

Lecture 28  
Revelation 21  
Dan Leppo

Well, we're down to the second-to-last lesson for this incredible series on prophecy and the book of Revelation. I hope it has been as eye-opening and affirming of God's always-kept promises for you as it has been for me. The key word in today's lesson that covers Revelation chapter 21 is, "new." That word is an abused and misused word in today's world. How often are we bombarded by advertisers hawking products and services that claim to be "new and improved?" In this disposable society that we are living in, we're no longer meant to have things that last. Why? Because then we're not spending more money on new things. The claims of "new and improved" are designed to make us think that what we currently have isn't as good as the newest offering. Yet, when we choose to buy the alleged new and improved, we find out more often than not that the thing isn't all that new, and it clearly isn't improved. We then end up with buyer's remorse – wishing we would have saved our money and stuck with what we had.

This is not the case in the Bible. When God says something is new, He means it. In today's reading, the new things are:

- A new heaven and new earth
- A new Jerusalem
- A new relationship with God

As I have with my previous lectures this year, I'll quickly recap where we are in the events of this book. Let's call this a Divine checklist:

- Glorified Jesus revealed (Chapters 1-3)
- Church raptured (Chapters 4-5)
- 7-year tribulation (Chapters 6-18)
- Jesus returns in victory (Chapter 19)
- Millennium, Satan's brief return, Satan's demise, Great White Throne Judgment (Chapter 20)

So, with chapter 21, we're beyond the 1,000-year Millennium. We're now getting a glimpse of our eternal home. However, before we get to see the *first* "new" – the new heaven and new earth - we learn that the *first* heaven and the *first* earth (what we're living in now) has passed away – and there will be no more sea. I'm sure you beach freaks and river rats may be lamenting over this, but believe me when I tell you that what you'll be experiencing in the new heaven and new earth will exceed your greatest days in the oceans or on the lakes and rivers. For me, it's hard to wrap my mind around an entire new heaven and earth. Colossians 1:17 tells us, "*And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*" Jesus the creator is holding all of creation together by His power. To give you a sense of this power, when an atom bomb is detonated, an atom is released from its containment to generate enormous power. Containing that power must be even more powerful, and that is the power of Jesus.

Peter described the passing away of the heavens as being a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up in his second epistle, chapter 3:10. The promise of a new heaven and new earth is not new – at least

where we are in the Bible. Daniel prophesied of a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). Isaiah offered this in chapter 65, verse 17 of his book, “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*” He repeated this and added to it in 66:22-23, “*For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make shall remain before Me, says the LORD, So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,*” says the LORD.” Jesus spoke of a regeneration in Matthew 19:28, and He spoke of heaven and earth passing away in Matthew 24:35.

In verse 2, John sees the second “new” - a new holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. This my dear brothers and sisters, is going to be our new home. Wait, I thought we were going to spend eternity in heaven? Nope, as members of the church, the New Jerusalem is our eternal home because it is described as being prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Jesus is the bridegroom, and the church is His bride. Verse 3 gives us the glorious news that God Himself will physically be with us in this New Jerusalem – He will dwell with us, and we will be His people. What will He be doing? He will be every bit as engaged in each of our lives as He is today – that is if we are allowing Him. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

What this means is sin is no more. You recall that the wages of sin is death, so if there is no more death, there is no more sin. We will be living in a perfect, holy environment in God’s presence. *All* pain – emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual – will be gone for good. For some of us, that sounds almost too good to be true – like a fairy tale. Yet, look at what verse 5 reminds us, “*Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”*” With this assurance, it’s like Jesus is saying, “This isn’t a joke.” “I’m not playin’ with you.” “What I’m telling you is the truth because I AM the truth, and I cannot lie.”

We know who is speaking to John at this moment – it is Jesus Himself. His words in verse 6, “*And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.*” are the same way He described Himself in chapter one. On the timeline of our existence, Jesus is there at the start, He is with us every step of the way, and He is with us at the end of our human lives. He is the author and finisher of our faiths. The promise Jesus makes to the thirsty in the second half of verse 6 should sound familiar, “*I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.*” He said in John 4:14: “*but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*”

Verses 7 and 8 indicate the New Jerusalem will have limited access. Those who will dwell will be the overcomers, “*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*” What makes an overcomer? The same author of Revelation, John, tells us in his first epistle there are several things that distinguish an overcomer:

- Born of God (1 John 5:4)
- Faithful (1 John 5:4)
- He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:5)
- You have known Him *who is* from the beginning (1 John 2:13)
- You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, (1 John 2:14)

As a result of these traits, we have overcome the wicked one. However, we didn't do this on our own. We did this by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Remember what Zechariah said about what our true power is, "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.*" (Zechariah 4:6)

As overcomers, we become heirs, "*[Overcomers] shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*" (Rev. 21:7) You know the old saying about being an heir, "*Where there's a will, I want to be in it.*" In Jesus, we have obtained a glorious inheritance. According to Romans 8:17, we are joint heirs with Christ. Colossians 3:24 promises, "*knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*" Finally, this verse confirms the promise of the permanency of this inheritance made by Peter in his first epistle, "*to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*"

However, there will be people not allowed in the New Jerusalem, "*the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" This verse refutes the claims of the modern-day pundits who say all roads lead to heaven. As I said earlier, the New Jerusalem will be a holy place. When I think of the things that run through my mind and the things that come out of my mouth, I find it hard at times to reconcile myself as holy. Thank God for the blood He shed on the cross, so I might take on *His* righteousness. My righteousness is indeed, as Isaiah says, like filthy rags.

So, we know who the residents will be, but what is this New Jerusalem going to look like? John is approached by one of the angels who held one of the seven bowl judgments and tells him he will show him, "*the bride, the Lamb's wife.*" That's us folks – again, we are the bride of Christ. What do we learn about this amazing new home of ours?

- It's delivered to us from heaven
- It has the glory of God
- Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Most commentaries I read said to imagine the brightest light shining through a flawless diamond.
- It has a high wall with 12 gates – each guarded by an angel. Each of the gates had a name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. There are three gates on each side of the city – just like there were three tribes encamped on each side around the tabernacle for the Jews in the wilderness.
- The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

What I love about this description is the unification of God's people. No more Jews and Gentiles or Catholics and Protestants. We will be, as we should be now but sadly aren't, one in Christ.

The dimensions of this city will be mind-boggling. We're told:

- It will be square – a cube
- It will be 12 thousand furlongs – if you're just thinking surface area, imagine the size of North America. But this is a cube, so now imagine the size of the moon.

- It will be suspended in space – some commentators think it will be to the new earth a satellite like the moon today is. Others believe the New Jerusalem, because God will be dwelling there, will be the center of the new heavens and the new earth.
- The walls are 144 cubits tall, which approximates a little more than 200' high.
- Finally, we won't be just on the surface – we'll be able to move within the cube

We're presented a list of precious stones that will be on the foundations of the walls with various and, no doubt, vivid and beautiful colors. Some commentators indicate they represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Some equate them to the gems on the vest of the high priest. Others relate the gem descriptions to the names of the apostles. There are also disagreements as to the colors of each of these gemstones. Whatever they will be, they will exceed our imagination. Verse 21 adds, "*The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*" Chuck Smith noted that God may have made the streets this way as a statement to show those people who are lovers of, and even killers, for expensive things like gold will be relegated to something like pavement on a street in heaven. I believe what we're reading doesn't do justice to what it will really be like.

We get to the third "new" in verses 22-27. In the New Jerusalem, we're going to have a new relationship with God. There will be no more temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. There will be no more sun and moon for you sun bathing fans to bake and werewolves to howl at. The shekinah glory emanating from God's presence will provide all the light we will need. We read the Lamb is the light. Jesus said in John 8:12, "*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*" God being the light is not new – what is new is we will ever be in its presence. We read the nations, or the people, will walk by the light of God's glory.

While the gates will be ever-opened, they will be guarded with a greater strength than any enemy can mount. The holy city will remain forever holy as verse 27 tells us, "*there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*" As believers in Jesus Christ, each of you is written in this wonderful book. We'll have unfettered, eternal access to our God. This chapter is a sneak preview of our eternal home. What do you think?

This all sounds amazing – more than my old mind can process. These are wonderful promises of these three new things – a new heaven and new earth, a New Jerusalem, and a new relationship with God. Yet, it's all in the future. What I want to conclude this lecture with is to remind you there are three new things that are available to each of us as believers in Jesus Christ *today*. They are:

- We are new creations
- Living under a new covenant
- Living with a new commandment

What these "new" things have in common with the ones in the future in today's reading is that they are all from God. They are given to us by God in order for us to clarify and deepen our faith and trust in Him. As a result, we become liberated and powerful representatives of Jesus to a world that desperately needs Him. These "new" things are life changing, but, as with anything when it comes to faith, they are only as real as you choose to believe them to be. A precondition to receiving is believing. If the person you trust the most in your life told you that Jesus *Himself*

told him that you could fly, how would you respond? Would you question this person you trust so much and not even attempt to try to fly? Or, would you try, but only hover a few feet off the ground? How many of you would take off and soar into the heavens? The promise is the same to each of these scenarios, so the only difference in the responses is the level of belief in trust you have in Jesus' promise that you can fly.

The first *new* for us today as believers is we are a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 is the foundation verse for this promise, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" What do you think it means to be a new creation? Consider Jesus' description in John 3:3 of being "born again." Upon your confession as a sinner and a pledge of a commitment to make Jesus as your Lord and Savior, a number of incredible things happened at that moment. One of the most notable things is you were born again – the spirit in you that was dead because of your sin, was brought to life by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you're born again, then that must mean the life you were previous living in your first birth is no longer in place – in God's eyes. All of the deadly and debilitating effects of sin have been completely forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

As a new creation, you are liberated – you are completely free of the shame and guilt that are the natural fruits of sin. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. I'll say that again – there is NO condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus! What does a new creation look like according to the Scriptures?

- From Romans 6:4, we're to walk in newness of life
- From Romans 7:6, we're to serve in the newness of the Spirit
- From Ephesians 4:24, we're to put on the new man [and woman] which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness
- From Colossians 3:10, we're to put on the new man [and woman] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

Just as your current existence was created by God, so are you created by God as a new creation. I could go on and on regarding this life-changing truth, but I challenge each of you to spend time dwelling on these Scriptures. Being a new creation in Christ may not deliver you from your circumstances, and your sin nature will still seek to haunt you with condemning and judgmental thoughts. Yet, if you choose to wait on the Lord and be willing to believe this foundational truth of being a Christ follower, you will experience the promise of Isaiah 40:31, "*[You] shall renew your strength; you shall mount up with wings like eagles, you shall run and not be weary, and you shall walk and not faint.*"

As new creations, we are to live under a new covenant. What is this new covenant? I like how the Interpreter's Bible describes it, "*a promise of redemption by God to people as individuals rather than as a nation and on the basis of God's grace rather than a person's adherence to the law.*" From the Bible, we learn this about the new covenant we're to live under:

- Its foundation is the blood of Jesus for the remission of sins (Mat. 26:28)
- We're to be sufficient ministers of this new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:6)
- Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb. 9:15; 12:24)

I would venture to say that most of us are not living fully under this incredible covenant – similar to the fact that a lot of us are not living as new creations. Yet, these are promises from God in the Bible! Do you understand how deep and how wide the forgiveness of your sins is? We must challenge ourselves to come to grips with the truth of this new covenant because the more we believe, the more we can become the sufficient ministers of it. What that means is the more we take on the personage of Jesus via the Holy Spirit, we become grace-giving and grace-living people shining a light of love and forgiveness to a world that is falling further into Satan's destructive and deadly clutches.

The real power of this new covenant is we have the risen Jesus as its Mediator. Why is this important? Even as new creations fully forgiven by God, we're going to sin. When we do this, Satan will be accusing us of them before God – he wants to bring sin's natural condemnation upon us. But what verse did I just recite twice? There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. That's what Jesus, as our Mediator, is telling the Father when Satan is accusing us of our sins and failures. I imagine Jesus speaking to the Father, "*Abba, whom Satan is accusing is ours - My blood has made them clean, and I will finish their faith and present them to you as my perfect bride.*" What a friend we have in Jesus, amen?

As new creations living under a new covenant, we are to live with a new commandment. Jesus gave this to us in John 13:34, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*" My younger son used to work at Best Buy, and he came home one day. I could tell he was in a mood as he was pacing back and forth shaking his head while looking down. I asked him, "*What's up?*" He kept pacing and shaking his head, and then he uttered in a low voice, "*I hate people.*" Trying not to laugh, I told him, "*That's kind of harsh.*" He stopped pacing, look me straight in the eye, and said, "*Have you met people?*"

Loving the unlovable is a tall task for me at times. When God brings people into my life for me to minister to, I find myself asking God, "Really?" "Him?" "Got anyone else in mind?" Yet, Jesus' commandment is inclusive – I don't see any exceptions in His words. The thing is, if we're honest with ourselves, each of us can be unlovable at times. That needs to be the first step to loving others – to come to grips with our own unlovable-ness – that while we were still sinners – unlovable – Christ died for us. Loving others is a commandment to give them every bit, if not more, grace, forgiveness, and love that God has given us.

Living as a new creation, under a new covenant, and with a new commandment is the Biblical Christian life. It is living on the other side of the cross. By surrendering our pride and fear, fully believing and receiving these promises of new, lives will change. Not just *our* life will change as we let go of the baggage of our old life and move forward in freedom and hope. The lives of who God brings into our life will change as well. The reality is that even in the midst of all this newness, your circumstances may not change. What the "new" promises offer is to allow God to lift you up above your circumstances and see them from His perspective – to allow Him to be your Jehovah Jireh – the Lord who provides.

As we wind up this year's study next week and you head into the summer months, I encourage you to consider the newness God offers you each and every day. His mercies are new every morning. You are a new creation living under a new covenant with a new commandment – to love one another. And, as we read in today's lesson, our eternal future includes a new heaven and new earth, a new Jerusalem, and a new relationship with God. God bless you for your diligence in this year's study, and I look forward to reconnecting with you in the Fall as we get into our study on Psalms and Proverbs. Let's pray.