

Lesson # 73 Revelation 21:1-8 The New Creation

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21 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. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.”

⁵ 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.” 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. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 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.”

I. The New Heaven and New Earth v. 1

As we embark on a study of this grand topic, I recognize two main potential distractions; 1.) to go into too much detail, providing information that is not in the text and is therefore speculative, or 2.) keeping the information so tight and basic that we lose the sense of intense hope and longing these verses are meant to convey to us. There are numerous people who have written books within the genre of “I died and went to heaven, then came back to life, and here’s what I saw when I was there...”. Having read a few of these “out of body experiences”ⁱ, I find them strikingly trite and suspiciously worldly, many of their recorded “sights and sounds” unbiblical, to say the least. These visions usually involve a tunnel of light through which the person has passed to reach a distant light source, and once there, to feel warmth, love, acceptance and community. They are often greeted by some Jesus-like figure whose theology is usually very universalistic in nature.

Randy Alcorn comments on this, “*But no one who had actually been in heaven would neglect to mention what Scripture shows is the main focus. If you had spent an evening dining with a king, you wouldn’t come back and talk about the place settings.*”ⁱⁱ

The final verse of chapter 20 is chilling though, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.” No, heaven is not a universal destination – note Rev. 21:27; 22:15, 18-19. We don’t even have to leave the vicinity of the context of this section to see that. Some people end up in Hell.

Verse 1 tells us that John sees the new heaven and earth because the first heaven and earth had passed away – cf. 20:11. It is no surprise from Scripture that this old order is to be eradicated in the future. Notice Heb. 12:25-29; LK. 21:29-33; Isa. 34:4; 51:6; 65:17; 66:22; II Pet. 3:10-13; MT. 5:18, etc. When it occurs, it is as a result of the completed purpose God had for creating it all in the first place. Rev. 21:1-4ff is clear. This is an absolutely new eternal order of things beginning where the old problems of weeping, mourning, death, pain, sin and sorrow will no longer have a role to play. Satan, demons & wicked people will be no more than a distant memory.

This eradication of earth & heaven *“does not mark a failure of God’s purpose for the first creation, but a process that he intended from the beginning in allowing evil to have its day in the first creation before being purged.”*ⁱⁱⁱ – according to Robert Thomas.

The role that the rest of Revelation plays in our salvation and hope is almost inestimable. In our lives in the here and now, in the often mundane and all too often, times of horrific experiences of suffering and death, we can only live faithfully in hope that what God promised us here is only a breath away. Like Paul in **Rom. 8:18-24**, we too long for the as yet unimaginable glory that awaits us as God’s beloved children. Although **I Cor. 2:9** is not (in its immediate context) referring to heaven, it seems to convey that heavenly hope we have now in our lives.

Verse 1 talks of a new heaven as well as a new earth. Does this mean God’s heaven (His home) or “the heavens” of space/stars/planets, etc. or both? I think God’s heavenly home is excluded because we will see the New Jerusalem “coming down from heaven” in verse 2. The new earth is not just a renovation of the current planet, because it is gone. This new earth is brand new and the heavens are brand new – an unimaginable display of glory which will transcend whatever we see now, even through the Hubble Telescope. Remember, there is no night in heaven (Rev. 21:23-26; 22:5); and no need of the sun or moon. However, the sky above us may be a deep sapphire colour or it may include rainbow colours or some other wondrous scenes in the constant light of eternal day. No one really knows.

Since God will dwell with us on this new earth – cf. Rev. 21:3, 22; 22:3 – not in some heavenly out of sight dimension we will realize something long ago lost in the first paradise, fellowship with God in person! The city, the New Jerusalem, - that city that Abraham sought in Heb. 11:10 - will come down to us out of heaven, so the eternal experience for us will take place (probably not exclusively) on the new earth. Does this mean that we will only have access to the earth? I doubt that. I believe we will be able to explore the entirety of the new heavens as well by virtue of our indescribable and indestructible glorified bodies. – See I Cor. 15:35-41.

Any vestiges of sin, death and decay will be missing from this new order. John mentions something that seems so radical as to pass beyond our ability to

comprehend it. "...the sea was no more." We cannot imagine a world where vast oceans and lakes are not there, but that appears to be what John is saying here.

All of life on earth is now dependent on the oceans for survival. Our climate & very cycle of life is completely tied to water. The rain we need to grow crops comes from the hydrological cycle of evaporating water, clouds, etc. On top of that, much of earth's beauty is derived from seaside venues, such as on tropical islands, etc. So this change to us is incomprehensible. Since a great percentage of our lives is tied to bodies of water, apparently our glorified bodies will not be based on that configuration, and we will have no need of water as a life-giving element, although the river of life in chapter 22 may provide some sort of refreshment that is not necessary but is invigorating.

This river (Rev. 22:1,17) is called the "river of the water of life", and v. 17 does speak of a thirst for this water. But this is probably not the water we are used to. There are times in Scripture where water or thirst are used as a metaphor for something else – like salvation or eternal life (ie. Matthew 5:6; John 4:10; 7:37-39; etc.). John MacArthur comments; "...*the new heaven and new earth will be based on a completely different life principle than the present universe. There will be a river in heaven, not of water, but of the 'water of life' (22:1,17), without a sea, there can be no hydrological cycle, so that every feature of life and climate will be dramatically different.*"^{iv}

One wonders if the life of Eden had similar nuances? There was apparently no rain there until the Flood (cf. Gen. 2:5-6) but there were rivers of fresh water and a tree of life, complete with fruit.

"No sea" probably means just that – No Sea – no huge salt water oceans, no sea life, no storms, no tides, and yet does this mean no fresh water at all for beauty and refreshment? No majestic waterfalls, no pristine lakes, no boating or water-sports in heaven? We cannot conclude that "no seas" means no water whatsoever. It may simply mean that there are no salt water bodies.

The sea has evil connotations over the course of human history. It has been a source of energy for hurricanes and tsunamis, it was the tool of the Flood, it means separation from loved ones, a place of great battles, shipwrecks and death, it is the source of the Beast in Rev. 13:1 – a synonym for the Abyss – perhaps the place of incarceration for those angels mentioned in II Peter 2:4.

Robert Thomas says, "*The sea is the first of 7 evils John says will no longer exist, the other 6 being death, mourning, weeping, pain (21:4), the curse (22:3), and night (21:25; 22:5).*"^v

N.T. Wright comments, "*Why should the new creation exclude the beautiful ocean? We love the sea because we can observe its enormous power and restless energy from a safe distance. But in reality the sea is very dangerous, the source of seaquakes and drowning. The new creation won't have the sea, because there*

will be no more natural suffering. Heaven will be a realm where, the Bible promises, God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”^{vi}

I do not believe that “the sea” is symbolic of something else here either. Some argue that this ‘sea’ refers to nations of the Gentiles, and that only Israel remains, however, this ignores verses like 21:24-26 & 22:2 where nations are clearly a part of this new created order.

II. The New Jerusalem

vv. 2-3

The Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem was a perfect 30 ft. cube. The New Jerusalem itself is described as a perfect cube, but it stretches 1,400 miles in all directions (Rev. 21:16). Some see this as mere symbolism, but my opinion is it does not have to be. God’s presence dwelt in the Tabernacle and the first Temple of Solomon within the Holy of Holies as the Shekinah Glory, and now, *“Heaven’s greatest miracle will be our access to God. In the New Jerusalem, we will be able to come physically through wide open gates to God’s throne.”^{vii}*

Is this city that descends from heaven to the new earth an instantaneous development or something prepared long before this time and now presented to the eternal heavenly community? Some indicate that **Heb. 11:16** is a reference to this city (and perhaps JN 14:2 is as well), and if so, note the tense, “He has prepared for them a city, not “will prepare”. **Heb. 12:18-24** may be another, more detailed reference to this. The builder of this city is God, from whom the city is said to have come. ④

This city is not ‘heaven’, but is heaven’s capital and is the third Jerusalem – 1st) historic Jerusalem in Palestine when David ruled, and it is called ‘the holy city’ (Rev. 11:2; Neh. 11:1; Isa. 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 5:4; 27:53; 2nd) restored Jerusalem where Jesus Christ will rule from David’s throne during the Millennial Kingdom; and 3rd) this New Jerusalem. This city will never be fought over or trampled underfoot by men, will never come under attack or be fouled by wickedness inside its gates. It will be the central communal feature of heaven, which apparently, does not take place in an eternal somewhere, but here on the new earth. In this city will exist perfect unity, harmony, relationships, joy and absolutely no taint of sin, not even a hint.

The city is said to be “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. We spoke a bit about the bride of Christ in lesson # 61. John Macarthur interprets this as a picture of the consummation of the concept of the bride of Christ. By this point in Revelation the bride concept expands to include not only the church (as it has since Acts 2) but also the rest of the redeemed from all ages who will live forever in that eternal city. This is the moment that Paul describes in **I Cor. 15:28**^{viii} when all things are subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.” On the basis of what follows in vv. 3-7, I believe he is correct. This is that time and all had become subject to Christ, and is being

turned over to the Father again – the redemptive purposes for creation and all creation are absolutely fulfilled. Cf. **Psalm 110:1**.

This great and awe inspiring city is about to be described in Rev. 21:9-22:5, but the angel calls it “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” in 21:9. We’ll examine those details as we get to them, but for now, let’s look at the remarkable and joyous report of v. 3.

Since we are human and have been trained by our culture & sinful nature to cherish ‘things’, we might tend to be overawed by this brilliant city coming down out of heaven, no doubt a spectacular, emotional sight when it occurs. But we tend to see v. 3 as an almost mere decoration, but v. 3 shows us that the point of heaven is not where we’ll live eternally, but with Whom we will live eternally. This is likely the reason there is not a lot of detail about heaven itself. We might get the impression that it is all about us and our pleasures, when it is really about God and our pleasure as a result of being with Him! Whatever else heaven is, this is the key aspect of it and all else pales in the face of that fact.

Have you noticed how often John stresses the news we all long to hear?

- Behold the dwelling place of God is with man.
- He will dwell with them and they will be His people.
- God Himself will be with them as their God.

As sinful, yet saved people now, this would be a horrifying thought – even though the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we seldom think of that, except at this future time in glorified sinless bodies – what a spectacular thought! No more wondering what God is really like; being able to see, walk and talk with the Lord Jesus Christ! There is no word ever invented to describe what that feeling might be like. ⑤

This promise of God being His people’s God is oft repeated in Scripture, from OT to NT – Lev. 26:11; Ezek. 11:20; 27:23, 37; Gen. 17:8; Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Zech. 8:8; II Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; etc. This is of course what Eden was like before Adam & Eve sinned, at least up until that Gen. 3:8 tells us that when they heard the voice of God walking in the cool of the garden, they hid themselves for the first time. From that time until the end of human history, that has been the trend in general, with the notable exceptions of the Tabernacle & Solomon’s Temple, both of which were set up under severe restrictions for fellowship with God.

But what John now describes in Rev. 21:3 is an eternal, never to end enjoyment of God’s people existing alongside Him personally, seeing Him as He is. There are hints of this in the NT – **I JN 3:2; Matt. 5:8**. Apart from our glorification, none of us could ever live in God’s presence, seeing Him, hearing Him or worshipping Him in person – cf. **Isa. 6:5**. Remember that, according to Lev. 16, only the High Priest, and then only once a year, and through elaborate preparation both physically and spiritually, and bringing with him the

appropriate sacrifices, could enter the Holy of Holies on behalf of Himself and his people.

III. The Curse Eradicated

v. 4

Steven Lawson points out, *“There will be nothing unclean around us. We will live in a world spiritually clean from the pollution of all sin...No abortion clinics, no divorce courts, no brothels, no bankruptcy courts, no psychiatric wards, and no treatment centers...No pornography, no dial-a-porn, no teen suicide...no drive-by shootings, no racial tensions, and no prejudice.*

There will be no misunderstandings, no injustice, no depression, no hurtful words, no gossip, no hurt feelings, no worry, no emptiness, and no child abuse.

There will be no wars, no financial worries...no heart monitors, no rust, no perplexing questions, no false teachers, no financial shortages, no hurricanes, no bad habits, no decay, no locks.

We will never need to confess sin. Never need to apologize again. Never need to straighten out a strained relationship. Never have to resist Satan again. Never have to resist temptation. Never!”^{ix}

Fyodor Dostoevsky is quoted by Tim Keller, *“I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage...In the world’s finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they’ve shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened with men.”^x* ⑥

Ravi Zacharias further comments, *“Is this then, the best of all possible worlds God could have made? Very plainly put, to our way of thinking there are only 4 possible worlds that scholars have talked about. The first is that there be no creation versus this world. Would it not have been better for God to have created no world rather than to have created this one where good and evil are possibilities? The second is to have created a world where only good could have been chosen, a kind of robotic world. The third option would have been a world where there was no such thing as good or evil, an amoral world. The fourth is this world that we live in, where good and evil exist along with the possibility of choosing either.”^{xi}*

Rev. 21:4 is one of the most comforting verses in the entire Bible and the source of tremendous hope. This verse marks the eradication of the curse placed on creation way back in Genesis 3, which has been in operation until this point which is yet future to us. Note – **Gen. 3:14-19 & Rom. 8:18-25.**

For me, the importance of this verse and what it represents calls to mind a question that begs an answer, but the answer is so complicated and deep that it requires the complete Bible and human history to answer it. What is that question?

In Rev. 21:4, God obviously has the power to eradicate sin, evil, suffering, crying and pain. Since we know He is omnipotent, and has never gained strength - there has never been a time when He was weak, why now does He do what this verse says, and not 5 minutes after Adam & Eve sinned? Why did He not simply annihilate Lucifer and the third of the angels who fell when they sinned (which was even before Adam & Eve fell, and actually occurred in heaven)? Why now? Let me tell you this...I believe that if you get the answer to this question right, you will have found the key to unlock the mystery of why God created anything in the first place. This verse and the timing of it is that critical!

I have thought a lot about this topic over the past 6 or 7 years. I will give you a hint that God's sovereignty is at the heart of the answer to this question, so if you believe that man's autonomous free will is the first cause of all the evil and suffering in the world, you may disagree with my conclusion. You might have an argument regarding evil and wickedness among men, but in no way can the free will argument cannot account for natural evil like hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanoes, tsunamis, floods or earthquakes.

Here is the verse that jumps off the page for me, and I want us to spend some time pondering the implications of this verse . The sea is the first "evil" of 7 being eradicated in this passage. The other six are: death, mourning, weeping, pain, the curse (22:3), and night (21:25; 22:5).

First, God will "wipe away every tear from their eyes" – from our eyes. How we long for that to happen in our lives here and now, and in some sense, our faith & trust in God gets us through whatever trial, test or season of grief we encounter in our lives. The problem though, from our perspective is that these seasons of grief are too long and too frequent, too painful, too sad and relief does not come soon enough, and sometimes, not at all. Our prayers seem to go unanswered and God's love and presence seems remote and cold, and we often feel abandoned in our grief. Yet, God's word promises us that He will never leave us or forsake us, and if we love Him, He is working all things out for our good and His glory. And so, as imperfectly as we do, we trust Him and we wait for the day described here.

What is our experience today – what is our worldview? It is very easy to be drawn into a vortex of hopelessness and despair as we observe the daily news or carry around on our shoulders the worry and concern over the tragedies in our own families. So, I would ask you this question, as we ponder Rev. 21:4 – does what you believe about God have a strong enough theological framework to support what you observe real life to consist of? I'll put it another way – How big is your God & how deep is your faith in Jesus Christ?

When babies die or young people are killed or maimed for life in a tragic automobile accident; when serial killers seem uncatchable; when another terrorist attack kills and wounds scores of people; when a loved one , perhaps even a beloved child is diagnosed with a terminal disease; or a baby is born with a heartbreaking handicap; can your understanding of God's goodness

(yes – goodness) and power sustain you during these onslaughts against your faith or do you collapse in despair, or worse, decide to believe that “God was not in that.”? It is at times like these, when our faith is tested – in the furnace of affliction – that reveal to us our true beliefs.

Mary Beth Chapman, whose 5 year old daughter died in a horribly tragic car accident in their own driveway, provides us with excellent advice;

“These are places where God exercises His sovereign right to retain mystery. We cannot fathom the intricacies of the divine plan. But make no mistake, when we are in the driest desert, we can receive the manna to make it all the way to the other side where trees bud again and children laugh. God sometimes delivers us from evils we never see. Other times He parts raging oceans before our very eyes. Still other times he says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you...do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. (Isa. 43:2,5)”^{xii}

Rev. 21:4 gives you hope – something to cling to for the future – but I would like to have you consider something this glorious verse implies about all of the heartbreak of human history that precedes it. It implies purpose for everything that has occurred and will yet occur – if you are alive, your suffering is not done yet, I assure you. Nothing is simply happenstance or accidental – nothing. If all that alarms us is simply accidental or random & purposeless, and therefore, outside of God’s will for evil to have appeared to dominate the world since Genesis 3, and if He has had the power to end it all along and wipe away the tears forever – and this verse is saying that – then I put forth this idea for your consideration... 8

Since God could have ended evil, death, war, loneliness, disease, genocide, broken relationships, poverty, despair, etc. at any time, then the very fact that He has not done so, but now in this verse, does, tells us that He has a purpose for allowing it all, it is NOT that He was simply powerless to end it before, or could not interrupt man’s free will or was uncaring about it. You cannot read through the bible honestly, especially the book of Revelation and think that God has been powerless against evil^{xiii}. Numerous verses attest that even Satan is under His direct control.

On a topic like this one, it is easy to get philosophical, but I want us all to think biblically about it. I want us to know His purpose as His word reveals it, because this verse stands at the very precipice of the revelatory consummation of God’s entire purpose for creating at all.

Christians believe that all the trouble we see in the world – all of it directly or indirectly leading to death began at the fall of Adam & Eve in Gen. 3. Biblical truth shows that God knew Adam & Eve would sin and what would follow long before He created anything. We find verses talking about a Saviour slain before the foundation of the world – thus preparing a remedy for sin before sin even existed; and we found the lamb’s Book of Life wherein are listed those God chose

for salvation before the foundation of the world, again showing a need that did not yet exist being dealt with before time. In Matthew 25: 31-34, Christ talks about entrance to the Kingdom prepared for those who enter from before the foundation of the world. We find other verses (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2) talking about God's promise of salvation from before time began.

Well, if He created it all, knowing what would occur and how bad it would get, and even prepared a remedy before-hand to save people from sin and we are now at a verse which demonstrates that He has finally eradicated sin and all the results of it forever, then we have a perspective that effectively bookends world history for us. He created it, He sustains it and He brings it to a close – His way. Cf. **Col. 1:13-17**; **Rom. 11:33-36** – for His purposes.

Let's look back at **Rom. 8:20-21**. Carefully note Paul's wording here. Who subjected creation to futility? He did. He who? The He or Him of Rom. 8:20-21 is – without a hint of doubt - God. In the context of the passage, that is the only conclusion available. God subjected it to futility, as an even casual reading of most of Genesis 3 (vv. 9-19) will also attest. Futility is a good general word to describe the effects of God's curse on His world and for the whirling chaos whisking around us in our lives, which we desperately attempt to sidestep, eventually unsuccessfully.

But there is more to these 2 verses. Verse 20 ends with the phrase, "in hope". What's the hope aspect of this? Look back at **v. 18**. Here we find a very important key to understanding personal suffering, trials and grief we experience, and this verse leads off a section that ends in one of the most comforting verses in God's word for the believer. It promises future glory to be revealed, gives us purpose for our prayers (vv. 26-27); promises God's providence at work in our lives (v. 28); reveals the unbreakable chain of redemption (vv. 29-30) and in vv. 31-39, promises our absolute unshakeable assurance of salvation's consummation! So, as believers, we cherish these truths and others that describe the reasons why we suffer – ie.) to teach us patience, to teach us to trust God more, to show us we must hold the world's goods loosely, to give us a better resurrection, to teach us to assist others better, to bring God greater glory as we demonstrate through steadfast faith that in the midst of our suffering, even when it seems endless, God is still worthy to receive our highest praise. We worship Christ even if there is no Mercedes, no gold plated mansion, or if our health fails, if we have a small retirement pension and live under a corrupt and godless government, we still live in hope and that brings us joy because our joy is ultimately tied to how big our God is and to His eternal promises to us, not to our circumstances!

Unbelievers, those who see no purpose behind the evil in the world, typically come up with a syllogism that goes something like this:

1. If God is all powerful, then He could prevent all evil
2. If God is perfectly good, He would desire to prevent all evil
3. Evil exists
4. Therefore:

- a. God does not exist...or if He does, then
- b. He is not all powerful or
- c. He is not all good

Other variations of # 4 – more biblically based – however, are based on some recognition of some purpose God has for allowing evil:

- d. God allows evil to exist so that man can have autonomous free will – this one is the most common Arminian argument, and usually includes the idea that God cannot possibly gain any glory from acts of evil. Although verses like JN 13:31-32 indicate that He does.
- e. God allows evil to exist because this is the best universe He could create which allows the most people to be saved -this is a heresy called Molinism.
- f. God allows evil to exist for the purpose of bringing Him the most glory from not only good things but from evil as well. This is the Biblical view.

It is “f” that is most supported in the Bible. God has a purpose for allowing evil. He is not the source of it, but He has decreed that it would be part of creation so that His full orbbed attributes would be revealed and He would receive maximum glory from His creative purposes. For example, if sin had never entered the world, we would never have any way of knowing about God’s holiness, wrath, grace, forgiveness and mercy, and would have no real way to measure His love. These things are all part of God’s perfect character and could never be demonstrated in a world where sin never occurred. There will be no need of these things in the New Heaven & New Earth because everyone entering heaven will have lived a life on earth within history and will have already seen all of these attributes in action & will glorify and trust Him perfectly as a result of that knowledge. ⑩

As we study through the Bible we see verse after verse that shows God purpose for allowing evil – Gen. 50:20; & 45:11; Acts 2:23-34; 4:26-28; JN 13:31, Ex. 9:16; 10:1; 11:9-12; Isa. 10 and many others. It is important that we know such verses are there because that helps us to understand the critical connection of Rev. 21:4 to our hope. These evil things described in Rev. 21:4 – death, mourning, crying & pain – things we all live out and experience today, persevere through and cry over and worry about and pray over, will be banished from existence forever. Our verse says, “they have passed away”. Biblically and theologically, there is no more purpose for them to exist. God had a purpose for them but by Revelation 21 that purpose has been exhausted and there is no longer a need for them.

Let me suggest why this occurs at this future time and not now, or better, even earlier in our lives? The purpose – to glorify God - is consummated. Everyone that this is pertinent to – the redeemed and glorified of all ages of earth’s history, have experienced all of these evils. They have seen man at his worst and God at His best. They’ve sunk into despair and been raised up by God. Some have been martyred and then gloriously resurrected by God. Many of them have cried out from a safe place in heaven during the events of Revelation 19 – “Hallelujah!” –

see **Rev. 19:1-5**. Why? Judgment has finally arrived – Christ is on the verge of returning to earth in 19:11ff, to bring about His Millennial Kingdom for His people and damnation for the wicked. His holy & righteous vengeance is about to be unleashed with eternal results.

Those about to enter heavenly eternity – those from whose eyes God will wipe away all tears, will know without a hint of doubt that God is God – so immensely, and so inconceivably sovereign that even evil was under His control throughout history. If He now says that all that sorrow is gone then it is gone – finished. We will dwell in safety and joy forever, without even a hint of sin ruining this new Heaven and New Earth. See **Rev. 21:23-27** – exclusive eternal life, no more night, no clandestine or open access for anyone or anything who might want to spoil the joy of those in Christ for eternity.

Right now, we can't even imagine a world without worry, death, mourning, crying, fear or pain, can we? No funerals, no late night shocking phone calls, no feeling like we've been kicked in the stomach when we get tragic news; no mind-numbing Doctors' diagnoses, no mourning or missing someone, no layoffs, no tearful goodbyes and no grief stricken moments to get over.

There will no longer be any reason to weep because finally, we will be in a place where there's nothing that will ever happen to stir up those emotions in us. No pain...in a congregation even as small as this one, many people suffer with pain every day. Some are just aches and pains from aging; some are sharp pains from arthritis, injuries, kidney stones or damaged organs; some deal with cancerous tumors, chemo or radiation therapy and perhaps a shortened life expectancy. Many are recovering from surgery or waiting for it with trepidation; and many deal with chronic, every day misery with almost no hope for recovery or even for a few good days, and many times, coupled with a poor income and no way to make it grow. It's unimaginable that there is hope for that all to be gone one day, but here we have it on God's word, the most trusted source imaginable - in black & white!

Tim Keller makes this comment, *“And when we get there, we will say, I've come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here! This is the land I've been looking for all my life, though I never knew it! And it will by no means be the end of our story. In fact, as CS Lewis put it, all the adventures we have ever had will end up being only “the cover and the title page”. Finally, we will begin, “Chapter one of the great story, which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before.”^{xiv}*

IV. Alpha and Omega

vv. 5-7

We need to move along here, so look with me at **Rev. 21:5-7** – there are just a couple of things to point out here. In v. 5, “He who sits on the throne”...there is no higher authority than this. God Himself says “Behold, I am making all things

new. This didn't just come about, He planned it in eternity past and the time has now arrived.

In v. 6, He says, "It is done." "I am the Alpha & Omega, the beginning & the end." He will give to the one who thirsts personal attention – the one, not them or those, but the one who thirsts.

And then note v. 7 – who will inherit these things? He who overcomes. This was the disclaimer attached to every letter written by Christ to the 7 churches in Rev. 2 & 3. "To he who overcomes, I will give...all these promises, but the best promise is this final one in **v. 7**.

Mark Thompson comments;

"God can be trusted in the midst of the darkness and He has promised that the darkness will end. In the meantime, the darkness strangely serves to keep us from so entangling ourselves in the present that we forget about hope. For a day is coming when the circumstances that drive us to despair, those we have engineered and those beyond our power to control, the restriction of our freedom and the oppressive opening of a plethora of freedoms will finally be resolved. A day is coming when fear will be done away with and weeping will be a thing of the past. Our losses will be swallowed up by grace, and the guarantee is the cross of Christ. Hope can withstand the batterings of conscience and the false accusations of the evil one because Jesus died and rose again. Peace can anchor the tormented soul because Jesus died and rose again. Our failures have been dealt with and new life has begun."^{xv}

12

Our future hope, based on the promises of God's word, from the OT to the NT, and in our own personal lives, was bought for us on a Roman Cross outside of Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago cf. **Col. 2:13-14**. If God did not end His creation before wicked men crucified His Son, then He has a plan that includes Jesus' death & resurrection in His purpose for everything. See **Romans 8:32**.

I'm going to end this section with a quote from a Christian woman I respect more & more every time I hear her speak or read her latest book. As a quadriplegic for about 40 years, Joni Eareckson-Tada understands chronic suffering better than just about anyone, and God has used her greatly to teach others how worthy Christ is of our worship, no matter what our circumstances. Here is what she says in a recently published book;

"I hope I can take my wheelchair to heaven. With my new glorified body I will stand up on resurrected legs & I will be next to the Lord Jesus. And I will feel those nail prints in His hands, and I will say, "Thank You, Jesus!" He will know I mean it, because He will recognise me from the inner sanctum of sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings. He will see that I was one who identified with Him in the sharing of His sufferings, so my gratitude will not be hollow.

And then I will say, "Lord Jesus, do you see that wheelchair over there? Well, You were right. When You put me in it, it was a lot of trouble. But the weaker I

was in that thing, the harder I leaned on You. And the harder I leaned on You, the stronger I discovered You to be. I do not think I would ever have known the glory of Your grace were it not for the weakness of that wheelchair. So thank You, Lord Jesus, for that. Now, if You like, you can send that thing off to Hell.”^{xvi}

This is a God who is worthy of all of our praise and worship!

V. The Eternal Contrast

vv. 8

Verse 8 describes those who are not overcomers, who will never inherit God’s kingdom or experience the glorious sight of the new Heavens and new earth, or the New Jerusalem. They certainly won’t ever enjoy anything God’s beloved saints will experience eternally. They will never even see it – cf. Matt. 5:20; 7:13-14. They are having ‘their best life now.’

Who will end up in heaven is not decided on the basis of some accident. The bulk of humanity will not be in heaven, because according to Jesus’ own words, those who find the path to heaven are few. He says it is a difficult way and a narrow gate. This list in v. 8 is one of many in the Scriptures that categorize sins. Another, briefer list is found in **Rev. 22:15**. Others are in I Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 1:18ff; Gal. 5:19-21; II Tim. 3:2-5. The Ten Commandments lists sins and categories and the Bible in narrative after narrative offers prescriptive advice and points out specific sins, and there are very few that are left out. Many think of new ways to commit these sins, but they always fall under an already established category of sin. As Solomon points out in Eccl. 1:9, “there is nothing new under the sun.”, and cf. Eccl. 1:14. 13

Man is a sinner by nature (Rom. 5:12-21), but the entirety of Scripture is designed to show man who God is – to reveal and demonstrate His attributes and to display the remedy for sin God has provided in Christ. Both forgiveness and perfect righteousness are necessary to enter heaven. God Himself provides the way and means to enter the narrow gate and to remain on the narrow road which alone leads to eternal life. What a glorious section of Scripture this is!

Alexander Patterson will have the last word in this lesson; *“The question is often asked, “Why did God permit the fall...In some world, if not this one, the question was sure to arise whether the will of God was best and right...God could have met it by a display of power and might and silenced all opposition, but that would not be an answer but a suppression. It would not be worthy of the plan which God had before Him as seen in the ages. To silence by authority is not to settle the question...Better this issue fully and fairly met now and the questions answered at once, than it should be left open, a constant danger ever threatening the universe, hanging like an avalanche over the future, to break forth perhaps when the universe was filled with holy, happy beings...There seems to have been but one way – to permit an actual experiment and demonstration of the whole question. To this end sin must be allowed to present itself in all its hideous nature and effects: suffering must follow, and sorrow deep*

and widespread must be felt and endured. When this great experiment is over, every question will be forever settled. Every alternative opposed to the will of God will have been solved. It will be apparent as the noon-day sun to all intelligences that all has been passed through the crucible of actual demonstration. The verdict from this will be that there is but one standard of right, but one way of happiness, but one way of holiness, and that is the will of God. The participants in this struggle are to be rewarded for their part in this sad stage of suffering by correspondingly and vastly increased benefits hereafter. They are to have the highest state in the kingdom to come.”^{xvii}

Next lesson – Lesson # 74 -- Rev. 21:9-21 The Description of the New Jerusalem

ⁱ Richard Eby, *Didn't You Read My Book?*; *Caught Up Into Paradise*; Don Piper, *90 Minutes in Heaven*; Betty Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*; Trudy Harris, *Glimpses of Heaven*; Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Heaven*; etc.

ⁱⁱ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale, 2004, p. 180

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, Moody, p. 440

^{iv} John MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, p. 263

^v Thomas, *IBID*, p. 440

^{vi} NT Wright, as quoted by Dinesh D'Souza in “*Godforsaken – Bad Things Happen. Is there a God who cares? Yes. Here's proof.*”, Tyndale, 2012, pp. 228-229

^{vii} Alcorn, *IBID*, p. 181

^{viii} MacArthur, pp. 265- 266

^{ix} Steven J. Lawson, *Heaven Help Us*, Navpress; 1995; pp. 148-149

^x Fyodor Dostoevsky, from *The Brothers Karamazov*, quoted by Tim Keller in Bryan Chappell (ed), *The Toughest Sermons You'll Ever Have to Preach*, Zondervan, 2011, p. 67

^{xi} Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Night*, Word, 1998, p. 216

^{xii} Mary Beth Chapman, “*Choosing to See*”; Revell, 2010, p. 19

^{xiii} Note: Isa. 41:2-4; 42:6-9; 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:4-7, 21-23; 46:9-11; Pss. 46:8-10; 32:4-19; 48:15; 103:19; 119:160 etc.

^{xiv} Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, Dutton, 2008, pp. 225-226.

^{xv} Mark D. Thompson, chapter – “*Luther on Despair*”, in “*The Consolations of Theology*”, Brian S. Rosner (editor), Eerdmans, 2008, p. 71

^{xvi} Joni Eareckson-Tada, in chapter entitled, “*Wheelchairs in Heaven?*”, p. 324 of “*Why O God?*”, Larry J. Waters & Roy B. Zuck, editors, Crossway Books, 2011

^{xvii} Alexander Patterson, as quoted by Norm Geisler in “*God, Evil and Dispensations*”, an essay within the book, “*Walvoort: A Tribute*”, Donald Campbell (editor), Moody, 1982, pp.107-108