



“I Am Making All Things New”

Series: The Wonder of Worship

Revelation 21:1-8

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

Well, beloved, here we are – the last sermon in our Worship Series. Only it’s not. I realized as I was studying and then as I was writing the sermon for this morning that I had bitten off more than I could chew. So this is actually the next-to-last or maybe the next-to-next-to last sermon in the worship series. We will just have to wait to see, but this text that we are looking at today begins to answer the questions of: “Where is all of this heading? What is God in Christ saving His people for? Why is He pursuing and redeeming, rescuing and transforming sinners and rebels into worshippers of God? How does this all end for the people of God?” These are great questions and they are questions that are woven into the human soul.

Eternity in Our Hearts

In the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3 and verse 11, we read: **“(God) has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, ESV)** God has put the desire for something more, something beyond this sin-ridden world into the heart of every man. It is woven in the heart and the mind of man, even though it has been stained and tainted by the fall. There is something in the heart of man that knows there is something better than what we see – a longing for something better. That’s the reason for this Utopian desire in man’s heart - -this thought that somehow we can make a better world, a perfect world, Utopia – now what that would look like varies from person to person based upon what they most desire in their hearts. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Hitler, Lenin, John Lennon, Hugh Hefner, Oprah Winfrey, Barak Obama, your neighbor, the guy at the gas station or WalMart, the philosopher – ask any of them and their vision of Utopia would vary immensely. It would include everything from totalitarianism, perversion, ethnic cleansing, living for the moment, Muslim domination, just making enough money to get by, or some vision of a world with really no meaning at all – Utopia. And yet, here’s the thing, despite man’s desire and yearning for some kind of Utopia, **he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.** Fallen man is

ignorant, he cannot comprehend, cannot accomplish, cannot bring about in his own power – that is the idea of “find out” what God has already ordained from beginning to end. He cannot do what only God can do.

Here’s the ironic thing in all of this. The word Utopia, used to speak of the perfect city, the perfect world that man creates by his power and will– ironically enough – comes from two Greek words that mean “no place.” Utopia doesn’t exist. And no amount of social engineering or application of human wisdom or power can create it. Utopia is “no place.” That’s true – one man’s Utopia is another man’s hell.

But, here in chapters 21-22, we are given a vision of God’s perfect world, the renovated, redeemed and glorious eternity of joy and wholeness, of gladness and glory, of worship and fellowship with God and His Christ and with all the saints, a vision of that which God has prepared for those who love Him because He has loved them first and saved them By the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Lamb of God and Lion of Judah. Here we have a vision of the glorious eternity that awaits the children of God. And it is breathtaking.

After describing His visions of God’s wrath against unbelief, His vindication of His glory and of His saints, the revelation of Christ in all of His glory, splendor, majesty and power, the description of the eternal judgment of world of men – Babylon the great – the very embodiment of worldliness and godlessness, of immorality, of the united rebellion and opposition of fallen mankind against the Sovereign rule of God, and the casting of the beast, the false prophet, the great dragon, Satan, and all unbelievers into the Lake of Fire, into the eternal and inescapable hell of God’s fury and punishment – after describing all of this, John now describes the beauty and the glory of eternity.

After taking us through redemptive history, the war for worship, after showing us the triumph of the Lamb of God through his atoning death and resurrection, after showing us Christ’s ultimate display of glory and power as He makes the full expression of His might and glory in crushing and judging His enemies and the enemies of His gospel and of His people, this vision of John takes us beyond the Day of Christ’s glorious appearing and His judgment of His enemies to gaze upon what lies ahead for the people of God. He gives us a vision of all things made new. And like I said before, it is breathtaking. Look with me at

The New Heaven and The New Earth (1) And let me just say that as we are reading John's words, understand that he is not seeking to give us a systematic exposition of the glories of heaven – this is John, not Paul. No, instead he is just telling us what he sees. He is trying to explain the wonder he beholds. He wants to stir in our hearts awe and wonder, to fuel our Scripture-drenched imaginations as to what lies before us. Look, starting in verse 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.”*** (Revelation 21:1, ESV)

How are we to understand this? What's this look like? We don't have any frame of reference for this except the present heaven and earth. But that's ok, because what John is speaking of here is not a replacement heaven and earth, but one that is new – not in time, as if it has just been created by God and never had been in existence before, but rather, as this specific Greek word for “new” indicates – new in quality, new in character, new in essence, new in its glory. The idea is not that God has just scrapped the previous heaven and earth, but that He has renewed, transformed, and converted the old heaven and earth that had been corrupted by sin. Think of it like our resurrection bodies. Paul wrote of them: ***“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:42–44, ESV) We are raised from the dead in a bodily form, changed in an instant, given a body that is fit for eternity, but it is a body that in some way approximates our body now. So this is a new kind of heaven and earth that in some way, a renewal and transformation, that in some way is related to but is immeasurably more glorious than the one we see now. God will transform the creation so that it reflects its intended glory and magnificence, but with one difference – no sea.

What is that about? In Revelation, the sea represents the place from which the beast rose to bring forth mayhem and destruction upon the earth and so this reference to no sea seems to be a reference to the unchanging and immutable glory of this new heaven and earth. This absence of a sea indicates the absence of any threat to this new creation being corrupted by sin ever again. From this we turn to the picture of

The New Jerusalem (2-6) John continues saying: ***“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”***

(Revelation 21:2, ESV) The last picture we saw of the church back in chapter 19, of the bride of Christ, was that of a multitude but now the picture of the church is a holy city – the new Jerusalem, a holy community, not individuals. What’s behind this change in picture? There is no private heaven, no individualistic existence in eternity – but a community of the redeemed. Do you see it? The New Jerusalem is not composed of individuals, not a loose confederation of people, but is a holy COMMUNITY. More than that, it comes down out of heaven. Eternal paradise is not the Utopian fantasy of men, not achieved by what man did at the tower of Babel, reaching up into the heavens to make some glorious monument to man. The renewed and redeemed Paradise comes down from God – it is the work of His hands. It stands in direct contrast to the city of man, to Babel and Nineveh and ancient Babylon and Rome, and to Babylon the great, the prostitute of John’s vision. The beauty of the New Jerusalem, now adorned for her bridegroom, Christ, completely and totally transcends anything that the city of man can offer.

And we are given this sense, in the new Jerusalem being unfolded from heaven, that no more is there a separation between heaven and earth, but it is all one unified universe – the Kingdom has come where God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Then, taking this picture with what we read next, we see that God’s purpose, the focal point of eternity – the renewing of heaven and earth – is the eternal communion and fellowship of God and of Christ with Christ’s glorious bride. Look at this: ***“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. 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.”***” (Revelation 21:3–4, ESV) The focus of it all is fellowship and communion – with God, with Christ, with God’s people.

Get this. The promise and the hope of the covenant that God made with Abraham: ***“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”***” (Genesis 17:7–8, ESV) The covenant that God renewed with the nation of Israel under Moses: ***“I will dwell among***

the people of Israel and will be their God.” (Exodus 29:45, ESV) The promise of the new covenant to Jeremiah: **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”** (Jeremiah 31:31–34, ESV) The covenant expressed to Ezekiel: **“I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.”** (Ezekiel 37:26, ESV) The covenant fulfilled for us and accomplished for us by Jesus Christ, the Immanuel, God with Us; the covenant ratified with His own blood: **“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”** (Luke 22:20, ESV) All of this comes to its full and final consummation in the unfolding of the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem. This is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to be our God and that we will be His people.

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. God dwelt with men in tabernacle, in the temple, and ultimately, for a time in flesh and blood in Jesus Christ, and dwells with his people in His church by the Holy Spirit now, but this picture speaks of intimacy, of closeness, of satisfaction, of God’s permanent and abiding presence in the fullest possible way. It speaks of His presence with us to bless us and satisfy us in a way that the city of man, that Babylon, could never do because it is cursed and polluted with sin. It’s the fulfillment of the words in Ephesians 2: **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”** (Ephesians 2:4–7, ESV)

In God’s presence is kindness and blessing, forevermore! **“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.”** (Revelation 21:4, ESV) There will be no

mourning over sin, no mourning over death, no crying, no broken hearts, no pain. There's no more battling sins, no more struggle with the temptation to pursue the empty promises of the world. There's no more anguish over failing in our faithfulness to Christ. There's no more apathy toward worship. There is no more specter of persecution, opposition or oppression. No more anxiety over the future, no more fear, no more sorrow – why? Because the curse of sin has been removed, conquered and crushed by the cross of Christ. There is no more sin, no more curse of sin, which is death – Christ has conquered all through the power of the cross. The former things – this sin-cursed world in which we live – it has forever and finally passed away! Can I get an “Amen!”?

Oh, this seems so amazing, it's so overwhelming to John, that the voice of the Lord comes forth from the throne to assure John that everything he is seeing and hearing, and all that it means is true! **“And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.””** (Revelation 21:5, ESV) Bank on this. This is reality. This is the truth. Verse 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.”** (Revelation 21:6, ESV) This future for God's people is so certain, so sure, that God speaks of it as fully accomplished. He is the beginning of all things – the Alpha -- and He is the end of all things – the Omega and as the beginning and the end, what He says goes. It sounds very much like the words of Christ when he fully accomplished the salvation of all of His people on the cross, crying out, “It is finished!” When Jesus paid the price of salvation by His blood on the cross there was nothing left to pay. Here the word is, “it is done.” The plan of redemption has come to its full conclusion. Not one thing is left unfinished. All that God intended and ordained, everything from beginning to end, has been accomplished.

And He will give to His people, to the thirsty, the spring of real and eternal and spiritual life of which now we can only see dimly. The spring of the water of life which make the joys of earth look like a few drops of muddy water. We will have life, as we have never known it, infinite in glory, infinite in joy, infinite in satisfaction, infinitely interesting and exciting and remarkable without any possible comparison. We will have life – true life. Oh, this is so awesome. But it is not for everyone. John records for us...

Who is There and Who is Not (7-8) God is specific as to who will receive this blessing. He says: **“The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” (Revelation 21:7, ESV)** This promise is for those who are truly the people of God – not the nominal Christian, not the one who merely professes to be a Christian, not for the one who is merely a church-member, but the one who conquers, the one who overcomes, the one who perseveres to the end, the one who remains steadfast in persecution and oppression, the one who is not deceived by false religion, by false saviors, the one who is not seduced by the perspectives, values and attitudes of Babylon – but the one who overcomes, who conquers the great adversary Satan **“by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, (and who) love not their lives even unto death.” (Revelation 12:11, ESV)** This is a promise for the truehearted. They are the ones to whom God is Father and who are His true sons. Those, whom grace captures, grace transforms into the image of Christ.

By contrast, then, God tells us who will not be there: **“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.”** (Revelation 21:8, ESV) These are specific and purposeful words. See that with me. There is the cowardly, the faithless, and then there is the detestable -- out of whom flows all of the descriptive words in this text.

Who are the cowardly? The cowardly are those who are afraid to take the yoke of Christ, afraid to stand steadfast and unswervingly with Christ, who are unwilling to sacrifice the approval of men for the approval of God, who shrink away at the trial of following Christ, those who **“have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.” (Mark 4:17, ESV)**

The faithless are those **“who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Mark 4:18–19, ESV)** They have no lasting faith, no fruit of faith, no desires transformed by faith, and they have none of these things because they lack true saving faith – that are faithless.

Then there are the detestable – those “who have become foul,” who should be abhorred. It is those who perhaps give the appearance of godliness but inwardly are ravenous wolves, those who perhaps gave the impression of true faith, but who actually pursue the full satisfaction of their fleshly lusts. The fruit of their lives is murder, destruction, sexual immorality and deviancy, sorcery, idolatry of themselves and others – in all, those who are hypocrites, liars whose consciences are seared, whose god is their belly, whose glory is their shame, who use the name of Christ as a cover for their immorality. These are the detestable. And none of these will be in the city of God, the New Jerusalem. Instead, they all will be cast in the lake of fire and sulfur and suffer eternal death – the second death. The New Jerusalem will be a purified and perfect church – we will see that more next week.

Why Are We Given This Vision?

This vision is given, first so that we can ask ourselves, “To which city do I belong? To the city of man, to Babylon, to the perspectives, values and attitudes of this world, to self-exaltation and self-rule, to sin and fleshly desires, to selfishness, greed, pride, arrogance, malice, ungratefulness, heartlessness, unforgiveness, to treachery, to pleasure? Or do I belong to the New Jerusalem through faith in Christ? Are you in the words of Paul in Colossians 3, **“raised with Christ, seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Setting your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Is your life hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, will you also will appear with him in glory. Are you putting to death sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry? Are you killing anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth? Do you speak truth? Are you holy, compassionate, kind, humble, meek, and patient? Do you forgive? Do you love?** Are you a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ? The city of God is home to those who conquer the great adversary Satan **“by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, (and who) love not their lives even unto death.” (Revelation 12:11, ESV)** The city of God is for the truehearted. Are you true hearted?

JC Ryle said: “I know not what others may think, but to me it does seem clear that heaven would be a miserable place to an unholy man. It cannot be otherwise. People may say, in a vague way, they “hope to go to heaven,” but they do not consider what they say... We must be heavenly-minded, and have heavenly tastes, in the life that now is, or else we shall never find ourselves in heaven, in the life to come.”

Not only does this text require us to consider where our citizenship lies, but it is meant to encourage in us faithfulness, confidence and hope -- for those who in John's day were facing such great persecution, but also for us who are seeing hostility against our faith in Christ rising dramatically even now. God will not be defeated and we know the fullness of joy in dwelling with Him in the New Jerusalem to come, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be for remaining faithful in this present evil age. And they are going to get harder. To endure, you need a heavenly vision.

And one more thing, what this vision of the heaven and earth to come is designed to do for our hearts is this -- to increase our longing for God and our longing for heaven and the glories to come. It must give to our hearts motivation to live in light of the eternity to come, motivate us to faithfulness in the face of temptation, and purify our hearts and our desires by giving us a glimpse of the glory that awaits us in the presence of God. Catching a glimpse, through this vision, of the beauties and the joys of the new creation and our place in it must open our eyes to see the cheap counterfeits of this world for what they are.

I agree with Iain Duguid when he says, "Most people hope to go to heaven when they die. This is not surprising, given the generally acknowledged alternatives (either hell or nothingness). However, it is quite revealing to ask people what they hope to do when they get to heaven. Most people anticipate the joys of this world writ large: golf courses with no sand traps or water hazards, heavenly mansions with no worries about mortgage payments. If they could have all of those things without leaving this planet, they would be more than content. Christians, however, long for heaven because they long to be in the nearer presence of the God whom they love with all their hearts, joining in the unstinted, eternal worship of the Lamb."

Is that our hearts today, beloved?

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