



Part 43 – “Behold, I Am Making All Things New”

Revelation 21:1-8

Six times in Chapters 19 and 20, John uses the words “Then I saw.” Now for the seventh time, beginning in Chapter 21, he uses the same words, “Then I saw,” to introduce what is set before him: “A new heaven and a new earth.” All that has been building in Chapters 19 and 20 (and, indeed throughout Revelation) is now brought to completion with John’s vision of the new creation. It is not too much of a stretch to say that the

key idea of this passage, and all the way through to the end of the book, may be summed up in one word: “New.”

The Heart of God’s Covenant...

The final two chapters of the Book of Revelation bring us to the great end for which God’s covenant of grace was designed. We can fairly sum up the substance of the covenant of grace with three words: *People*, *Place*, and *Presence*. God promised to make for himself a people, to give them a place, and to be present with them there. We see this pattern from the time God originally ratified his covenant of grace with Abraham, in the ways he further illuminated those promises through his covenants with Moses and David. He then fulfilled those promises through Christ and will bring about the final consummation of those promises in the new creation. The Lord makes us his people. He gives us a place. And he promises to us his everlasting blessed presence. As the passage unfolds, you will see how each of these covenant promises are fulfilled.

People, Place, and Presence

Vs. 1 – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” – Often what Christians mean when we talk about heaven is the reality promised here of “a new heaven and a new earth.” The future for God’s people is not some sort of gauzy life among the clouds with harps in hand. Rather, the eternal and blessed home of God’s people is a fully embodied physical reality in a world that, in many ways, will be familiar to us.

John sees that “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” This echoes God’s promise through Isaiah: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17; cf. 66:22). The “former things,” are all the sins and sorrows that belong to our fallen world. The sea that is taken away symbolizes all of the chaos and wickedness that characterized the fallen creation (it does not mean that there will be no bodies of water in the new creation).

Vs. 2 – “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” – Notice how John states that “the holy city, new Jerusalem” is “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” This language is descriptive of the church. Elsewhere in Scripture, the church is compared to or described as a city. Similarly, the Bible uses rich language to link together the church and Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23). This is further confirmed in verses 9 and 10 where John is told by an angel, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” At that moment, John is carried away in the spirit and shown “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven...” So “the holy city, new Jerusalem” that John sees is symbolic of the church in all her glory in the age to come.¹

Vs. 3 – “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’” – This declaration serves as a sort of organizing statement for everything the Scriptures promise. From Genesis Chapter 3 onward, the Bible seeks to address fallen humanity’s most fundamental dilemma: How can sinners dwell in the presence of God? God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants was, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” It is a promise repeated many times in the Bible (Jeremiah 31:31ff; Ezekiel 37:27; Zechariah 8:8; Leviticus 26:12). For God to be our God and for us to be his people is biblical shorthand for everything the Scriptures mean by salvation. For all the innumerable blessings there, the greatest blessing of the new creation will be the presence of God. The tabernacle and temple were faint signs pointing to the eternal communion we will share with God in the age to come.

¹ This view is found among the church fathers and is the consensus among Reformed scholars as well.

Vs. 4 – “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” – It is likely not possible to describe the perfections of the new creation apart from negation – describing it by what it is *not*. Nevertheless, what a tender scene is captured in these words. This world is a veil of tears, but when our Redeemer comes he will remove all things that, in this life, have been the cause of mourning and sorrow and pain. Death, “the last enemy,” will be cast away. No more hospitals. No more funerals. No cemeteries. Nothing reminiscent of decay and death shall be present in the new creation.

Vs. 5 – “And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new...’ – Notice that God does not promise to make *all new things*. Rather he is “making all things new.” Think of this not as a total annihilation of the old creation but an act of Divine purification, a complete renewal from top to bottom, to the extent that everything in the entire cosmos, including its inhabitants, will be new. “God does not negate what he made, even though Satan pockmarked it by sin... God is not going to destroy what he made. He loves his creation; he loves our bodies and souls.”² God will purify the first creation, not obliterate it. Peter connects the destruction of the world during the flood with the destruction of the world by fire at the end of the age. It seems best then to understand the fire referred to by Peter as not a means of total annihilation but of purification, just as was the case with the flood (2 Peter 3:4-7).

The new creation will not be an entirely alien thing to us. Along with the glorious discontinuity between this world and the new creation, there will also be a blessed continuity. That is, the good things that we love so much about this world will be translated into the new creation. What will be missing is all sin, death, and decay; all sorrow, pain, and loss. The Lord will make the entire cosmos new. We are not his partners in renewing all things. This is God’s sovereign work to be done at the end of the age.

Vs. 6 – “And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.’ – In 1:8 the Lord identifies himself as the *Alpha and Omega*. These statements form what scholars refer to as an *inclusio*. Think of book ends that remind us that God is both the beginning, as the creator of heaven and earth, and the end as the one who brings all things to their conclusion and fulfillment.³ God is Lord over all time and space from beginning to end. Therefore, he can stake his very name upon saving every sinner who thirsts.

Vs. 7 – “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” – Take note that in the final clause of verse six. It is a beautiful depiction of the way that God saves sinners. We come to him having nothing to offer save our thirst. All we have is lack, need, and insufficiency. We are those whom Jesus describes as “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). It is to impoverished and thirsty sinners that God promises to give “from the spring of the water of life without payment” (vs. 6c). These same individuals are the very ones who will conquer; who will endure to the end.

In the end, John’s vision tells us very little about what the new creation will look like. Perhaps this is because it will be very much like the first creation except without sin, decay, and death. John’s vision places the accent on the character and experience of those who will be welcomed into this new eternal home. In terms of their character, John describes those welcomed into the new creation very much like he describes those in chapters two and three who persevere through trials and persecution. In these ways John is merely describing Christians, the followers of Jesus. They are the thirsty who turn to Jesus for the water of life. They are the redeemed who persevere through trials because they have set their eyes “on the glory that is to be revealed” (Romans 8:18).

Vs. 8 – In a final warning, John identifies those whose destiny is one of utter loss and tragedy. He offers a “vice list” in order to remind us that the innocent will not suffer the sorrows of hell, and it is a list of sins that encompass the range of human iniquities. No one is exempt entirely. But the second death belongs to those who preferred sin to salvation. These are those who had a real taste for poison over the water of life.

“The vision will eventually complete the urgent challenge that John has set out from the very beginning to those in the assemblies of the seven cities (and with them, all Christians contemporary with John and then all those sharing with him the in-between times until Jesus’ return): the decision to choose between life and death.”⁴

² Douglas Kelly, *Revelation* (Edinburgh: Christian Focus, 2012) p. 400

³ Richar Baukham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 26-27

⁴ Ian Paul, *Revelation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018) p. 347