

Sermon

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Text: Rev 21, 1-7

topic “Dream on dreamer, ... your time will come...”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Berlin Wall”

by the South African artist Johnny Clegg

published in 1987

Welcome to my Island.

Please don't stay too long

I wouldn't want anybody to think that something's going on

toe the line and you'll be fine

you'll see another day

don't connect, don't reflect, just fetch your weekly pay

Oh sister don't you feel

what I know inside my bones

I meet you on the underground and we'll make a call on the phone.

Berlin Wall can you hear this call for one world, one nation

who can it be banging at my door

can't trust anyone anymore

I drink my beer in a state of fear

is there no salvation

wire on the gate, barbs of hate to separate one nation.”

In 1987 the South African Johnny Clegg wrote these lyrics. His words describe the bleak situation in his home country in the late eighties: People of different races were separated by Apartheid law. Contact between the races was kept to a minimum and was regulated by paragraphs. To be seen with a person of another race for too long by the wrong people was dangerous. You ran the risk of being arrested. So people invented all kind of ways to meet up in secret. How do you really relate to one another under such circumstances? How do you deal with such pressure?

If you have been to South Africa in those days, if you lived in any of the countries behind the Iron Curtain or visited there, you know how the relationship of people was put under much constraint by these political circumstances. Families and close friends were separated. Suspicion, distrust and fear ruled people's relationships. When our friends in East Germany wanted to speak openly to us, we had to go for walks in the nearby vineyard. That way they made sure that no one else could listen in on our private conversation. Looking back, it seems as if it was a completely different world that we used to live in only slightly more than 15 years ago.

If you recall your own memories, your thoughts and feelings of those years, you will also recall the hopelessness of the situation: “Is there no salvation?”, as Johnny Clegg puts it.

Then, all of a sudden, to everyone’s surprise, Mandela was released from prison, the Berlin Wall came down, the Iron Curtain fell. The next day, the following weekends, Trabis and Wartburgs, cars from Eastern Germany drove past just outside this very church. I remember how I took a different way to school so that I could see it with my own eyes. It was so unreal that I did not want to just watch it on TV. Do your memories of those days still send a shiver down your spine, too? It was emotionally so overwhelming: A vision, a dream that only few people had dared to keep on dreaming came true. It happened right here, 15 years ago. - - -

Unfortunately, it did not take long and the hopes and aspirations for a new, peaceful world order, a united nation in Germany and South Africa turned into disappointment and bitter frustration. The necessary social changes did not keep up with the radical political changes. As early as 1993 the South African Johnny Clegg published another song. It is called “Your time will come” and deals with that disappointment. The chorus says: “Kuzolunga – ukuthi nini? Asazi! Kuzolunga wena ‘mngane wami” Everything will be alright – it is just when this will be – we cannot know. Everything will come right, I tell you my friend.” The song ends with the lines:

“I saw the Berlin Wall fall
 I saw Mandela walk free
 I saw a dream whose time has come
 change my history.
 So keep on dreaming. Dream on dreamer,
 In the best of times and in the worst of times
 gotta keep looking at the skyline
 not at the hole in the road
 Your time will come, sister, your time will come.
 Nobody gonna rush history, we have to ease it along, ...”

In the sight of all the present difficulties Johnny Clegg encourages his listeners to draw their strength from their past experience and their persistence from the focus on the broad perspective: “In the best of times and in the worst of times gotta keep looking at the skyline not at the hole in the road.”

It is that very perspective that John wanted to draw the Christians’ attention to when he wrote the Book of Revelation to the Christian congregations in Asia Minor: Don’t focus on your difficulties right now, on the persecution you have to suffer under the Roman Cesar Domitian, but keep in mind that a New Heaven and a New Earth awaits us! It’s the skyline of the New Jerusalem that John wants to put in front of their eyes so that they don’t have to keep looking at the many holes caused by suffering and persecution on the road of their Christian walk. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” (V.1)

If you are suffering under the current circumstances of your life, such a promise might sound too good to be true. How often do we wish that we could have a brand new start in life when we have really messed it up or when circumstances seem unbearable? Maybe you have been disappointed so often by other people's dreams and visions for a bright future that you think to yourself: Come on, be realistic, and don't conjure up your own ideas to comfort me.

John, however, is not a dreamer who wants to comfort us with his own hopes and dreams of a new world. John reminds the Christians of the visions that God gave to his people Israel through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more."

These are the words of the prophet Isaiah that John wanted to bring to his readers' attention again: Remember God's promises from long ago. Even though you are suffering right now, there is hope that things will change, for we have God's promise for a new world. It is God's vision for a new heaven and a new earth that you can trust and find your comfort in— not my own ideas. It is God's aim for his dealing with us that we will one day live in a new world, in His new world with Him. HE will, thereby, put an end to our search and longing for a new world order that is just and fair for all. That New Heaven and New Earth cannot be corrupted by man again and disappoint us because it is God's doing.

That New World will be so radically different that Isaiah and John could only try to describe it by using various images, like the one of the bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Looking at people's needs and experience in this world, Isaiah and John could give hints of what it could be like, when everything is made new: "God himself will be with them and be their God. 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."

Our human language and mental capacity are still so limited, so much of this world that we can only think of the New Heaven and the New Earth in these contrasts, in what it will *not* be like: "...no more death or mourning or crying or pain," for everything will be made new. We cannot fathom what it will be like or how it will possibly come true, yet we long for such a world without tears and pain, even without death.

How can we trust that this vision will come true? John does not provide us with any evidence, he gives no explanations, he simply states: That's what it will be like.

In a way, however, that's exactly how we comfort one another, too, and how we are comforted ourselves. Remember a situation when you last have been comforted. What did you find your comfort in? It is not wise explanations, it is not intelligent arguments, and it does not help when someone tells me: "You don't have to feel sad, because ..." No, it is comforting when someone turns to you, hugs you and wipes away your tears. It is that closeness of another person that is often much more than mere words, sometimes goes without words at all.

Remember your childhood days: Looking back, we prefer to remember the wonderful times, the fun and joys we had. Yet, there were also many occasions when we felt sad, were fearful and disappointed. How wonderful, if you had parents who would then hug you and say: “Everything will be alright. We are there for you.”

That was and is truly comforting. Such support encourages and brings new hope, even though the circumstances stay the same and there is no reasonable proof for the truth of the promise “Everything will be alright”. Yet these words help to lift one’s spirit, when we know that we can trust the person who told us so. Having such childhood memories, having friends who support us in such a tender way, also enables us to learn to trust in a loving God who wants to comfort us with His words of promise, the promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Yet, we are not little children anymore. We have experienced enough of this world ourselves or learned of the pain and the suffering of others, that we don’t want any cheap comfort. Especially if you mourn for a loved one and feel the heaviness of grief, it is hard to simply put our trust in such promises. Still, even as adults, we need a trustworthy hope; otherwise, we cannot keep a positive outlook on life, in the midst of all our experience. That lack of hope is, I believe, one of the reasons why so many share a negative and depressing view on life in our society today.

Just as Johnny Clegg draws on his past experience of visions come true to encourage his fellow South Africans, in the same way the Apostle John reminds first century Christians that they have already seen part of the vision come true: God has already begun to live amongst us: In Jesus God came to live amongst us. In Jesus God shared our human pain and suffering. He knows the taste of tears and he knows the sadness of the mourning for a loved one. The one who promises to wipe away our tears is the same one who has mourned for his friend Lazarus, who then conquered death by suffering death on the cross for us and rising from the grave on the third day. Therefore, HE will not take our tears lightly nor comfort us lightly, for HE knows what HE is talking about.

That’s why we can trust HIS word of promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

Such a vision still sounds too good to be true and it is still hard to keep hanging on to it in our everyday life. But did not many of us also think that the Berlin Wall would never fall, that the Iron Curtain would never come down? Yet:

“We saw the Berlin Wall fall

we saw Mandela walk free

we saw a dream whose time has come change our history.

So keep on dreaming. Dream on dreamer,

In the best of times and in the worst of times

gotta keep looking at the skyline of the New Jerusalem

not at the hole in the road of your walk of life.

God’s time will come, brothers and sisters, our time will come. ...”

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**