

"The New Heaven and New Earth"

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Revelation chapter 21? That's page 977 in the Pew Bible.

Revelation 21, we'll be considering verses 1 through 8. So Memorial Day weekend, sometimes consider the start of summer.

For those of you in school right now, middle schoolers, high schoolers, I'm sure you're more than ready for summer break to begin as you grind out the last couple weeks of school.

And looking forward to summer, that sort of helps, right? You know that in just a couple short weeks, the trials will be over, the tests and exams will be passed, and you'll be able to enter into your rest, at least for a couple months.

But when you graduate from school, summer breaks go away. And yet, don't we still know what it's like, as adults, to be motivated in the present by something good in the future?

[1 : 11] Maybe it's a vacation, a trip you've been planning to take, or maybe it's an upcoming event that you get to celebrate with one of your kids, or maybe it's a plan for retirement. Whatever it is, we know what it's like to be motivated in the present by something good that's coming in the future.

And the more certain that thing is, and the more exciting that thing is, the more it can motivate us to press on through hard days, to persist through the ups and downs, and to not give up or to give in. As we turn to the final two chapters of Revelation, this is exactly what John is trying to help us to do. He's going to hold out for us our ultimate future in Christ. He's going to show us the supreme good that God has in store for his people. And his aim in doing so is that we might be motivated in the present to press on, to persist, to not give up, or to use the language of Revelation to conquer, to overcome.

When we get weary of running the race, when we're tempted to throw in the towel and just join the world in their apparent victory, John holds up this eternal vision of glory and says to us, don't give up.

[2 : 40] God has unimaginable good stored up for you, for those who conquer, who overcome, who persevere. So let me read Revelation chapter 21, verses 1 through 8, and then I'll pray as we consider God's word.

So Revelation 21, 1 through 8. 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.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I'm making all things new.

[3 : 53] Also, he said, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. 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. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.

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.

Let's pray together. Father, as we consider this passage, renew our hope. Help us to see the glorious future you have secured for your people so that we might not give up.

And would you open the eyes of the hopeless that they might see Christ in all his beauty, the King who has purchased this future for all who surrender to him and his grace.

[5 : 10] We pray in the name of Jesus, our King. Amen. Amen. So what is this future that God has in store for his people?

Well, John says, it's nothing less than a new creation. We mentioned two weeks ago that the book of Revelation in these final chapters is showing us what we're saved from and what we're saved for. Well, here we're beginning to see what we're saved for. And it's life in a new heaven and a new earth. And verses 1 through 8 of chapter 21 are sort of like an introduction.

They're this opening summary, this prelude of the entire final section of Revelation. Each of the themes and images of these first eight verses are going to be unpacked in greater detail in the following passages.

And in the coming weeks, we'll explore those, the new city, the new temple, the new garden of this new creation. But what comes to the forefront in this prelude of verses 1 through 8 is this, that the real glory, the real gift of life in the new creation is that it is life in intimate communion with God.

[6 : 26] John's writing this book of Revelation to churches a lot like ours. If you go back and you read chapters 2 and 3, the letters to the seven churches, what do they face?

They face pressures within and pressures without. They're tempted to compromise morally with the world around them. They're tempted to lose their first love for Christ.

They're tempted to rely on their own strength and security. They're tested and tried, even persecuted by an increasingly hostile environment. But the final vision that God gives to John is of a future so good that we shouldn't want to live for anything else.

And what is this good thing that God has in store? Well, it's God himself. God is the good that is in store. Intimate communion with God.

Now, where do we see that in our text? Well, we see it in verses 2 through 3. Let me read those verses again. John writes, And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

[7 : 38] 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. Now, we'll see in the coming weeks that the New Jerusalem is a metaphor for the resurrected people of God shining forth in their true identity.

Here's the church on the last day in all of her beauty. Beauty, John says, like a bride or husband. We've seen this marriage metaphor before in Revelation 19, right?

The church is God's beloved. You see, after the Lord Jesus returns in glory to save and to judge, when he wins the final battle against evil, when he renders perfect judgment, when the earth and sky flee from God's holy presence, as we saw in chapter 20, verse 11, then on that day he will establish a new heaven and a new earth and take his bride, his beloved, to himself.

Verse 3 expands on this idea of intimate communion. There we're told that God in the new creation will dwell in our midst. And the word dwell there is the same word for tabernacle.

In other words, the Old Testament tabernacle and temple where God took up residence in the midst of his people in a provisional and sort of typological way, that image will be fulfilled in the new creation.

[9 : 11] But this time there won't be a literal tent or temple with their curtains and their walls separating people from God, restricting who can enter God's presence and when. No, in the new creation it will just be God himself dwelling in our midst.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. No barriers, no restrictions, just free, intimate access to the Almighty.

The last image of intimate communion is found in verse 7. God is depicted here not just as our husband but as our father. Look at verse 7. The one who conquers will have this heritage and I will be as God and he will be my son.

Now I think God intentionally uses that word son to describe this intimate reality for all Christians, men and women. Why? Why does he not say sons and daughters or children? I think because in the ancient world the son legally had all the rights, all the privileges of the father and God is saying here that's what's true of every Christian, male and female.

We have all the rights, all the privileges of being the father's true heir. It's all yours. That's how much the father loves you.

[10 : 34] That's the sort of intimate communion he has in store for you. He holds nothing back. And as we'll see in chapter 22 in a couple of weeks, that means that we will reign with God forever.

So at the heart of the new creation of this new heaven and new earth is this, it's intimate communion with God. God will no longer feel distant or far away, but like a loving husband, like a caring father, like a perfect lover, like a perfect parent, he will be near in intimate communion with us.

But what does this intimate communion with God mean for our life in the new creation? Well, from this vantage point, we can consider kind of the rest of the passage.

And we can kind of do it in three ways. First, we'll see what won't be there in the new creation. And then second, we'll see what will be there. And then third, we can consider how to get there.

So what won't be there and what will be there and how to get there. That's kind of the rest of our passage. So first, take a look at what won't be there in the new creation. As we experience this intimate communion with God, what will be absent?

[11 : 45] What won't be there? Curiously, John says in verse 1, the first earth has passed away and the sea was no more. Now, why won't there be a sea in the new creation?

Well, for us today, what does the sea represent? What does the ocean represent? I think for a lot of us, the ocean is a place of beauty, right? It's a place where we go on vacation. Yeah? We sail, we fish.

It has mostly positive connotations for us today. But in the ancient world, the sea was viewed much differently. The sea was actually not a place where you went on vacation.

The sea was a place of danger. It was a place of chaos. Sailing, for example, that was a risky business. Not to mention there were creatures lurking in the deep of the seas that were frightening. What's more, in the book of Revelation, John and his sort of, you know, metaphorical casting in this book of Revelation, what do we see? Well, it's Satan and his beasts that are depicted as rising out of the sea, right?

[12 : 48] That place of kind of chaos come the great enemies of God and his people. And it's upon the seas that the kingdoms of this world, we saw this in Revelation 18, it's upon the seas that the kingdoms of this world engage in their economic trade and their exploitation.

So when John says, the sea was no more, he means that chaos and evil, he means that oppression and violence, he means that uncertainty and danger, these things are removed forever from humanity's future home.

And what remains when all those things are removed is nothing short of brand new, a new heaven and a new earth. Now, does that mean that everything in this old world is completely eradicated or annihilated, right?

You know, when we compare the various passages from Isaiah like Kevin read for us earlier or when we look at passages from Paul or even from Peter that speak about the new creation, we see that some passages emphasize continuity.

They seem to say that the new creation is a renewal of this old creation. But then we also see that some passages emphasize the kind of discontinuity. They seem to say that the new creation is a replacement of the old.

[14 : 09] So which is it? Well, I think the best analogy to help put these pieces together is actually the resurrection of Jesus. After all, the bodily resurrection of Jesus was the first act, the inauguration of the new creation.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the foretaste and the pattern for the whole. And when you think about it, you see this same kind of distinction in Jesus' resurrection body, right?

When you think about it, in one sense, Jesus' resurrection body was the same. It was recognizably Jesus, right? And the tomb was empty. It was the same body that came out.

But at the same time, Jesus' resurrection body was undeniably new. To some, he was actually at first hard to recognize. And certainly, if you go back to the first chapter of Revelation, John's vision of the risen Christ at the beginning of this book shows us how stunning his newness can be.

Well, I think the same will be true of the new creation. I think we'll still recognize it as heaven and earth, right? There'll be continuity. It's not going to be like, oh my goodness, it's Mars, where are we, right?

[15 : 27] No, it's still heaven and earth, material, real, more real than we experience it now. So there will be continuity, but at the same time, it's going to be utterly new, radically new.

Paul says on that day, creation will be freed from its bondage to decay. Or as John puts it, the sea will be no more.

You see, where God dwells in his fullness, there will be no more evil and no more chaos and no more oppression and violence. The sea will be no more.

Can you imagine a world without those things? A world without those fears and insecurities? That's what God has in store for us.

But that's not all. There's something else that won't be there. The reality of this intimate communion with God gets much more personal. Look at verse 4. Verse 4 says, God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

[16:43] Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. Friends, on that day, the hand that created the stars and the galaxies, the hand that raised the mountains and carved the rivers, the almighty hand of God will come to you personally.

And with a tenderness you've never experienced, he will wipe every tear from your eye. All the pain you've accumulated in this fallen world, the mourning, the crying, the suffering, will be met by the hand of sovereign love and in tenderness God himself will wipe the tears away.

He will tend to your wounds and he will heal your broken heart. So what won't be there, neither the seas of evil nor the tears of pain, neither will have their place there in the new creation.

Suffering, sickness, decay, and death will all be gone. But what will be there? If the sea won't be there, if tears and death won't be there, what will actually be there?

Well, we see our second point in verses 5 and 6 and 7, especially at the end of 7, God says, to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

[18:23] The seas might be gone, but John sees that there'll be a spring, a spring of the water of life. In other words, in the new creation, there won't just be the absence of chaos and death and tears, but there will be the fullness of satisfaction.

In intimate communion with God, our hearts will be filled by an ever-flowing spring of life flowing from the very heart of God.

Now, ask anyone today, who doesn't want life and more of it? Who doesn't want to take life and drink it deeply like a spring of water?

You know, listen to practically every self-help wellness podcast that there is, right? Whether it's Mel Robbins or Andrew Huberman, you know, pick your favorite one.

What are they reaching for? What are they hoping to achieve? What are they grasping at? Is it not a fullness of life? Not just to be healthy, but to be happy.

[19:31] But of course, this life cannot finally give us those things in full measure. Our desire will at some point be thwarted in this life.

Our protocols and our plans will one day fall short. But in the new creation, in the future that God has in store for His people, there's a spring of living water.

And what is that spring? Again, it's God Himself. The Alpha and the Omega. The sovereign Lord of history.

The one who rules from beginning to end and every moment in between. The one who makes all things new. The one who's trustworthy and true. The one who will say on that day, it's done.

You see, what God's saying to us here is that He's not just our Creator. He's not just the Alpha, the beginning.

[20:33] But He's also the Omega. He's the end. God's not just the Creator, but He is the consummator. He is the desired goal of everything.

God is the journey's end. Whether it's the magnificent view at the top of the mountain hike, or whether it's the warm fire and the comfort of friends at the end of the day, it's all speaking of Him. And He is bringing everything to its appointed end. And one day He will say, it is done. And in His intimate presence, we will drink and drink and drink and know a satisfaction and joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

He will be the majestic view. God will be the warm fire. He will be the goal we've been longing for. So John shows us what won't be there and what will be there.

But last, how do we get there? Look at verses 7 and 8. The one who conquers will have this heritage and I will be his God and he will be my son.

[21:54] 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.

There are two options, John says. They're the conquerors and they're the cowardly. In this life, we will either press on through trials, holding on to the faith, or we will fall away.

We will either remain faithful or our profession will prove to be false. We might look like Christians for a while, but when hardship comes, we will leave the path and become just like the world.

And John holds up this vision of the new creation in all of its goodness so that we might be motivated not to fall away, so that we might press on and be those who conquer.

Now conquer in Revelation has a special meaning. The conquerors in Revelation are those whose lives are characterized by a refusal to compromise their faith despite the threat of persecution.

[23 : 09] So in reality, John's using the term sort of ironically, isn't he? Christians conquer when they maintain their faith even though they may appear defeated. Even though in the world's eyes, because of persecution, they look utterly defeated, John says, no, they're the conquerors.

So what does it mean to conquer? Well, it doesn't mean what the world means. It doesn't mean, you know, you win every argument and you enforce your will on others, right? No. To conquer means to hold on to Christ even when the raging seas and the abundant tears of this world press against you from every side.

That's what it means to truly conquer in this life. To cling to Christ even if it costs you everything.

But how do we do that?

How do we overcome? How do we conquer? And how can we possibly have enough strength to do this? Are we just meant to do it on our own, right? Who can possibly make it through all the trials and all the tears of this life and not fall away?

Is not our own grip too weak? The reality is, friends, if we were left to ourselves, we wouldn't make it.

[24 : 33] Like the disciples on the night when Jesus was arrested, we would all fall away. But here's the good news. We aren't left to ourselves.

Conquering, persevering, pressing on isn't something we do merely in our own strength. No, we look to the one who has already conquered, the lamb who was slain, the Lord Jesus.

He promises to complete the good work he began in us. He seals us with his spirit so that we might be protected and safe so that we might turn from sin and pursue holiness.

He places us in local churches so that we might spur one another on to love and good deeds. He gives us his word full of promises and exhortations to keep us running the race with endurance.

But the greatest gift of all is the gift of himself. Do you want to know the secret of endurance, of overcoming, of conquering?

[25 : 40] it's not what you do. It's to see what the true conqueror has done for you. Consider verse 3 of our passage.

How is it that God will be able to dwell in our midst? How can we possibly have such intimate communion with a holy God for eternity?

You and I are sinners. We deserve judgment, not welcome. It's possible, friends, because of what Jesus has done.

In the incarnation, Jesus became flesh and tabernacled, dwelled among us. Because Christ came and dwelt with us in our sin, we can dwell with God in his holiness.

Or consider verse 4. How can there be no more pain or death? because the Son of God suffered and died on the cross for our sins.

[26 : 41] You and I can know an eternity without suffering, without death, because of that. He shed his tears so that our tears might be wiped away.

Or consider verse 6. How can this water of life come to us without payment, totally free of charge? I mean, goodness, if you want to get the advanced content from Andrew Huberman, you've got to pay up, right?

Nothing in this life is free. And yet here, the greatest gift comes to us without costing us anything.

So who paid the price so that we can drink and drink and be satisfied?

It was Christ. Jesus hung on the cross for your sins. He said, I thirst so that you need never be thirsty again.

And if you see that, brothers and sisters, if you see what Christ did for you, then you won't fall away. He will be the one who actually holds you in the palm of His hand and He will never let you go.

[27 : 54] And all the pleasures of this world will seem like trifles compared to spending eternity with the God who loves you like that, who is so infinitely glorious that He would rescue you by sheer unmerited grace.

In other words, if you hear Christ say from the cross, it's finished, and you realize that He said that for you and all your sins, past and present and future, then friend, you will surely hear those words again in the new heavens and new earth when the one seated on the throne says, it's done, it's finished.

I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. So press on, brothers and sisters. Don't give up. Lord, the future that God has in store for you is so good, there's nothing else worth living for.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, as we gather before you this morning, Lord, we are sure that if we were to list all the trials and temptations, all the deep wounds and pains that each one of us carries in this room, Lord, it would be an incredible weight.

And Father, if we were then to begin to confess our sins, to show the ways in which we've fallen short of your glory and turned aside from your ways, oh God, would that not be just a crushing weight?

[29 : 44] So Lord, we come before you this morning with much suffering and much sin. But we also stand before you knowing that we have an even weightier and even mightier Savior.

And we thank you that because of his work, we can overcome. That our pains can be healed, that our sins can be forgiven, that we can run this race with endurance, looking to you, Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith.

Oh Lord, fuel our hearts with a desire, with a hope of this great day to come. Lord, help us to carry on and to press on because we know that the future is good.

and you are trustworthy and true. You have never disappointed any of your promises. They are all yes and amen in Christ and this one too shall be yes and amen in Christ.

So would we live for that day? In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.