

“THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

January 10, 2016, 6:00PM

Scripture Texts: Revelation 21:1-8

Introduction.

What do you think of when you hear the word heaven? What flashes into your mind's eye? One of the unfortunate images of heaven among unbelievers is of saints in white robes strumming harps on puffy white clouds, sing around a great throne for endless ages of eternity. No wonder some people think heaven sounds more like their idea of hell.

Whatever we think of when we think of heaven is greatly handicapped by the fact that here on earth heaven is completely inaccessible to any of our five senses.

At Jesus' baptism a door to heaven opened a crack, we saw a dove come down and we heard a voice. In Revelation 4 the door opened even further:

Revelation 4:1-2 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

Now we are at the moment of John's final and greatest vision. These first 8 verses are a bit like a summary that will be expanded on in the rest of chapter 21 and 22. This is a forward or a preview, a setting of the stage for the grand finale of this great drama at the end of history.

What a dramatic shift. How many chapters now have we been wading through pain and suffering, persecution and torment? How many promises have we heard made to those who persevere and overcome, who don't bow the knee, who don't bear the mark of the beast?

Now comes the fulfillment, the consummation, the vindication.

Our text has two parts, and passing of former things and the making of all things new.

Revelation 21:1-4, The former things have passed away.

These first four verses are bracket by the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the former things have passed away. The old is past and gone.

We were prepared for this in Revelation 20:11, “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.”

The new heaven and the new earth.

The scene opens with something totally new, a total renovation of the heavens and the earth. This is not so much an ending as a new beginning, a new creation. The first beginning in Genesis was ruined by sin, so now we have a new beginning.

The words heaven and earth are just another way of saying everything, all of material creation, whatever is not God.

Some people think that what is new will be totally new, bearing no resemblance to the old heaven and old earth.

But Scripture doesn't support that. What John saw was recognizable as a new heaven and a new earth, it was not something completely foreign or alien. There will be a radical transformation of the old, but not a complete abolition of the old. Our new bodies will be a redemption and transfiguration, not something with no connection to the past at all.

We don't know exactly what God will do or how, but because we know His character we can know that it will be stunningly beautiful and glorious and cause for highest worship and joy.

I John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

The sea will be no more.

Why no more sea? Isn't the ocean one of God's great creations? We love the sea and its power and magnitude and beauty.

To the Jew the sea represented turbulence and unrest. In the OT in Job and Daniel the sea is the home of the great Leviathan, the beast of the sea. In Revelation 13 there is a vision of the beast rising from the sea and in Revelation 20 Satan is seen thrown into the great lake of fire.

Furthermore, the sea was also a place from which foreign invaders came. It represented danger and death. Think of Noah's flood. It also represented separation as loved ones were carried off, or from which they didn't return. The sea was seen as a source of evil.

The point of this image is that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no turbulence, unrest, chaos, danger, death, or separation; evil will not arise from the sea to invade the purity of God's new creation. What happened in the Garden of Eden will never be able to happen again.

The question is will there be no real ocean, or is this symbolic language to say there will be no more evil and chaos and danger that is associated with the sea? Is this simply a way of saying the God will establish peace and order and stability in His new heavens and new earth?

If the serpent standing on the sand by the sea in Rev 12 and the monster from the sea in Rev 13 are not literal beast, but figurative or symbolic creatures then is not the sea related to them symbolic as well?

The presence of a literal sea would not contradict this verse in Revelation 21. Every enemy will be overcome and every source of evil eliminated.

This isn't a text about whether we will be able to fish or snorkel or walk along the seashore. Whatever is included in the new heavens and new earth, it will be glorious beyond description and the best of all best possible worlds.

The holy city, the new Jerusalem.

Is this a surprise to us that heaven would be revealed and described as a city? Other religions have a far different picture, a garden paradise, an unspoiled wilderness, some kind of retreat or resort, an escape from the city. We think of heaven like we think of going to Florida or Arizona or Hawaii.

Cities are noisy, chaotic, rebellious. Think of Babel and the arrogant attempt to penetrate heaven. Think of Babylon in Revelation and that she was finally brought down.

I have been to Jerusalem. The three thousand year old city is cramped, smelly, dirty. You have to watch where you step. And what kind of example is the city that killed the prophets and killed Christ? This new holy city is quite different from all that.

This is the central focus of the vision. This new city represents the dwelling place of God and God's dwelling with His people.

In the OT Jerusalem was where the temple was, where God put His name and where God dwelt among the people of Israel. That was where the nation of Israel had access to God, where they brought their offerings and prayers. In the NT Christ becomes our access to God. He is the one and only mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). After His ascension Christ sent His Spirit to dwell in the saints who are the dwelling place of God.

God will dwell or tabernacle with His people. What was intended in the Garden of Eden will be restored and God will dwell with His people in intimate fellowship. The New Jerusalem is the consummation of our communion with God, of dwelling in His presence.

The New Jerusalem is God with us, God providing for us and all our needs.

The dwelling place of God is with man.

This is the language of covenant when God says, “I will be there God and they will be my people.” This is fulfillment of all that has been promised since the time of Abraham.

Genesis 17:7 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.

Marriage covenant language is most fitting here. This new Jerusalem is like a new bride who goes all out to adorn herself for her husband, will be arrayed in absolute splendor and majesty, will be dazzling in stunning beauty and purity.

In one sense we will dwell in the new Jerusalem and in another sense we are the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, the Church.

Notice Heaven is no longer remote in time or space, somewhere way out there where we go when we die. God makes His dwelling now with all His people everywhere. Heaven and earth co-mingle as do its inhabitants. God will fully inhabit both heaven and earth. And where God is, is heaven. So in essence we will be with God in both places and we will inhabit both places. Heaven and earth will no longer be separated.

There will be no more tears.

More fulfillment of the OT.

Isaiah 25:8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

All the causes of tears will be gone, there will be no tear-producers in heaven. No death, no sin, no sorrow or pain, no sadness or separation, no sickness or suffering, nothing to make us cry.

There will be no hospitals, no doctors, no funeral homes or morgues, no cemeteries, no obituaries. Death is gone because its source and cause are gone, sin is no more.

Nothing in heaven will cause emotional anguish or physical hurt.

Sin is the cause of all the ill in our lives and in our world. All the sorrow that sin caused will be forever erased. God will protect His people so they will never experience any of that again.

What do you experience in your life that is caused by sin? What trauma, what tension, what strife or discord, what shame or guilt, what heartache? God is greater than all our worst pain and deepest disappointments. He will swallow it all up, every last drop.

We can never fully understand why God created the world the way He did to allow it to be so filled with evil and wickedness. But we can rest in His perfect purposes and in His perfect plan to make all things new and to wipe away every tear, remove every sin and every effect of sin.

John Piper captures this in a poem:

The blind can see a bird on wing,
The dumb can lift their voice to sing.
The diabetic eats at will,
The coronary runs uphill.

The lame can walk, the deaf can hear,
The cancer-ridden bone is clear.
Arthritic joints are lithe and free,
And every pain has ceased to be.
And every sorrow deep within,
And every trace of lingering sin
Is gone. And all that's left is joy,
And endless ages to employ
The mind and heart, and understand,
And love the sovereign Lord who planned
That it should take eternity
To lavish all his grace on me.

Revelation 21:5-8, Behold, I am making all things new.

Three statements by God make up this second section, what God is doing, a command to write, and finally who God is and what He will do to the righteous and unrighteous.

Behold, I am making all things new.

What will be new?

The heavens and the earth will be new. God will take His entire creation and make it new. God will renovate everything. A total makeover.

Our son Todd took their home on Bay Lyn Drive down to the studs pretty much and started over. It had to be done, new walls and floor, new kitchen and bathroom, new everything.

When God makes all things new they will be new indeed. Nothing will have the appearance of being fixed up or repaired.

Christ's redemptive work on the cross redeems not only us as individuals, but all of creation.

Romans 8:19-21 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

We will be made new. *We will be physically new with new bodies.* No death, no pain, no tears. We will have new glorified bodies. No disabilities, no deformities, no terrible conditions.

Philippians 3:20–21 Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change the body of our lowliness to be like the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able to subdue all things to himself.

And we will be spiritually and morally new. We will be clean and pure and holy, no mixture, no dross, no besetting sins that creep up on us and catch us off guard. No wicked fleeting thoughts, no pride, greed, lust, anger, or jealousy. We will be holy inside and out.

Finally *He will give us a new relationship* with Him, perfect communion and intimacy. Like the Garden of Eden when God would walk with Adam in the cool of the evening.

To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

What a picture of God's perfect and full and generous provision and supply.

Isaiah 55:1-2 "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. 2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"

This is a symbol for how God will satisfy the needs and desires of every saint from the fountain of His living waters. Don't you desire such waters, don't you want to drink from that well? Remember Jesus words to the woman at the well.

John 4:13-14 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

To the thirsty God is the omega, the completion, the satisfaction.

What about those who don't thirst for God?

Revelation 21:8 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.

Notice that in God's plan for a new heaven and a new earth, there is still a lake of fire. It doesn't cease to exist as some suggest.

If God is not your greatest desire, if you don't thirst for Him, if you don't long to be free from every sin and stain, then heaven will not be home for you. Only the lake of fire will be your home.

What a contrast between an unquenchable fire and a river of living water that forever quenches our thirst.

As if it wasn't clear enough in the Bible already, verse 8 gives yet one more clear and convincing proof that those who have not repented from their sin, those who have not made a clear break with their sin, no longer clinging to it but hating it, those will be forever banished from heaven. Those who remain in their sins on earth, will remain in their sins in eternity.

Nothing is more important in this life than to hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His call to repent of all our sin, to make the break and mortify our flesh and die to wickedness and receive the forgiveness of Jesus through faith in Him.

Implications and Application.

What do you think should be the implication and application of a vision like this? If this vision is true, if it is a glimpse of a real reality, then what should its impact be on us and our souls?

Is this not a great encouragement to perseverance and faithfulness and confidence and hope and not growing weary in well doing? Especially in the face of trials and affliction and persecution.

God makes no empty promises. What God has promised He will completely accomplish. Our inheritance is kept completely intact and safe for us in heaven. Nothing can touch it or change it. Think on these things, meditate on them and long for them. Come, quickly, Lord Jesus.

I Corinthians 2:9 What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on

things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.