

A Door to Something More

A few years before COVID, the adult Sunday School class spent nearly two years studying the Book of Revelation and the end times. There is a field of study in theology that studies end times, known as eschatology. There are multiple theories of the when's and how's of Jesus Christ's return, as well as the Last Judgment. Something that wasn't talked about much, and usually isn't discussed a lot by folks studying eschatology is the new heaven and earth. I don't know that I've ever preached on it before, either.

In 1956, British theologian and author C.S. Lewis wrote the final book in his *Chronicles of Narnia* series. There's a moment at the end of *The Last Battle*, when the characters pass through a door and find themselves not at the end, but at the beginning. "The term is over," Aslan says. "The holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."¹

This isn't escapism. It's eschatology. What Lewis captured in storybook form is the hope Revelation 21 proclaims. After all the battles, beasts, confusion, and chaos of the earlier chapters, we arrive at the breathtaking vision of a new heaven and a new earth – a new world that God promises to unveil, and to dwell in with us, forever.

Today we explore this hope. What does it mean that God is "making all things new?" What does this view of the future say about our present? And how does the imaginative world of a children's book series from the 1950's give us glimpses of the glory to come? These are some things we'll think about this morning, as we explore the Scripture together. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Revelation 21:1-6. I'm reading from the New International Version this morning. **Read Revelation 21:1-6.**

The Old World Passes Away

Our passage opens with a sweeping announcement. "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," (Rev. 21:1). Oftentimes in Scripture, heaven and earth together represent all of created existence. The old world, disfigured by sin, suffering, and separation from God, is gone. It's not simply burned up or abandoned, but transformed – redeemed in the deepest sense.

The passing away of the old is not a rejection – it's a resurrection – a cleansing fire, not a destructive one. I remember one of my girls – I won't say which one and single her out, but she was a lot littler then – when we read this verse at home, she

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle*, (The Bodley Head, 1956).

started crying because of the phrase, “there was no longer any sea.” She was all about mermaids and dolphins. The thought of not having an ocean or sea for marine creatures to live in really bothered her. As I’ve looked at this passage, there’s more to it than meets the eye. As modern-day interpreters of the Bible, we often take things literally. Some things are meant to be taken figuratively, and this statement about no sea may be one of them.

Think about it. When John first wrote down the book, the livelihood of most people was based on agriculture. Farming. So what are some threats to a small farm? Drought, disease, swarms of locusts – stuff like the ten plagues that God sent on Egypt when Pharaoh wouldn’t let the people go. And floods. The Israelites passed through the Red Sea. And once they were through the Egyptians followed them in, and God swept them all away when the waters came back down. The sea, in this case, is a dangerous thing. And so, “there was no longer any sea,” may be a way of saying that the dangerous things have passed away.

We often think of heaven as a place up there – spiritual, disembodied. But John’s vision in Revelation is earthy, grounded. It’s embodied. We talked about embodied believing at the beginning of this series three weeks ago. It’s physical. Heaven comes down. God makes His home with us. “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,’” (verse 3).

This is Eden restored. Not us going up to God – we focus on that a lot, I know, I do it, too – but it’s God coming down to us. It’s the reversal of exile. The healing of all that is broken. It’s the fulfillment of every promise made to us in the Scriptures.

One of the characters in C.S. Lewis’ book states, “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now.”² What John, the writer of Revelation, and Lewis both understood is this: we are homesick. Not for the past, but for the future. We’re longing for the real world that we were made for. And that is for us to be physically present, with God.

God Will Wipe Away Every Tear

“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,” (verse 4). God doesn’t say there won’t be any tears. He says He will wipe them away. God Himself will do it – tenderly, personally. He doesn’t just fix what’s broken, He enters into it. He wipes tears. He draws near.

Church, remember the night when Jesus was betrayed and they were in the Upper Room getting ready to eat the Passover meal? What did the Lord do before the meal? He washed their feet. John Wesley believed that salvation wasn't about just being saved from something. He also said it was being saved for something – for relationship, for love, for holiness. He spoke often about what he called “practical divinity,” the idea that holiness is lived out in compassion, mercy, and justice. The God who will one day wipe every tear invites us now to be His hands and feet, wiping the tears – and washing the feet – of the broken in His name.

In Narnia, when King Tirian and the children enter Aslan's Country, they feel the pain of what they've lost. But they also experience the joy of what they've gained. The old Narnia is gone. But the real Narnia – the true country – has begun. That's the promise we have in Revelation 21. It's not just about the end of pain. It's also about the beginning of something unimaginably better. Not just consolation, but transformation.

The Holy City Comes Down

John states, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,” (verse 2). There are a lot of ideas being conveyed here. It's showing us God's covenant love, the creation of a sacred space, unimaginable beauty – and it fills us with anticipation! The city isn't just a place. It's a people. We are that bride. You and I, and everyone else who has ever been part of the Church are that city. And it's really striking – it isn't about us going up to heaven. Heaven comes down to us. The direction is crucial.

As Methodists, we believe grace isn't about escape, but rather, transformation. Salvation isn't about fleeing earth, but about earth being restored and becoming the dwelling place of God. The Holy City isn't the reward of isolated saints that we don't know personally – it's the entire community of all the redeemed. What makes the city glorious is not its gold or its gates – it's that God dwells there.

The presence of God is the Center, the Light – the heartbeat of the new world. We are saved to belong – to God, and to one another. This is why the Church matters. This is why worshiping together matters. In our life together, we give ourselves – and others – a preview of the city that is to come.

Lewis paints a similar picture in *The Last Battle*. Aslan's Country isn't static or sterile. It's vivid. Realer than real. As Lucy puts it, “I see now, this is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below.” The new Jerusalem – heaven on earth – is more than the current heavens and earth. It's won't be the end of nature – but all of nature redeemed and resurrected – including all those cool dolphins a little girl was concerned about several years ago.

The Alpha and The Omega

“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.’ He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’” (verses 5-6a). The person John sees on the throne is Jesus. The words He says to John, “It is done,” are the same ones that He spoke from the cross. In Greek, it’s “Tetelestai,” “It is finished,” or “Paid in full.” At the cross, He said it in regards to paying the price for our sin, and to conquer death for us.

But here, in Revelation, He speaks them over the whole creation. This is the voice of the One who spans history. The One who started everything in Genesis 1. He brings it to fulfillment and completion in our passage this morning.

Notice, too, that He’s not making all new things – He’s making all things new. There is a big difference! He doesn’t throw out His creation. He renews it. He restores it. And He redeems it.

When Jesus says, “It is done,” He’s telling us that nothing has been left unfinished. Everything that was broken has been healed. All that was lost has been found. All that was tainted by sin has been made holy, just as He is holy. Church, this is our future, secured by the blood of Jesus Christ!

In the Light of the New World

And then comes His invitation to us: “To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life,” (verse 6b). In Lewis’ book, the children drink from a stream that runs through the country. It tastes like nothing on earth. And they want more and more of it. That’s how our Christian life ends – not with a period – but a fountain. A gift. A spring of living water, flowing forever in the presence of God who is with us.

This vision of the new world should impact how we live today in a few ways. First, even though we’re currently in the old world, we need to live as citizens of the New World. We’re citizens of New Jerusalem, even though we still walk the streets of the old. Right now we live in a world of mourning and pain, but we live in the light of the world that is coming – and already breaking in. We live as people who drink daily from the spring of the water of life. We live like people who embody the love and justice of God.

We resist despair. Revelation doesn’t minimize suffering. It acknowledges it. It insists that suffering isn’t the final word. Look what He says, “Death will be no more.” God – who even in Old Testament times called Himself the God of the Living – will have the last word.

We look forward without fear. If this is what God has in store – not clouds and harps, but restored bodies, healed hearts, radiant cities, and springs of living water – then death is not a final defeat. Rather, it's an open doorway. And Heaven isn't the end of life. It's the beginning of life as it was meant to be.

John Wesley once said, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can." That's not busy work – that's kingdom work. It's how we proclaim the New World before it comes in fullness. We can't be passive observers – we have to actively participate in God's redemptive work. Every act of love, word of truth – every tear we wipe away in Jesus' name is a bold and decisive statement – that God IS making all things new!

A New Story Begins

John's vision in Revelation 21 is a deep truth. It is the Great Story – the one to which all other stories point. Lewis closes *The Last Battle* in much the same way:

And for us this is the end of all the stories, but for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning 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.³

This is our story, too. It's the story we were made for. We are not at the end – we are on the edge of a beginning! A new heaven. A new earth. A new world. And the One who sits on the throne declares, "See, I am making all things new." (verse 5). So let us live with eyes lifted toward the promise, hearts anchored in the hope, and lives shaped by the love of the One who writes the story.

Prayer: Eternal God, You are the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Thank You for the grace that redeems and renews, and for the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, where You will dwell with us and wipe away every tear. Help us to live now with hope, as citizens of Your coming kingdom, made perfect in love, always thirsting for the water of life You freely give. Until that day when all is made new, keep us faithful in love and full of wonder, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.