but my parents, like, kinda went crazy with Christmas because they just bought my kids so



many things. There was just so many gifts, it was embarrassing. They'd send them out early and so then they would pile around this tree and then we would be, like, having people in our house and, like, you could hardly see the tree and it was embarrassing, but it's a little hard. I mean, what are you gonna tell a grandparent? "Hey, stop loving you're grandchildren quite so much." But they couldn't hold it back, they were so excited to be able to give these gifts, and that's a little bit like what's happening here. God, He's going overboard, it's a little crazy, but that's how excited He is about us. See, as we said a couple weeks ago, God always prepares before He populates. But He doesn't just prepare a little stage because He's always got a bigger story, and so He's always preparing this incredible stage so that He can allow us to be part of these incredible things that He's doing, and that kinda thing's going on here.

The city is over the top because God's plans are huge. He's so excited. I mean, you wanna talk about huge, verse 21 says, "The 12 gates were 12 pearls, each made from a single pearl." That's a big pearl. I mean, I kinda wanna see the oyster those came out of, right? I don't know how long it's gonna take, but I'd like...you know, maybe I'll get to do that, like, that is a big oyster. Lord I lift Your name on high. I mean, is there more to the story? Yeah, there's absolutely more to the story. And here's where I think it gets really interesting. It says, "The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." We don't need a special place to go because God is right there. Every time you turn around, there He is. "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." I mean, there are sun and moon, He's made all things new, but you don't even need 'em in that city because the glory of God shines so brightly that it's day all the time. Here's where it really gets interesting to me, though. And here's where I begin to see something in God's Word that I don't think has always been captured in the way that we talk about the ending of the story. It says, "The nations will walk by its light, the kings of the earth bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory in the honor of the nations we brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

It's that verse 24 that really grabbed my attention several years ago and God began to speak a better picture than I had had growing up of what it is that we're destined for. It says, "The nations will walk by its light." The nations will walk away by its light. And you understand that the image we're being given there is that there are nations that are going about their business outside of the city. He says the gates never close, right? And he says nothing impure will ever go into it, but pure things will, and he's describing a life going on outside. There's nations out there, there's kings out there, but there's this constant procession of them coming in and then going back out and coming, and life goes on on a much bigger scale. You know, what's interesting is that when we think about Heaven, everybody says streets of gold and pearly gates and we've got all that, but that's not the new reality, that's just the heavenly city. It's the center of life but life is played out on a much bigger scale than that. The nations walk by its light. He says the kings...

Okay, I'm gonna geek out on you for just a second here, okay? Yeah, like, what are you gonna do, right? Almost every English translation adds a word here, then...and that word is "will". Almost every English translation says, "And the kings will bring," but the Greek is actually not a future tense, the Greek is actually a present tense. He literally says, "The kings bring." Now why would you use a present tense? Because clearly he's describing something in the future, so why would you use a present tense verb? And the answer is...I think is this. The Greek future tense is a little ambiguous in that there is the great future tense says it's gonna happen but it doesn't tell you is it gonna happen once or twice or over and over again. It just says it's in the future. The Greek present tense always talks about something that is ongoing. And so I think the reason that the present tense is used here, it's clearly in the future, but he uses the present tense as a way of saying this is not a thing that happens once. It's not the kings come in and they lay their treasure down there like, "Okay, Lord I lift Your name on high. Which verse are we on? Okay." And it's not gonna happen once, it's not gonna happen twice, it's gonna be a constant ongoing process of the kings coming in, bringing their treasures before God.

That's the new normal, it's the new reality which raises, I think, two questions, number one, who are these kings? And there's two options and I'm not entirely sure which one it is. One option is these are followers of Jesus who have been tremendously faithful



and they've been given a privileged position in the new creation, and certainly where we have that kind of teaching that would allow for that, Jesus said if you're faithful with the little, you'll be given responsibility over much. So it could well be that these are Christians who, because of their faithfulness, are given privileged positions. A number of scholars, and I actually include myself among this camp, also believe that it could well be that the kings here is all of us. It's all human beings, it's a little...the language is not quite inclusive. So it's kings and queens. And then you go, "Well, why would God use that language to talk about me?" Because He already has.

When we go back to Genesis and when we unpack what it means to be made as the image of God, there's a certain royalty into that language. To be the representatives of God, to be the people who are supposed to manifest God's presence in creation, accomplish His purposes and His will, there's a certain royalty to that. And a number of scholars think that this kings language here may be picking up on that language of all human beings. So this could well be every single one of us. All of us come in, and when we lay our splendor before God, and that's the second question we gotta answer, which is what's the splendor business? I mean, what are you gonna bring God? I mean, the city's already done, right? I mean, the streets are all paved, it's not like there's alleyways inside the city that still haven't been covered over so you gotta bring Him some more gold, right? It's already... it's blinged out as much as it's gonna get. Why would you bring Him...what are you gonna bring Him? And I think what we're supposed to understand is that we're bringing Him on and on and on over and over and over again for the rest of eternity is the things that we do that bring Him glory. We're gonna bring Him all the ways that we have served Him, all the ways that we've worked to bring Him glory in this creation.

Remember, this is the language that we get in Genesis. This is what we're made for, what we were designed for, it's what Jesus delivered us for, and now is what we're destined for, an eternity of doing what God made us for, which is bringing Him glory in the creation and getting to come back and share with Him what we've done. The only way I can picture this is...in modern language is what John is saying is that right there in the city, there's Jesus on the throne, and right beside the throne is a gigantic refrigerator. Do you need a little more? Yeah? Do you remember when you were little and you did something good, you drew your mom a picture or you wrote your dad a poem, you did good on the test and you bring it home you go, "Mom, I got something for you." What did she do with it? It's going on refrigerator. That seems to be the picture that John is painting here, that we get in line. I hate lines generally, but I'm gonna be okay with this one. We wait our turn to give Jesus what we've done for Him. And we move our way up and we, "What you bringing Him? That's cool. It's not as cool as what I got, but it's cool." And at some point we get to the end and some point we're in front of Jesus and at that moment, I mean, we probably freeze, right? "Hey." Stupid. Jesus just smiling, and He goes, "You got something there for Me?" "Oh, yeah. Do you wanna go? Okay. Yeah, I did this for You." "You did this for Me?" "Yeah, I thought you might like it." "Yeah, I don't like this, I love this. You did this for me?" "Yeah, I did." "I love this. Did you guys see this? You know where this is going." And everybody in the line goes, "That's cool."

You know, and you just...you have that moment with Jesus because, "I...thank you. This is exactly why I designed you. It's exactly why I delivered you. Man, well done, this is awesome. You have anything else for Me?" "No. I mean, I had this thing I was thinking about doing for You, but honestly it'd take, like, a thousand years. I'll be back, I'll be back." This is the picture John's...it's...this is not 24/7 Lord I lift Your name on high worship, this is worship on the scale that God intended it to be in the beginning, okay? This is worship on a scale that bigger than we can even imagine. It's not life that's smaller, it's life that's bigger, if we'll stay in the story. This is what we were designed and delivered and destined for. This is the wonder of the story that we're talking about in the series, that God has designed, delivered, and destined us for an eternity of significance as participants in His story. I don't know about you, this is a picture from God's Word that I can get behind. I can go, "Sign me up. Let me be a part of that. Yeah, you're talking about something I absolutely do not wanna miss out on." I'm not sure about the 24/7 Lord I lift Your name on high stuff. Unfortunately, that's not what God says is coming. This is a story I want to see through to the end, this is a story that I will hold onto no matter what the world says. This is a story that will change my here and now. This is a story that we get to participate in here and now. It starts here and now.

God has designed, delivered, and destined you for an eternity of significance as a participant in His story. We get to start it now and we get to do it forever in ways that just get better and better and better. Three things to help kind of unpack a question.



And the one question is this, how now shall we live? That's the key question. If this is what we were designed, delivered, and destined for, what do we start doing right now? And three questions, three things to wrestle with as we close this out. Question number one is just this, are you in the right story? Are you in His story? Are you clinging to His storyline? Because it's the only one that ends well. And again, well is a dramatic understatement, in the same way that all the other stories do not end well, and that's a dramatic understatement. Are you in His story? Are you in a relationship with God that's leading to this destiny because you put faith in the blood of Jesus that was shed for you to forgive you for your sins and to bring you back into His story? Are you in that story? And if you're not, you need to change that today. In a few minutes, they'll be some people up here, and if you're not sure what it looks like to be in His story, they would love to talk to you about that, take advantage of it.

The second thing you gotta wrestle with is just this, am I part of the story? Because this is a story that's not just waiting, it's a story that's already being told. Right now we can live in such a way that we go to God on some distant future moment and we're able to lay splendors that we've already been collecting. Right here, right now, you're collecting the things that you get to put in His hands and see thrown up on that refrigerator. Right here, right now, you're in the process of already doing that, or you could be. So are you part of the story? Are you waiting? What are you waiting for?

The third thing is you need to be telling the story. There's only one story that ends well, there's an infinite number that end very, very poorly. Most people don't know. They don't know the story. This is what I'd like you to do, if you'll humor me for a moment. There's a couple things I'd love you to put in your hands right now, one of them is this "Life Center" card, if you'd grab that. The other is in the seats in front of you, or if you're in the front row, maybe some people behind you can hand you. There's this "Step Into The Story" card.

As we conclude our Wonder series, I just wanna take a few moments right now to give you the opportunity to push in to what God's saying, and maybe to communicate what God is already stirred up in you. And that "Step Into The Story" card, if God has moved you in some way over these last few weeks and maybe you made a decision to get into His story, to trust Jesus as Savior, we would love to know about that, so we can come alongside you and help you figure out what it looks like to start participating in the story. So if you would fill out the personal information and if you trusted Jesus over the last few weeks, we would love to hear about that. If you'd like to talk to your pastor, you can choose that. Maybe from last week you made a major decision to own something about the story you've been writing so that you can disown it and get back onto His story, and if you want some prayer for that, we'd love to hear about it. And again, if you give us personal information, we would love to come alongside you. If you wanna leave it anonymous but just let us know I made the decision about this, we would still be praying for you, just not quite as personally. But if you prefer to remain anonymous, that's fine.

Maybe you're feeling, "Yeah, I need to get involved in the story," and last week we talked about kids ministry is a huge need, huge need in kids ministry. In fact, I know some of you're in this morning with children that you try to check in because...and you're here because those rooms are full, I don't know what to do about that, we're gonna work on that, but sometimes we have to turn kids away because we don't have enough volunteers. And last week they asked, we said we need 75 new volunteers because we got a thousand kids a week, that they're able to tell the story to, that they're able to pour into. And, you know, they were they were hoping for 75. I'm thinking we should shoot for 200. I'm thinking there should be a waiting list because this is an amazing opportunity to pour into kids' lives and help them figure out what it means to be part of the story. So if last week you heard that and you're thinking maybe, maybe not, you know who you are, the answer is yeah. Check that, and make sure you fill out the personal information so we can follow-up with you. We'll make it easy. Don't check "I wanna help with the kids ministries," and leave it anonymous, because that's cheap.

Maybe God's calling you to serve in some other way and we'd love to hear about that. One of those ways is we've already talked about is this life center, an incredible life-giving place. And if you wanna participate in the story and have an opportunity to tell people the story, this is a tremendous opportunity. They told me they were kinda hoping for maybe 20, 30 volunteers, and I said, "You're not hoping nearly high enough. Let's shoot for 300." Be sure you fill that card out if God's working on you. What we love for you to do is fill out these cards and on your way out this morning, drop 'em in the basket. And we're gonna pray over



'em, we'll get back in touch with you if there's anything that we can do for you. You can also take this "Life Center" card back to Mauricio who's at the booth out there. Don't miss an opportunity to respond to what God might have been storing up in you over the last few weeks.

Would you pray with me? God, thank you for this incredible story. Thank you for allowing us to participate in it. Thank you for this incredible gift. Help us to find the courage to stay in Your story and to find the good that we crave. Give us the courage to become participants in Your story in whatever ways You're leading us to right now, in Jesus' name, amen.

