

## All Things New

What does it mean that God is going to make everything new? As we've studied the book of Revelation together in our accidental series we've seen the drama of the story play out over and over again. We've seen a surprising amount of plagues, judgment, and evil defeated. We've also seen a lot of victorious moments, big celebrations, and a not just a few worship concerts. It's a whole book of worship really, a whole lot of encouraging us to keep our eyes on the Lamb and not to get distracted by the beast. It's this insistence that we remain loyal to Jesus and not pledge allegiance to the world. It's all been other worldly, a bit dramatic, and has had the makings of a good sci-fi series – it's been different than the images of heaven the world has used and put in our heads but nothing has appeared to be new or made new.

But now, satan has been thrown into a lake of fire along with the false prophet and the beast, the books have been opened, the last judgement has been administered, and the wedding has taken place. So chapter 21 opens telling us **John “saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” Revelation 21:1**

What does it mean that they're new?

The whole story of the Bible starts with creation - we're told **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:1-2** In Isaiah 45 we're told that God has made the earth and has continued to concern Himself with all manner of things having to do with how the world works **“For this is what the Lord says – he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited – he says: I am the Lord, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in the land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right.” Isaiah 45:18-19** God didn't create the world to just be beautiful but empty – He desired it to be inhabited – by us – His people. But, He also didn't create us, put us on earth and walk away – He isn't speaking to us from some distant place – from a distance God is watching, hiding, lurking, waiting for us to mess up to exact judgment – He is found by those who seek Him, He is

present with us in our world – the very world He created. He already made the heavens, the earth, and all of us– so what does it mean that He is making it all new?

There are other places in Scripture where God seems to change creation or reverse it.

There was once a battle when Joshua was leading the people of Israel. They marched all night and then hail stones came from heaven as if God were fighting on their behalf with those hailstones, and then the sun stood still in the sky for an entire day so they could see to fight the battle. When you created the sun, the sky, the moon, and hailstones you can do that. Other times God withheld rain, and once He even flooded the entire world as sort of a restart – but it wasn't a new earth. The plagues in Exodus are also a reversal of creation – darkness reigning instead of day and night, locusts destroying vegetation which God had told the land to produce since the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of creation. But, again, reversing isn't making all things new. It was just sort of changing things.

In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul tells us **“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed...We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” Romans 8:19-22** Creation is waiting to be renewed. Even creation recognizes things are broken and in need of salvation. Creation wants to be made new – but what does that mean? What does it mean for there to be a new heaven and a new earth? Is it a new creation? Is it simply that this time we can all try again to be better? This time God will create an earth where Adam and Eve won't sin? Is it going back and starting again? Has this just been an experiment gone wrong? Good hypothesis but the result was not what we expected so let's start over. But, if everything is new that would include us because we are part of everything God has already made. We must be included in the new. If we're new then it can't be a going back or a do over or a try again. Because then the readers of Revelation from John's day until us sitting here today would have nothing to hope in because it wouldn't even affect us. We'd be gone if new meant starting over. So, no, it seems that cannot be what it means for God to make all things new.

Maybe it means something will be fixed or restored. What was broken or what was keeping us from real, close, uninterrupted relationship with God will be destroyed. For one thing, when John sees the new heaven and new earth he immediately notices something else – the sea is gone.

In Revelation 4 we were told there was a crystal sea before the throne seemingly holding us back from fully approaching the throne. In other places we find the sea is the place where evil comes from – the dragon in chapter 13 was first seen on the shore of the sea, the beast then comes out of the sea. It's also been a place where trade and commerce happened and symbolized the idolatrous worship of money and empire and success. The sea was also a representation of the old creation – God had made the sea and everything that was in it and we've seen a literal sea throughout the book of Revelation. In chapter 19 the sea gave up the dead that were in it. So, the sea has been a natural boundary, it's been a part of the old creation, it's been a place where evil has come from, a way for idolatrous trade to take place, and a place of death. But, when God makes everything new it appears separation and evil and idolatry and death are no longer represented. So, is that what it means when God makes all things new? Because there must be a reason the sea is gone. I mean no more death or threat of evil. That would certainly be wonderful. A world where death no longer reigns and where evil is destroyed and Jesus is King and rules with justice and righteousness. That's new. What does it mean for God to make everything new?

I was at a graveside committal last week with my dad. I attend a lot of funerals, but I don't always go to the graveside. To be honest I'm not a big cemetery person which makes me a real oddity in the Taylor family. They love a good cemetery. I know he reads from Revelation 21 often at gravesides and shares this same story about a time I was living in Ireland and had been in a car accident and him getting the call that I was fine but... and realizing he was separated from me by a large sea – namely the Atlantic Ocean. It reminded me of the flip side of that story and me being in Romania when my dad was rushed back to the hospital with complications after the removal of a portion of his kidney when cancer was found. He was losing blood and not doing well. I was 8 time zones away separated by an entire continent, an ocean, and half of America. I was trying to figure out how to get back to him and it seemed like I was simply too far away. The sea was separating me from those I loved. Imagine if the sea was gone and a direct flight was possible. Imagine if nothing separated me from getting back home. It would have made the difference as I tried to figure out my options. Nothing separating me from standing with the ones I love most.

John can imagine. Because when all things are made new even the sea is gone. There's nothing separating us at all. What does it mean for *everything* to be made new and not just different?

The prophet Isaiah had envisioned this day hundreds of years earlier. **“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer, while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.”** Isaiah 65:17 – 25

Isaiah is writing before Israel is taken into exile already anticipating their return when God will create something new – a place so incredible that all the former troubles they’d endured, like exile and captivity and a place far from where God’s glory dwelt, would no longer be remembered. A new city – a new Jerusalem would be built that would bring joy and in it people wouldn’t weep or cry or mourn ever again. Babies wouldn’t die prematurely, old people would remain young. They would put down roots and watch them grow, they’d be productive, their work would have meaning, they would have descendants and a legacy. Before the people would even speak God would already have heard and was prepared with an answer. And, the craziest part was that wolves and lambs would just be eating out of the same bowl without a care in the world. Predators would not exist and peace would reign. This is definitely new. Israel had

not seen this before. But, as they read this again returning from Babylon 70 years later and then read it again after they had begun to rebuild and then read it again as the next generation and the one after that and as we read it today we think but babies still die in our day, parents have still buried children, we've still seen people grow old and die. Wolves and lambs do not eat from the same bowl. Peace does not reign. We are still toiling and working in vain. So this isn't so new after all. It's more of just the same. It's a lovely thought but the people in Isaiah's day must have been as confused as we are reading it. Unless, what Isaiah saw is still to come for all of us.

In Isaiah God said I will do this. See, I will create. John watches and hears God proclaim **"I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:5** I am presently doing it and John is watching it in real time. And, then God said, I have done it. **"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." Revelation 21:6** He was present in Genesis, He was at work in Isaiah, He was finished in Revelation. It's done. I have been, I am, I will forever be with my people but it's all new.

So we begin again at the start of Revelation 21 and we ask what does it mean that God makes everything new?

**Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:1-5**

The sea is gone and with it the difficulties and the battle against evil and death and idol worship. A new city has come down – remember – the new city Isaiah saw would be a delight and a joy. It would be a place where God would rejoice over His people and take great delight in them. Why? Because He has forever connected Himself to His people. He's created a forever covenant to be with them, protect them, care for them, provide for them,

rescue them, defend them, and enjoy them. It's why He set it all up as a picture of marriage – Jesus, the Lamb, has entered into a covenant of marriage with us as His people. God's dwelling place will now forever and ever be with us. He will be with us in ways we've never fully been able to understand. What we've believed by faith – that deposit that came when the Holy Spirit took up residence inside of us at the moment of salvation – we now see by sight as we gaze upon our God and the Lamb forever dwelling with us – delighting over us. In His presence peace reigns and wolves and lambs, ox and lions are all present at the same time – sure they've been there all along – the creatures around the throne – one looked like an ox, one like a lion, the Lamb was on the throne.

God has made everything new which means we've been made new and our bodies won't decay or grow old or die. There in the new heaven and new earth – babies will live, 100 years is nothing – what a youngster – we won't be saying goodbye or grieving the loss of loved ones. All the tears we've shed between now and that day they'll all be wiped away and remembered no more. We'll call and God will answer because He's right there, present with us. We'll work with our hands and it will mean something. We'll enjoy our labor for the curse is gone too.

The old order of things is gone and it's all new. What does it mean? It means everything God has promised has come true. Everything God had intended way back in the very beginning has been realized. It isn't a do over, a reset, or a clean slate – it's just all new. It's not just different, it isn't life 2.0 – an update to work out the bugs or give us a few fixes – it's not even the same life but with a fresh coat of paint – it's just all new. It's everything God has desired – a place where He could dwell with His people, where we would live and work for His glory and to bring Him worship. It's new because it's joy and peace at levels we can't even comprehend. It's new because it's the Jesus we've known here but without distraction or temptation or doubt. What does it mean? It means heaven and earth have been redeemed.

But look at verse 7. **“Those who overcome will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” Revelation 21:7-8** The promise of verse 3 is repeated in verse 7. The dwelling of

God with His people, the promise to be our God and for us to be His children – it's actually only given to those who overcome. All the new we just described at the beginning of this chapter and realized from Isaiah is only available to those who overcome. Those who overcome are those who have kept their eyes on the Lamb. They are those who have remained committed to the Lamb and His word. Who have taken up their cross and followed Him regardless of anything else that called out for their attention or their allegiance. Those who have overcome the empire, the beast, and the pseudo lamb they have been made new – they now have new, resurrected bodies and are about to step into a new heaven and a new earth that has also been redeemed and made new by the death and blood of the Lamb, who is Jesus.

But, there are those who will not inherit – who have chosen for themselves not to be made new and have held on to the old order. The cowardly suggests an empty faith – a faith that when push came to shove wasn't really there at all. When times got tough they bailed out on God – they stopped believing, they decided they had no faith to live by or a faith to die by. The other things listed there all sort of connect to the empire, to Babylon, and idolatry. If you don't fear God all those things become easy to do – to set up your own god – to worship things or people, relationships or wealth instead. And if you do that it's easy to think people are disposable – murder, meaningless sex, rape, abuse, vile and disgusting things said or done to others. Why not? I live for myself and no one else. And, finally liars will not inherit either. In a place where The Way, The Truth, and The Life powers the city and is the center of all that takes place you can see why liars cannot enter. The Father of Lies, satan, has already been sent to a lake of fire and burning sulfur and now his children will join him. I'm not sure what color hymnal this song was in – but I think it's a recognizable tune for those of us who grew up in church – Revelation, Revelation, 21:8, 21:8, liars go to hell, liars go to hell, burn, burn, burn. It lacked context and offered no plan of redemption, but it got its point across.

But, this is the old order. Jesus has come to make all things new and in Revelation 21 we see that God has done all that He'd said He would do. We can take it to the bank. It's trustworthy and it's true. God will make all things new. Through Jesus He has redeemed the old order. Redemption through Jesus has made the heavens, the earth, all of creation, you and me and all those who have overcome – we've all been made new.

However, we don't live in Revelation 21. Not yet. We don't live in the new heavens and the new earth. All things have not yet been made new. We live in hope that God will make all things new but it's not here yet so what do we do now? How do we keep living while hoping? Let me share 2 quick things.

### **1. We labor in the Lord**

The Apostle Paul wrote about the resurrection of our bodies in 1 Corinthians 15 and that when the trumpet sounds the dead in Christ will rise and at that resurrection standing with Christ we'll victoriously announce where o death is your sting? And then the next words Paul says, **"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.**

**Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."** 1 Corinthians 15:58

What do we do while we wait in hope? We keep working for the Lord. We aren't waiting around doing nothing between now and God making all things new. We are actively participating in life on this earth.

N. T. Wright wrote, **"What you do in the present – by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself – will last into God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether...They are a part of what we may call building for God's kingdom."** – N. T.

**Wright**

In this way we bring signs and symbols of the new heaven and the new earth into this one to point others towards a future reality. So we fight for justice in places where there is injustice. We engage in our communities – we speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves – we make sure the hungry are fed, the cold have coats, that kids who have no one to look out for them find care in foster homes, that systems which endanger and hurt and discriminate are torn down. Because when God makes all things new He'll remake it all with justice and righteousness so we point to it now by standing for it here.

We celebrate the goodness of God and the beauty of His creation in the things we produce. We work to bring Him glory. Work was assigned by God in the Garden of Eden before sin entered. Work is what Isaiah envisions the people in the new heaven and new earth still doing. We do our work with excellence because it's all for God's glory and our labor in that



way is not in vain. We create to bring Him glory. We worship to bring Him glory. Because when we do we point to a day when God makes all things new and none of our work will be in vain, and creativity and beauty will surround us and worship will be the sound on our lips.

And, as we wait in hope we announce already the good news of Jesus. Easter is us seeing what all things new will look like. Jesus rising from the dead Easter morning is the start of God making all things new. We announce to everyone in our words and our actions – Jesus is King and His Kingdom has already been established. And when we do we point to a day when God will make everything – us included – all new.

## **2. We give ourselves fully to the Lord**

We devote ourselves to worship – singing and times of praise, but also the worship that comes from a life surrendered to Jesus. We see that in our commitment to be here at church – not for attendance purposes but because of the life of the church. The encouragement we are to each other. The opportunity to join together in praising the Lord, praying for each other, bearing one another's burdens, and serving each other and all those who walk in our doors. We gather together and point to the day when God will dwell among His people forever.

Because when we come together at the Lord's table for communion on Sundays we're once again announcing – Jesus blood and body are how God will make all things new. It's the closest we come on this earth to the new earth and the new heaven and God making all things new. We proclaim that message every time we come to the Lord's table together and we'll keep proclaiming it until we're seated with Him in the new heaven and new earth.

And, we keep praying and believing. Jesus taught us how – Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. When we invite Jesus to establish His kingdom in us and in our home or in our community, or in a hospital room, or standing by a grieving family, or on our job – we are inviting Him to come and begin to make all things new in us.

**In what way is your life serving as a signpost to the new heaven and new earth and the day when God will make all things new?**

Let's pray.