**Revelation**

*Lesson 39 – Revelation 21:1-8*

* Tonight’s portion introduces us to the new realities that come after the great white throne judgment of all people. Revelation 21:9-22:5 will discuss these new realities in greater detail, so tonight is kind of like an introductory overview.

*Verse 1*

1. John sees a “new heaven and new earth.” Why? Because the 1st heaven and 1st earth had passed away. There is some debate over what this “passing” means. Does this mean that our current heaven and earth is completely destroyed and replaced? Or, does this mean that our current heaven and earth are renewed. **Romans 8:19-22** seems to indicate that the current creation longs for redemption to be set free from bondage just like we do. Also, **2 Corinthians 5:17** says that for those who are in Christ, that person is a “new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” The beginnings of new creation begin here and now in this creation that is passing away. Notice also that in salvation, the beginnings of the “old creation” (that is, the sinful self) is passing away. You can also read **Isaiah 65:17-25** to see how the Old Testament talks about the new heavens and earth and it talks about it in terms of our current heavens and earth.
2. What does this strange phrase “and the sea was no more” mean? It doesn’t mean that part of God’s new creation is lost. This is symbolic language for all the challenges to God’s order. Waters depict evil and chaos. The first beast in Revelation 13 rose out of the sea. **Psalm 69:1** – “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck.” The Red Sea was waters of judgment upon Pharaoh and Egypt through which God safely brought His people. **Daniel 7:3** – “And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.” **Isaiah 27:1** – “In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” In the eternal state, there is no longer any threat of evil or tribulation for God’s people.

*Verse 2*

1. Next, John sees the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, dressed as a bride. The New Jerusalem was alluded to earlier in Revelation 3:12 where Jesus promises to write the name of new Jerusalem, the city of God, on the one who overcomes. **Isaiah 52:1** – “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.” Jerusalem is dressed in white as a bride, depicting purity and holiness, because all uncleanliness has been removed from her. Jerusalem has been completely sanctified. **Isaiah 62:3-5** – “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. **4**You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. **5**For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” The woman who has been in hiding in the wilderness from Revelation 12 is now free to come out and be dressed for her wedding. Jerusalem in the Old Testament signified God’s dwelling place with His people via the temple. Now that his people are a living temple (1 Cor 3:16, Eph 2:21), God’s dwelling place with people is symbolized as a new Jerusalem, complete with the “temple” of His people. This is God’s dwelling place with all whom He has redeemed, living for eternity in a state of perfection.
2. I also want you to notice that this new Jerusalem is coming down from God out of heaven. God is the one who sends or brings the New Jerusalem down and it is God who comes down or descends to dwell with man. He comes to us rather than us going up to Him (unlike the Tower of Babel). This is a picture of God’s great condescension. He’s not ashamed to come down to meet His people and be with His people.

*Verses 3-4*

1. This is exactly what we find in this verse. Just so there’s no mistake and to make it perfectly clear, God shouts with a loud voice about His dwelling with His people and His people dwelling with Him. God’s presence with man is repeated 3 times just so it’s crystal clear. God’s dwelling place is with man. This has been one of the great themes throughout Scripture. We see God communing with man in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of creation. **Exodus 29:45**  - “I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God.” **Leviticus 26:11-12** – “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. **12**And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” **Isaiah 7:14** – “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [God with us].” **Ezekiel 37:27** – “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” **Zechariah 2:10** – “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the Lord.” **Matthew 28:20** – “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” One way to look at the whole story of Scripture is to see it as God dwelling with His people, His people ruining that by forsaking Him, then God acts to redeem a people for Himself that He may dwell with them again forever.
2. And in this consummated city where God dwells with His people once again in perfect bliss, there will be no more tears, death, mourning, crying or pain. This is part of what it means up in verse 2 that “the sea was no more.” Those things associated with sin are all completely gone forever. There will be no more grief and suffering because of sickness and death. There will not be any remorse for the past. The effects of suffering on behalf of Jesus Christ will be gone, because the “former” (or “first”) things have passed away. Crying, suffering, sorrow, and death are associated with this old creation which even now is passing away and will one day be permanently restored to complete health and vigor. **Isaiah 25:8**  - “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.” Again see **Isaiah 65:17-25**.

*Verses 5-8*

1. God guarantees all of this by asserting His words as “trustworthy” [faithful] and “true.” Jesus was described as “faithful and true” in Revelation 19 and now God’s words are described in the same manner. The words that God speaks bear His attributes. God is eternal; His words are eternal. God is truth; His words are truth. God is life; His words are life. And because God is trustworthy, he presents the vision to John as if it’s already happened. John sees the new heavens and the new earth. He sees our current state as already being transformed.
2. Then God says that all things have been accomplished or come to pass (“it is done!”). All that God has been doing throughout all of human history – all that He has decreed, all that He has promised – has taken place according to His will. Why? Because God is all in all. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. All of human history has been about God accomplishing His purpose. What He has started, He has brought to completion. **Revelation 1:8** – “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,” **Revelation 22:13** – “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”
3. Because God is absolutely sovereign over everything, He is able to provide us with assurance that He is able and will give blessings to His redeemed people. He freely gives from the spring of the water of life to those who are thirsty. **Isaiah 49:10** – “they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.” **John 7:37-38** – “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. **38**Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Thirsting is a picture of one’s spiritual need. Just as we have need of real water when we get thirsty, so people need redemption through Jesus Christ who recognize that they are spiritually thirsty.
4. Those who thirst are also described in verse 7 as “the one who conquers.” This phrase appeared repeatedly in Revelation 2-3 in the letters to the churches. There, the conquerors were promised: The tree of life (2:7), exclusion from the second death (2:11), their name in the book of life (3:5), bright clean garments (3:5), inclusion in the new temple (3:12), God’s name written on them (3:12), and reigning with Christ (2:26-27, 3:21). For all those who receive the blessings of God, we again see the promise of the Immanuel principle – God with us.
5. So far so good. But then we come to verse 8 which serves as a warning. There are people who will not have a share in this new heavens and new earth. Rather their portion and allotment is something completely different, and something completely awful. The sins listed in this verse are a summary of the types of sins John wrote about to the churches in **Revelation 2-3**. The share of this list is the 2nd death which we saw in **Revelation 20:6, 14** and represents the casting of the body and soul of resurrected unbelievers into the lake of fire.
	1. Cowardly – in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word was used of Israelite men who were “trembling” or “fainthearted” going into a battle and were told to head back home lest their fear affect the soldiers around them. Jesus uses the word 2 times (**Matthew 8:26** & **Mark 4:40**) against Israelites in relation to having no or little faith. Greg Beale writes, “The cowardly are those in the visible community of faith who have ‘turned back’ in the holy war with the world and have not been courageously faithful in the battle against the beast.” In other words, the “cowardly” are those who publicly professed faith in Christ but had no true saving faith. They are apostates or hypocrites.
	2. Faithless – This refers to all people who did not have true, saving faith in Jesus. It’s all unbelievers, whether they were open unbelievers or unbelievers within the church.
	3. Detestable – This word refers to those who practice what is abominable or a practice that we are to abhor. In the Greek translation of the OT, it’s used to refer to unclean animals that Israel was to abhor. They were to be an abomination to Israel. It also refers to detestable sexual acts such as bestiality, homosexuality, and incest. That seems to be the sense here in Revelation. Sexual perverts and those who practice such perversion will have no share in the new heavens and new earth.
	4. Sexually immoral – this is a broader word for all kinds of immorality that God forbids, including adultery, fornication, divorce, etc.
	5. Liars – This same word is used in **Revelation 2:2** to refer to false apostles. Those who profess false or unsound doctrine, those who teach such things, those who claim to be Christians but whose lives tell a different story – all of these types of people fall in this category.
6. This is a wide array of various sins and notice how they all get treated equally with the same punishment. There are some sins more sinful than others (WLC #150; John 19:11, 1 John 5:16), but all sins receive the same punishment from God. Homosexuals are cast into the lake of fire along with murders, liars, hypocrites, those who practice fortune-telling/witchcraft, and even unbelievers who were generally nice or good people.

**Message for Us**

1. “This vision is meant to encourage faithfulness, confidence, and hope in Christians, especially those who face persecution. God will fully achieve His purpose, and Christians will inherit His full blessing, however grim the present circumstances may be.” –Vern Poythress
2. “People may vainly imagine that by means of better education, a better environment, better legislation, and a more equitable distribution of wealth they are going to usher in a new era, a golden age, the Utopia of man’s ardent desire. Their dream remains a dream! Neither economic nor disarmament conferences, neither better schools nor share-the-wealth programs are going to bring about a really golden age, a new heaven and earth or a new order. It is only God who through His Spirit makes all things new. He alone can restore and renew man and the universe.” –William Hendriksen [1940]
3. “The standard of God’s justice, as well as the holiness and the peace of the new Jerusalem, requires the exclusion of evil. No sin or second fall into evil will disturb the permanent security and bliss of the new world.” –Vern Poythress
4. The New Heavens and New Earth is not us floating on clouds with angel wings, playing harps. The eternal state is us living in physical bodies (that have been perfected) on a physical earth (that has been perfected). We will actually be doing things then that we do now, but we will be doing it perfectly. We will worship. We will eat. We will play with animals and enjoy the beauty of creation. Flowers will not fade or die. You will be able to swim without drowning. You will be able to climb mountains without falling. You will rejoice with your fellow believers.
5. “If you are scurrying about as if this world is the only world there is, listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ and respond to it. Are you clinging to this world, as though this life is the only life that you will ever have? Have you discovered that there is a new world ahead, a new heaven and a new earth? Have your horizons been enlarged by the gospel of Jesus Christ? Fix your eyes on the world that lies just beyond this one, “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” and looking “for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:12–13).” –Joel Beeke