



Pilgrim Home Baptist Church

NT 2022 Q4 • ALL THINGS NEW • REVELATION 21:1-8 • 11/27/2022

MAIN POINT

As the children of God, we can look to the future with hope and confidence knowing that Jesus is restoring what was lost and making all things new.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you think of yourself as an optimist or a pessimist? Have you always been that way?

How would those closest to you answer that question about you?

What's the difference between optimism in general and the kind of optimism a Christian can have?

Christianity is about hope no matter what else is happening. Even though all around us we see the hopelessness and despair that came about because of the fall, we can rest assured that Jesus is making all things new. If we fast forward to the end of history, we see the consummation of the hope that was begun when Jesus was born.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 21:1-8.

What are some things that characterize the old order of things for you right now?

Even though we might experience a measure of joy and peace in the old earth right now, we are still a part of the old order. That means any joy, peace, and life we will experience now will be

short lived, because the old order is characterized by death and decay. But it won't always be that way.

What are some of the characteristics that stick out to you about the new heaven and new earth from these verses? Which is most personally meaningful to you? Why?

In verse 2, John described the church as the bride of Christ. Why is this image a good one?

What is the goal of all redemption, as described in verses 1-4?

At the close of his vision, John saw the new heaven and new earth, along with the new Jerusalem, where God's people will dwell with Him forever. Short on words, John described this new holy city as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. A great scriptural promise God made repeatedly, especially in connection with the New Covenant, was that they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God (see Jer. 31:33; 32:38; 2 Cor. 6:16). Now His promise finds perfect fulfillment. In Revelation 21:4 the heavenly voice noted five more evil things of the old order that exist no longer—every tear, death, grief, crying, and pain. These are things we experience now because of sin's impact on our world. But when the old has passed away, their evils will be gone as well.

What does verse 3 show us about God's desire for humanity? How do you see God expressing His desire to be with His people throughout the Bible?

What's the difference in the way we will know God at that time and how we know Him now? What gets in the way now that won't be present then?

In verse 5, John recorded hearing God proclaim, "I am making all things new." Is this a promise we only experience at that time, or something we can experience now?

How has God made all things new for you personally?

What are the promises for you in verses 6-7? How do these promises make the pain and suffering we go through today worth it?

Confirming the certainty of God's purposes being fulfilled, God said "It is done." The created world is restored to its perfection. As a further confirmation, He described Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He also extends an invitation to anyone who thirsts. Throughout Scripture thirst symbolizes spiritual longing (Ps. 42:1; Jer. 2:13; John 4:14).

Where are some places we might turn to satisfy our spiritual thirst, other than to God? Why do those things not ultimately satisfy?

What characteristics of your life demonstrate that you are “thirsty” (v. 6) for all God has promised?

God’s invitation is to a thirst-quenching experience of grace in Christ that will last throughout life and eternity. He offers a drink from the spring of the water of life, eternal life. Many have wasted their lives in a fruitless search for lasting satisfaction. The satisfaction they seek is offered without cost to those who thirst. That does not mean the gift is not costly; it cost God the life and death of His Son, Jesus. The point here is that no one can purchase or earn eternal life. No one has the adequate resources or ability to attain it. Eternal life is God’s gift to be received by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

Look back at verse 8. Why is it important that we see this verse as part of the new order God is creating?

What happens if we neglect to take this promise into account with all the others?

In the new order, God’s final justice will be executed. That means eternal reward for those who have trusted in Jesus, but it also means that those who have not will receive the justice that is due. This, too, is part of God setting all things right in the new order. But for the children of God, the promise of God’s justice and restoration is a great source of hope and confidence because these things are faithful and true.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How often do you think about God’s restoration of all things? What do you think would change in your life if you thought about it more often?

What is our responsibility in light of this promise? How specifically does knowing this day is coming increase our urgency to bring hope to the world?

What situation in your life needs to be informed by God’s promise of the future? How are you going to do that?

PRAYER

Thank God that His Word is faithful and true, and that what He has promised will come to pass. Thank Him for the sure and certain promise that He is making all things new, and ask Him to help you live with a sense of expectation, urgency, and hope in light of that coming day.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 21:1-8

21:1–2. After the solemn judgment scene at the great white throne, the scene of the New Jerusalem provided welcome relief for John. The bowls of God’s judgment in Revelation 16 had demolished the old earth. At the beginning of the final judgment, “earth and sky fled from his presence” (20:11). What would happen now that the first heaven and the first earth had passed away? John saw a new heaven and a new earth. Whether he meant a transformation of the old elements of the universe and a renovation or whether this is a brand new universe is not clear. What he saw, however, transcends anything that could exist in the universe as we now understand it (for example, life on earth without a sun, v. 23).

The first of seven enemies for God’s people that will exist no longer is the sea (for the others, see v. 4 and 22:3, 5). Commentators differ in their understanding of what the absence of the sea implies. However, the first great monster had come out of the sea (13:1), and the surging oceans had been a suitable metaphor for the wicked of Isaiah’s day: “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud” (Isa. 57:20).

John’s panoramic focus quickly narrows to the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. She is obviously the counterpart to the wicked prostitute Babylon. If Babylon was Dame Civilization in her final embodiment as a wicked city, then New Jerusalem is “God’s People” in her eternal flowering as a holy city. The symbols John uses to picture the eternal state exceed our ability to understand them.

By beginning his description that she is coming down out of heaven, John conveys that the final home of the redeemed is earth itself for eternity. God created humanity to dwell on the earth, and his plan is for a new earth to be their place forever. In fact, one striking note about this vision of the New Jerusalem is the reappearance of the Tree of Life—one of the main items found in Eden, the first home of mankind (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2).

In Revelation 19:7, John had heard from a heavenly multitude praising God about the wedding of the Lamb and the preparation of the bride. Now, at last, when he sees the city he compares her to a bride beautifully dressed. A human bride is her most splendid only on her wedding day. Here is a bride whose radiance will never fade. The description of the bride’s attire begins in verse 11, emphasizing that she exists for her husband, the Lamb-Bridegroom.

21:3–4. For the third and final time John hears a loud voice from the throne (16:17; 19:5). The word for dwelling is traditionally translated “tabernacle” or “tent.” When the Israelites had lived in the wilderness after the exodus, God’s presence was evident through the tent (Exod. 40:34). Part of the reward for Israel’s obedience to God was, “I will put my dwelling place [tabernacle] among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev. 26:11–12). Israel’s disobedience, of course, led finally to the destruction of the temple.

The permanent remedy began when God became enfleshed in Jesus: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). A form of the same verb translated “made his dwelling” in John 1:14 is now used by the heavenly voice: he will live with them. Here, then, is the final eternal fulfillment of Leviticus 26.

“They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” is a divine promise often made, particularly in context of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; 2 Cor. 6:16). In eternity, it will find full completion in its most glorious sense. One striking note here is that the word translated “people,” while often singular in Revelation (for example, 18:4), here is plural, literally “peoples.” This points to the great ethnic diversity of those in heaven.

The great multitude who came out of the Great Tribulation received the pledge of many blessings including the final removal of any cause for tears (7:15–17). Now this promise extends to every citizen-saint of the New Jerusalem. The picture of God himself gently taking a handkerchief and wiping away all tears is overwhelming. All these belonged to the old order of things where sin and death were present. The last thought could also be translated, “The former things are gone.” No greater statement of the end of one kind of existence and the beginning of a new one can be found in Scripture.

21:5. In chapter 21 the first speaker was an unidentified voice from the throne. John now hears a second speaker. The throne is the great throne of heaven, first seen in 4:2, but most recently the place of final judgment (20:11). The Judge of the final reckoning was Christ. Now he speaks, as Creator rather than as Judge. Isaiah had foreseen this new creation (Isa. 65:17). During his earthly life Jesus had pledged, “I am going there [to my Father’s house] to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2), suggesting a process of creation. Now his statement that I am making everything new emphasizes both the process and settled determination of Jesus to establish this eternal reality.

The angel in charge of this vision had commanded John earlier to write a “blessed” followed by a solemn affirmation of its divine trustworthiness (19:9). Now Jesus himself urges John to write this down, apparently the entire vision sequence. An equally solemn affirmation follows, applying especially to the words just spoken. They are trustworthy and true words because they

issue from the one whose name is “Faithful and True” (19:11; the vocabulary is identical in the original).

21:6–8. When the seventh judgment bowl of divine wrath had been poured out, a great voice declared, “It is done” (16:17). The wrath of God had been fully manifested at that point. Now Christ himself makes the same declaration about the glory of God, fully declared through the appearing of new Jerusalem.

At the beginning of Revelation the Lord God Almighty called himself the Alpha and Omega (1:8), the A and Z, the one who existed from before the beginning and beyond the end. Now Christ also lays claim to this title (see 22:13). This time the letters are explained as the Beginning and the End. All things are created by Christ (source) and all things will end in him (goal). The apostle Paul declared the same truth in Colossians 1:16: “all things were created by him and for him.”

The last words of this vision declare again the two possible final destinies. Two images describe those who receive eternal life. First is the figure of drinking without cost from the spring of the water of life. Even greater was Jesus’ declaration at the Feast of Tabernacles: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37; see also 4:14). Later on, John will see this same picture further developed as an everlasting river flowing through New Jerusalem (22:1, 17).

If the first image is of quenched thirst, the second is of family: I will be his God and he will be my son (see v. 3). Both pictures include a notion of deliberate intention. Nobody accidentally receives eternal life. It is reserved for those who recognize their need (are thirsty) and demonstrate their faith through their good deeds (he who overcomes; see also 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Although this is the only time that Revelation compares heaven to something Christians will inherit, the epistles use it often, notably Ephesians 1:14 and 1 Peter 1:4.

The contrast to eternal life is the fiery lake of burning sulfur, that is, the second death, already described as the destination of the wicked at the end of the final judgment (20:14–15). The passage about the final judgment had stated only that the books will be opened and the dead will be judged for their works (20:12). Now the damned are described by the deeds they had done. The specific deeds are to be seen particularly in light of the coming of the sea monster and great prostitute:

The first three may apply to professing believers who became apostate, thus demonstrating that they were never truly redeemed. The entire list applies to those who never sincerely committed themselves to Christ. Here is a strong exhortation to the readers of the letter to maintain steadfast loyalty to Christ.

Thus, just as John's second vision had ended with the solemn note of God's wrath poured out at a point in time on Babylon the Great (16:17–21), so now his third vision concludes. This time, however, the wrath of God is poured out forever in the lake of fire.