



RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

THE WEEKLY BRICK

May 2, 2010.

As you come to him, the living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:4-5

“It’s A New Day!”

Revelation 21:1-6

Revelation 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

Context:

Having seen Jesus’ enemies destroyed, John finally sees the new heaven and new earth. God’s ultimate purpose in redemptive history is to create a people to dwell in His presence, enjoying Him forever. The story begins with God in eternal glory (Genesis 1-2), and it ends with God and His people in eternal glory (Revelation 21-22). At the center stands the cross, where God revealed His glory through His Son.

Relevant Scriptures:

Genesis 1: 1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was ^{un} formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters...

Revelation 21:1-2 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...

Creation (Genesis 1-2)

- *Heavens/earth (Gen. 1.1-2)
- *Day/night (Gen. 1:14-19)
- *7th day holy (Gen.2:2)

New Creation (Revelation 21-22)

- *New heaven/earth (Rev. 21:1)
- *No darkness (Rev. 21:23)
- *All holy (Rev. 21:25-27)

Garden

- *Tree of life (Gen.2:8-9)
- *River of life (Gen.2:10)

Garden

- *Tree of life (Rev. 22:2)
- *River of life (Rev. 22:1-2)

The Grand Reversal:

²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God...

⁴He 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.” ⁵He 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.” ⁶He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life....

Prayer/Implications:

John’s vision from Jesus reveals to us that through the resurrection the new age has dawned; God dwells with us already. Yet we wait for the time when the tears that cloud our vision will be wiped away. Then we will see the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

☐ Day #1--Monday, May 3rd Read: *Revelation 21:1*

The remaining two chapters of Revelation describe the eternal and consummated kingdom of God and the saints (believers of Jesus) on the new heaven and earth. The opening verses of chapter 21 describe the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, which chronologically follows the thousand-year reign of Christ described in chapter 20.

God's working in and through humankind reaches its culmination in this passage. In fact, vs. 1–4 describe the new creation in which God and people dwell together in fellowship. Its purpose is to strengthen the faith, hope, and resolution of the church as it faces persecution and trial. The creation of a *new heaven and new earth* is also taught in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Jewish teachers interpreted Isaiah 65–66 variously; some held that God would *renew* creation for his kingdom, others that God would *replace* it by an entirely new one. It is possible to render these verses as describing either interpretation. The declaration that "...there was no longer any sea..." is less concerned with water than wickedness. It was believed in the ancient world that the ocean contained monsters and unknown perils of many kinds. In apocalyptic literature (like Revelation) the devil, the antichrist, and ungodly empires, are often depicted as "sea monsters" that arise from the sea. Likewise, the sea is a symbol of perpetual unrest. Jesus himself calmed the seas and actually *rebuked* the sea, treating it as a hostile antagonist of His disciples. (Matthew 8:23-27). The sea symbolized the political tumults out of which "the beast" arose (Revelation 13:1). Finally, it is the sea that divides lands and peoples; often enemies would arrive by ship "from" the sea that sought war and domination. The vision reveals that ultimately, the sea which was at one time the place of monsters, evil, peril, and division in the "old world," will not survive into the new.

Question/Reflect: How do you think your city would be different if God were the mayor? Where do you think the new world will be lived out—on earth or in heaven? Why do you think so?

☐ Day #2--Tuesday, May 4th Read: *Revelation 21:1-2; John 14:1-3*

The imagery used in the portrayal of the Holy City here and in Revelation 21:9–22:5, fluctuates between the "bride-city," as the context of life in the kingdom of God, and the fellowship of the redeemed with God. Chapter 21 begins with the familiar words, "Then I saw...", a phrase repeated in verse 2 (For the opposite, see v. 22 "I did not see..."). Again, the new creation that is coming from God is described as just that—new! It is not the present heaven and earth renovated. This is supported by the addendum description that the "first heaven and the first earth had passed away." We use the term "passing away" to describe death. While there are few descriptions of the new heaven and earth, later in v. 23 John tells us that there will be no sun or moon and, by implication, no stars; this likely points to the reality that because God is visibly present in the new future, the "heavens" will no longer be the "abode" of God. Some commentators cite the promise of Jesus in John 14:2, "I go to prepare a place for you..." as referring to this new heaven and earth. The New Jerusalem is described as it will be in the eternal state, and it is described as "a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." The marriage metaphor is continued because the church is pictured in Scripture as a "bride" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Question/Reflect: How does this vision of a new heaven and earth make a difference in your life?

Day #3--Wednesday, May 5th Read: *Revelation 21:3-4*

A few other references are found elsewhere in the Bible about the future of heaven and earth. Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; and 2 Peter 3:10-13, are three such passages. After the vision of a new earth and heaven, John wrote, "I heard a loud voice from the throne..." This is the last of twenty times that the expression "a loud voice" is used in Revelation (the first use is in Revelation 5:2). The final revelation from heaven describes God dwelling with His people and His people dwelling with Him! In eternity, God's people will experience an intimacy with God which is impossible in a world where sin and death are still ever-present. The first heaven and earth experienced the consequences of sin committed by the first man and woman, ushering death and decay into God's

beautiful world. Creation is in bondage and travail (Romans 8:18–23), and even the heavens “are not clean in His sight” (Job 15:15). In this coming new day, there will no longer be any sorrow. God will personally “wipe every tear from their eyes” and the ultimate enemy, death, along with its mourning, pain, and crying will vanish. The new heaven and earth will have none of the features that often characterize this present aeon.

Question/Reflect: What has caused you mourning, crying, or pain this past year? What does it mean to you to know that this will one day pass away? What do you think it will be like living without fear, pain, or death and with the continual and direct presence of God?

Day #4--Thursday, May 6th Read: . Revelation 21:5

Even despite Scripture’s description, it is difficult to imagine what the eternal city will be like. John characterizes it as a *holy* city (Revelation 21:27), a *prepared* city (John 14:1–6), and a *beautiful* city, as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day! The most important truth about the new future is that God will rule there, from His throne. Elsewhere, the Bible provides interesting descriptions of the dwelling places of God. First, God walked with man and woman in the Garden of Eden. God dwelt with Israel in the tabernacle that led Israel through the desert. Later, this tabernacle would become the temple in Jerusalem. When Israel sinned, God had to depart from those dwellings. In both the tabernacle and the temple, the veil stood between men and God. The veil was torn in two when Jesus died, thus opening a “new and living way” for God’s people (Hebrews 10:19ff). Later, Jesus Christ came to earth and “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14). Today, God does not live in man-made temples (Acts 7:48–50), but in the bodies of His people (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) and in the church (Ephesians 2:21–22). Even though God dwells in believers today by His Spirit, we still long for the day when we can relate to God face to face! God’s assurance that “*I am making everything new,*” refers to God’s action in the new creation; however, it was begun in Christ’s resurrection and is experienced by all believers in the present (2 Corinthians 5:17). On that future day when God makes everything new, we will dwell in God’s presence and enjoy Him forever.

Jesus instructed John to write the words down that describe this vision of a new day. Because John obeyed Jesus and wrote down these inspired, trustworthy, and true words, the first believers and every believer since, can rejoice knowing that the present sufferings will be outweighed by the glory that awaits the faithful believer.

Question/Reflect: John tells us that in the new city, God will dwell on the throne; God is in charge. What (or who) sits on the throne in your life?

□ Day #5--Friday, May 7th Read: Revelation 21:6-7

The declaration here in Revelation, “It is done,” echoes Jesus’ cry on the cross (John 19:30) and the voice from the throne (Revelation 16:17). God is the “Alpha and the Omega.” The first and last letter of the Greek alphabet serves as a picture of the eternity of God, as does the following phrase, “the Beginning and the End.” God’s eternal character is the guarantee of the truth of God’s word in Revelation and throughout the scripture. What God began in Genesis, God finishes in Revelation. Often, the stories in the Bible are referred to as God’s “salvation history,” the narratives of God creating all that exists with humankind being the pinnacle of God’s creative activities. However, humankind rebels and both humanity and the creation suffer as a result. Despite this human rebellion, God continued to pursue humankind offering redemption and reconciliation, along with a promised future day when this salvific history will be completed. In the meantime, in verse 7, a promise is given to the Christian who “overcomes.” “He that overcomes” is a repeated admonition in the book of Revelation (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). As John wrote in his first letter, all true believers are “over comers” (1 John 5:4–5). For the faithful Christian who endures through this broken and fallen world, the blessings of the new Holy City will be his or her inheritance. Those who are metaphorically thirsty for new life and spiritual blessings in this “dry” and “arid” existence, will be able to “drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” Today, we usually do not think about being thirsty and needing water, but those who lived in the days of the writing of Revelation, particularly those who worked in the Roman mines and/or wandered through desert

lands, knew the meaning of thirst. Spiritually tortured saints throughout the ages would certainly identify with this wonderful promise from Jesus: Free and abundant living water for all!

Notice the description of familial relationship: “I will be his (her) God and he (she) will be my son (daughter). Literally in Greek: “*I will be to him a God,*” that is, all the implied blessings found in the name, or character, of God. In this passage, the “He” is emphatic: i.e. He (or she) in particular and in a peculiar sense, above others, is a son or daughter. Literally in Greek the sentence reads: “*shall be to me a son.*” This would imply the fullest realization of a promise made to an heir regarding a future inheritance.

Question/Reflect: Do you feel like an “over-comer?” Why or why not? How can the promise of blessing from God give you the strength to overcome something you may be facing right now?

☐ Day #6--Saturday, May 8th Read: Revelation 21:8

In contrast to the one who overcomes, those who do not inherit the kingdom are those who preclude themselves from it. Those who are unbelieving, i.e. “faith-less,” will be excluded from the New Jerusalem and will be destined for the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This judgment is a righteous punishment for their sins, eight of which are cited here. The ones who deny or reject Jesus, are those who choose a feeling, experience, and/or practice over Jesus; they demonstrate their opposition to God. Notice the inference and possible wordplay in v.8: we have a description of those who are not *over comers*, rather, they have been *overcome* by sin and the ways of this world. The world often considers Christians as “losers,” but it will be the unbelievers who will ultimately lose! The word, “cowardly” here likely means those who are afraid to stand up for Christ in the face of persecution (Matthew 10:32–33). It illustrates those who do not “fear,” or respect God. Rather, they are more fearful of man. John describes the “fiery lake of burning sulfur” as the “second death.” The first death is our physical death on this earth. All people will experience this first death. The second death is the eternal death of hell. This death is entirely avoidable! The reason that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no fear, death, pain, and tears is because, among other reasons, those who practice sin and hurt people will not be there! (See Revelation 21:27; 22:15).

One note: please do not mistake this passage as describing a salvation by works. Conversely, this passage is an indicative of whether one is saved or not. Obviously there will be many in heaven who before their conversions were indeed guilty of these sins, but who turned from them through the grace and love of Jesus the Savior. Our works, both the good we do and the bad we do not do, are the evidence of the salvation that has been freely given to us by Jesus.

Question/Reflect: How do you feel about knowing that the Holy City will be your hometown?

