

*All Things New: The End of Waters and the Living Water*

*By Jason Huff*

*June 21, 2020*

*Isaiah 25:6-9; Luke 7:11-17; Revelation 21:1-8*

Our final Scripture reading comes from Revelation 21:1-8. May God bless the reading of His perfect, holy, and sacred Word. "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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And 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. 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." 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. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.""

What is your best day? Maybe it was your wedding day or the birth of your children. Maybe it was when you got the job you always wanted. Maybe it hasn't happened yet! We might also think about our hypothetical best day. For some of us, and by some of us I mean me, it might be watching movies and playing board games all day. For some, it would be watching a favorite team win the championship. Others might have their best day laying on the beach, surrounding by friends, reading a book and talking about life. Whether your best day is fishing on a frozen lake or touring Paris, we all have a best day. Days like today, like Father's Day and Mother's Day and birthdays, tend to be about giving a loved one a truly special day to remember.

But we often don't think about our best day being when we reach eternity. We think of death and we want to avoid that at all costs, or at least the suffering associated with it. But humanity, even strong Christians, have had a difficult time picturing what eternity will look like. The worst pictures have people floating around on clouds with wings and harps. The worst pictures not only have no basis in the bible, but they make eternity seem incredibly boring.

But even the best minds haven't put together a compelling picture of the afterlife of the saints. It says something that Dante's portrait of hell called Inferno has been read and studied for nearly six hundred years as a classic...but very few people read his companion piece called Paradiso. Author C.S. Lewis commented that spiritually, we're often content to make mud pies in a puddle because our minds can't comprehend a vacation to the seaside. Even Christians often don't await eternity with much joy because our minds are still too addled by sin and distorted to fully anticipate the goodness that awaits us.

That's why I love Revelation 21 and 22. They give us the portrait of eternity we should have. The two chapters aren't terribly long, but they are jam packed. Over the next few weeks, we're going to conclude our study in Revelation by sorting these passages out and seeing what we can expect when we receive our eternal reward. I believe that once we understand the picture God paints for us through John's book, we will be a lot more excited about the life to come and following our Savior in such a way that shows we've been chosen to spend eternity with Him.

As a reminder, in last week's passage, we saw the judgment of all humanity. We saw that those whose names had been written in the Book of Life since before the dawn of time, those who were chosen by God and embraced God and trusted in Him for salvation, were welcomed into the Kingdom. Those who were not were sent to the lake of burning sulfur. At the same time, a Book of Records held all of what we did, so that rewards and punishments fit what was done in life. Death and the grave and the devil were all banished to the lake of fire as well. All the great antagonists that stand against us now were sent to eternal destruction.

Today's passage begins: "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." In last week's passage, when the dead were raised to life for judgment, the old heaven and old earth no longer had a purpose and went away. Keep in mind that the ancients saw multiple layers of heaven, so when we read this, we're speaking of the heavens as the created universe – *not* the place outside of space and time where God dwells.

So there is a new creation, a new heaven and new earth. The word for "new" used here in Greek has the sense of "fresh" or "better than the first." Greek uses a different word for something that's young in age, like new wine. They aren't just remade but are created completely anew. From its very introduction, the new heaven and new earth are going to be different, cut from a different cloth than the first, never prone to decay and natural disaster, never scarce in its resources. The new heaven and new earth will be recognizable in some way to us, not totally foreign, and yet far, far better than what we can imagine now.

What does it mean that there is no sea? We know there's a calm sea like glass in heaven – we saw that in Revelation 4. I don't believe this is literal. Over and over again in Revelation as well as in historic Jewish thought, the sea is where evil resides; it's where it comes from, and it's a place of the dead. The dragon, the devil, stood on the shore of the sea; the beast comes from the sea. While God can do anything He wants when He creates the new heaven and the new earth, it may have oceans, but what it won't have is evil in any form. The sea that stands for violence, oppression, and rebellion against God will never be a part of the new creation.

Next: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Here we see that even though God creates everything anew, there is still continuity between the old and the new. God's city has been and will always be Jerusalem, Zion, the place where He is admired and worshiped. John has no other way to describe how awesome this is except to use the metaphor of a bride on her wedding day. But the new Jerusalem is not the bride of Christ – we, the church, are. We are the ones that will be forever joined to Him, as we'll see in a moment.

The fact that the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven also reminds us that God is the only one who can give us utopia. We have tried to create the perfect city ourselves and we fail miserably. We should never think that we can create paradise on earth. Christians have tried creating monasteries, communes, all sorts of things to get back to Eden. Only God can do that.

John then hears a voice from the throne, Jesus, 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. 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.”

This is the heart of eternity. A new heaven and a new earth where we live with God. It’s a return to the Garden of Eden – not of fruit trees and vineyards and vegetables, but a return to what mattered in the Garden of Eden, that God walked with Adam and Eve, was with them, shared with them, cared for them intimately. And it’s God who will be with us...not a stand-in, not a prophet, not Moses or Elijah or John the Baptist, but God himself. We will be His, and He will be ours. If you want to know what eternity is, it’s the permanent presence of God with us.

Even in our best relationships, our closest friendships, our marriages, something is always a little off. We can never quite understand each other perfectly; we argue instead of listening; we get our feelings hurt when they spend too much time apart from us, and yet too much time with us and we get annoyed. Sin affects all of our relationships. But that will not be the case with God. We will know everything God desires to share of Himself with us, and we will be fully known – every last part of us, and still accepted and loved by Him. We will be with Him, the One who made us and made us for relationship with Him.

But that’s not all. That same God who loves us and takes us into His perfect city also is our perfect consolation. Sorrow will be gone; sadness will be gone. Death, mourning, crying, pain, the scraped knee and the cancer alike, the broken heart from a dying relationship, the broken heart from a lost loved one, all of those, gone gone gone gone gone! The old order is gone. The tears will be gone. The sea of evil and suffering is no more, and with it all the tears that poured out when we have wounded and been wounded, when we have hurt and been hurt.

All of this happens because Jesus is making everything new – in the present tense. Everything is being re-created to something better than before. And once it is made new, it stays new. The decay of the old world, our world now, will not be in play. Imagine a home that never needs a new roof; a tool that never wears out; a tree that never withers. This is our new home.

All this is so astounding that God has to tell John to keep writing – He doesn’t want John to miss any of the truths He is about to speak, but John is so awestruck that he forgets he’s there to take notes for the rest of us! Even if the details don’t move us to joy, take it from the guy who was writing the book, who was so taken with this vision of glory that he couldn’t even find the words to describe it all.

God says to John, "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. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

This simple phrase, “It is done,” is important. The Greek tense means that the action is complete but the results continue. When Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished,” or “It is fulfilled,” it uses the same tense – His sacrifice was over, but the results continue. In John’s vision, God’s work is completed in that the new heaven and new earth, the triumph over sin and death and the grave, that’s all done – and yet the results live on and on.

In Greek, Alpha is the first letter and Omega is the last, so in a sense, in English, God is saying, “I am the A and the Z.” Everything starts with God, and everything finds its end, its fullness, its completion in God. God is telling us that He is where we should find our everything, our beginning and end. He is our reason and purpose both now and in eternity.

We may have seen the end of the sea and the end of tears, but there is still water in the Kingdom of God – the water of life. This passage is really telling us what kind of person is in the Kingdom – someone who thirsts for God and overcomes the world. Not good people, necessarily, in the way we think of it. People who want God enough to persevere through the trials this world offers to drink deeply of the live God gives. And there’s no cost to it – whatever price needed to be paid was taken care of by Jesus on the cross. Life eternal comes from God; if we truly and deeply thirst for it, He won’t keep it from us. Those who overcome will inherit God’s Kingdom; it belongs to all the saints.

And we who thirst for Him are His children. How blessed is it to know that God loves us in that way! I’m like the prodigal son, saying, “I have disowned you and have no right to anything from you; make me your hired hand.” And God says, “You are mine; you belong to me; you are as valuable to me as Christ Himself. You will be a child of mine just as He is.” Christ retains all the glory and honor and praise; He alone is begotten of the Father from before all creation. And yet, in a very real way, what God says is made true. God says we will be His daughters and sons, and that is what we will be.

In the midst of all of this, though, is a surprisingly dark turn given that we’ve already seen the punishment of the wicked. “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.””

This part of the passage is a blessing and a warning. The blessing is this: no more will God’s people ever be harassed or abused or mistreated or oppressed by those who are determined to act wickedly. This is an assurance to God’s people that no one who is defined by these terms will be in the Kingdom. This is important, because the worst betrayals some people have are at the hands of those in the earthly church. For them, this is an assurance that those who unrepentantly used or abused them will not be doing so throughout eternity. No one who has lived an unrepentant life will be in the Kingdom. It does not mean that everyone who has done evil is excluded; no one would make it if that were the case! But there will be no evil done in the Kingdom, and no one who wants to continue the evil they did in this life.

This is a blessing for those who have suffered in this lifetime and are assured of their peace in the next. But it's also a warning for all of us to make sure that we are a part of the church eternal and not just the church in this world. It's odd that "the cowardly" are listed, since there's no law against cowardliness. But cowardice is thinking of yourself before others as a rule. The coward abandons God in the moment of crisis and doesn't look back. Peter was a coward and a liar, yet he became the leader of the Jerusalem church. Why? Because he grieved his sin and went back to Jesus in repentance. This list ultimately springs from unrepentant cowardliness – from letting fear drive us into indulgence and sin rather than the arms of Christ.

It's a warning too because many people have thought that getting into heaven was a matter of being a part of a church. I am amazed about how many people think that to have your name written in the Book of Life, you must have your name on some local church's membership roll! Not true. And many people have decided to continue in sin and then turn to the church as some sort of appeasement.

If you ever seen a movie about the Italian mob, you'll see some family planning corrupt schemes one moment and then heading to the Catholic church the next. Art imitates life – that a lot of mafiosos really have tried to buy the church's affection and blind eye over time, despite multiple popes condemning them for it. We might think, "I'm not a mobster, surely I'm not guilty of the same thing." But the warning is here because we can fall into the same trap of believing that our sins are covered not because of the blood of Jesus but because we attended worship services or gave money to good causes or did some nice things for people sometimes. We are saved only through faith in Christ and following Him. This list is not about the bad things we've done – it's about whether or not we have turned away from our wickedness and come to Christ for forgiveness and a new way of life.

There's so much here to bask in, to anticipate, to enjoy. This is the hope and promise for every believer. This is not a passage with a moral issue to face or a teaching to obey. There's only one question for us today: *are you thirsty?* Do you thirst to know more of the Father and the Son? Do you thirst to be led by the Holy Spirit? Do you crave more of Him than you have? Do you desire Him over the offerings of this world? If you do, rejoice and ask for Him to pour out more of His life into you and through you to others. And if you don't, I encourage you to ask Him for that thirst, ask Him for that holy desire, that want of Him above all else.

Because a lot of us have been satisfied on the salt water of the world. We're drowning in the water of the world's decadence, yet if we keep living that way, we'll die of dehydration. All the world has to offer us is salt water – it looks good, but in the end it leaves us with nothing. And do not think that receiving a taste of the living water is thirst for Him. Sometimes, we get a sip of the living water when we go to church or listen to Christian music on the radio and we think we're thirsty. If that satisfies you, if you're satisfied by an hour on Sundays and a song in the car, you're not thirsty. Pray that you might truly thirst for God.

Are you thirsty for the living water, knowing nothing else will satisfy? God will give it to you even now. Thirst for Him, and you will drink to the brim of His grace and forgiveness. Thirst for Him, and the inheritance of the Kingdom is yours. Thirst for Him, and know the love of God now and always.