

The New Heavens and Earth

Revelation 21:1–8

Studies in Revelation #28

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Here we go! We've reached the end of Revelation. And in the next three sermons we'll meditate upon the final two chapters as they present us visions of a new heavens and earth, a new Jerusalem, and a new Garden.

After all God has given to Jesus to give to an angel to give to John to give to us, we come to this glorious climax. What have we seen so far? To put it in personal terms, we've seen how weak and sinful we truly are. As pastors and elders we've been warned that if we don't step up and protect you from false doctrine and sinful living, Jesus will remove the light of his Spirit from us. As Christians we've been warned not to give up our confession of Jesus regardless of the threats of the devil, who uses the power of persecuting government as his spokesman and henchman. As Christians we've been warned not to be of the world called Babylon even though we live in the world. Whether you realize it or not there is a real spiritual struggle for your soul!

And now we are given a vision of what awaits us who persevere in faith against all the assaults of the Dragon, his beasts, and Babylon. Philosophers describe it in terms of three great questions: who am I, where did I come from, where am I going? Our lives were made to go somewhere, to move towards a purpose, and here it is:

- 1. Its Newness Imagined***
- 2. Its Newness Inhabited***
- 3. Its Newness Inherited***

Its Newness Imagined

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). That’s how the Bible opens up. Here we read how it closes up in its final scene: **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away** (v. 1). The new heavens and earth. See here *its newness imagined*. All things were made upright. Then all things fell because of Adam’s sin. In the end, all things will be repaired. Creation was marred by rebellion by shall be what God intended through restoration.

The big question is whether all things being made new means renovation or annihilation and re-creation? I believe God’s Word teaches that the God who created all things with the goal of enjoying fellowship with him means that despite sin’s temporary frustration of that goal God will reverse the curse. Paradise lost will become Paradise regained. The word John uses for **new** (*kainon*) means new in comparison to what is old; new in comparison to what is obsolete. The **new heaven** and **new earth** are new in quality, not kind. They are of the same genus—earth—but a new species—**new heaven** and **new earth**.

Let me give you two biblical analogies to the **new heaven** and **new earth**. First, *the heavens and earth are made new like we are made new when we are born again*. Jesus has made us a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). His re-creating us is mirrored in the new creation. Just as we are renewed from the old nature, and not created *ex nihilo*, so too this creation will be renewed—the new from the old, the old into the new. Jesus himself, in fact, calls the period of time in which he returns “the regeneration” (Matt. 19:28). Second, *the heavens and earth are made new like Jesus was made new when he rose again*. Jesus’

death and resurrection are like an old creation and new creation (cf. Col. 1:15–20). In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says that Jesus is last Adam in contrast to the first Adam; he is the man from heaven in contrast to the man from the dust; and just as his earthly body was transformed into a spiritual body, so too it will be with the new creation.

Children, think about a caterpillar with me. What does a caterpillar become? It becomes a butterfly. But a butterfly doesn't look like a caterpillar; it looks like a completely new creature. They are the same, but they are different, aren't they? Or think about the diamond ring that most married women wear in our culture. Where does a diamond come from? It comes from something like black coal. Or think of a lemon seed. If you plant it what does it become? An entire lemon tree!

Let me illustrate this with one last Bible passage. Turn to Romans 8:18–25. The parallel is between the liberty of both the sons of God and the physical creation; thus, as it will be with one, so it will be with the other. As we groan under “the sufferings of this present time” (Rom. 8:18) so too the creation was subjected to futility so that it too “groans and labors with birth pangs” (Rom. 8:22). But the created realm was “subjected in hope” (Rom. 8:20), and that hope is to be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:21). It is *this* creation that was subjected to futility in hope, and it will be *this* creation that is given liberty along with the sons of God.

And John imagines this newness in that little phrase, **and the sea was no more** (v. 1). As we've seen before the sea is an Old Testament image for the powers that come

against the Lord and his people, which we saw in chapter 13 as the place from which the Dragon's beast comes.

Its Newness Inhabited

The second thing I want you to see about this new heavens and earth is *its newness inhabited*. To do this, think about all the imperfections of the churches we saw in chapters 1–3. Are you tired of your sin nature that causes you to actually sin? Are you tired of fighting with your fellow Christians? Are you tired of that feeling you get in serving Jesus' church only to step back and see how much more there is to do, but you feel helpless? Well, the new heaven and new earth needs inhabitants and John says they are you: **And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband** (v. 2). Literally, new Jerusalem is from heaven, from God. What is it? Better, who is it?

Go back to 3:12 where you see the overcomers *themselves* will be pillars in the temple of God. Go back to 19:7–8 where the marriage supper of the Lamb is described. The bride, we are told, “has prepared herself,” being adorned in fine linen. This image of fine linen is then explained for us in the next phrase: “for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” This language is reflected here in verse 2 as **the holy city, new Jerusalem was prepared, as a bride adorned for her husband**. Note that the city is described with the simile **as** and described in feminine terms: **a bride adorned for her husband**.

So what will inhabit the new heaven and new earth? Even more accurately, who will inhabit it? The bride of Jesus Christ, his church.

Jesus assures you today, if you are a believer, that he has gone to prepare a place for you in that new creation.

Jesus offers you a place in that new creation today, if you have not yet believed.

Its Newness Inherited

Note finally *its newness inherited*. Children, what is an “inheritance?” It’s when our grandma or grandpa or mom or dad dies. When that happens we get really sad. But one of the ways they show you how much they care about you is to leave something for you. Sometimes it’s a special picture, or a ring, or some money, or even a house. Imagine the biggest house you’ve ever seen. Jesus is saying to you today that the inheritance that he has given you is more than you can ever imagine.

What is the inheritance of the inhabitants of the new creation? First, *the presence of God*: **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”** (v. 3). This was the goal of all the physical dwelling places of the Lord throughout history, whether tabernacle or temple. And this is the blessing of those dwelling places: face-to-face, intimate, and personal fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer. And one of the beautiful things about God’s presence in the new creation is that it’s not just with the descendants of Abraham. When we read **He will dwell with them, and they will be his people**, the word **people** is literally *peoples*. The

ultimate promises of the gospel are for every kind of people, whether black or white, whether rich or poor, whether you're from uptown, downtown, or across town! God's promise to Abraham that in him "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3) comes to its greatest fulfillment in the new creation.

What is the inheritance of the inhabitants of the new creation? Second, *restored life*: "**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**" (v. 4). No more death! No more sorrow! No more heartache! No more tears!

And it's not just the absence of death. There is the presence of life. What is the inheritance of the inhabitants of the new creation? Third, *the fullness of grace*: **To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment** (v. 6). The Old Testament looks forward to a time in which God would give freely, generously, liberally from his stream of life (Pss. 36:9; 42:1; 46; 63:1) since he is the fountain of life (Ps. 36:9; Jer. 2:13). By including that little phrase **without payment** John clues us that this image comes from Isaiah 55:1, where the prophet spoke of receiving God's grace freely:

Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Conclusion

Such beautiful good news, isn't it? "But why does it end on such a negative note?" **But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death** (v. 8). The new life that awaits us in the new creation is a new life that changes us now. If you are feeling a sense of remorse right now for how you live your life, that is God calling you to repentance and faith. That's God calling you to turn away from your sins and to turn to him for mercy and grace. If you do, he will make you a new creation now so that you will have a place in the new creation to come.

"These words are trustworthy and true" (v. 5).