

Study 43: Revelation 21:1-8

1 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'm not sure that this verse and those following are about heaven. I know that's what they would appear to be addressing. But I'm not so sure. My reason for doubt is that the language of Revelation, which we have described as apocalyptic, is given to exaggeration and extreme analogies for effect. What is Revelation is talking about the here and now, about the Church?
- I think of what happened when Jesus was crucified. There was a literal shaking on earth, which tells us that *all* creation was impacted by Jesus' death.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people (Matthew 27:51-53)

- Did John see a literal heavenly city, or was this a picture of the new order that was established through Jesus' death, the age of the Church of Jesus Christ? Imagine our earth without the oceans! What a dramatic difference that would be from what we have and know now. Isn't that the difference between before and after Jesus' death? Don't we now identify the years of history as BC (before Christ) and AD (Latin for after Christ)? Didn't Jesus life and death and life redefine how we understand heaven, our role on earth and the relationship of God with His people? That sounds like a new heaven and new earth order to me.
- Do you agree or disagree with my opinion here (and it is just that: an opinion)?

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

- There is now a new city, a new Jerusalem, that is there for all to behold. The problem is that one can only see it through spiritual eyes! This new city, the Church, is a heavenly phenomenon. It has its origins in heaven, even though it is manifest on earth.
- I hear many people talk about the Church adorning and preparing herself as a bride for her bridegroom. But this bride is dressed in *heaven*, not on earth. God adorns His bride. The bride cannot dress herself in clothes that are pleasing to God. Only God can provide the clothes, the righteousness, that will please Him. Otherwise, you have a Church of works, populated with people who are trying to do things *for* God, instead of *in* God. The work has been done in and through Jesus. We now put on the garments that He provided for us.

- There is a new Jerusalem, the old one is of the earth and the old covenant. Now there is a new covenant and that requires a new headquarters. This headquarters is in heaven, not in Rome, Constantinople, Washington DC, or Jerusalem.

3 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.

- The loud voice returns. I have repeated this insight over and over again, but let's look at it one more time. Heaven's message is loud. You must work hard *not* to hear what heaven is doing and saying. What is heaven saying to you at this point in your life?
- This voice is from the throne. It is an authoritative voice that emanates from God's government.
- And what is this loud message? That God is living with His people! God no longer "lives" among His people by living in a temple or tabernacle. He is now with His people in an intimate way through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why I don't think these verses are about heaven (although if they are, they are still powerful and comforting).
- Let's keep in mind that Revelation was written to a church under siege in the first century. I fail to see how a picture of heaven, of the "by and by," so to speak, would be a comfort to them. This image shows that God is with His people *now*, in power and might. They, and therefore, we don't have to wait to see the victory of Jesus. It is ours *now*.
- And the Church, beleaguered and inept as it may be at times, is still the bride of Christ adorned beautifully. Hallelujah!

4 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."

- Now you may disagree with my interpretation here because of the reference to no more death or mourning or pain. There is certainly plenty of that in this lifetime. But if God will wipe away tears, that can only happen now.
- I have seen the Lord comfort people now who are going through tremendous loss, even persecution. They have a joy that is beyond description. God is with them and has wiped away every tear from their eyes. They aren't mourning as the world mourns; there is meaning and comfort in their pain.
- It may not be the best example of what I'm referring to, but consider what happened to the apostles early in their ministry after Jesus:

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing

because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:40-42).

- How did the apostles respond? With joy! They continued to do what they had to do, not hiding or cowering in fear. They preached the word. They were operating by a new order, the order of the Holy Spirit. That was the message to those churches in Revelation. They weren't supposed to hold on until heaven, they were to act as if they were in heaven already. It was a new heaven and earth for them. My goodness, even Phillip found himself being translated from one place to another in Acts 8:39. There was no "sea" for the early church, no insurmountable obstacle between them and accomplishing the will of God.

- There was even a new economic order established after Pentecost:

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. (Acts 4:31-35).

- I think it is somewhat dangerous to put too much emphasis on getting to heaven. That is already taken care of. What's more critical is to accomplish what we must do now on the earth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

5 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."

- Jesus often said while He was on earth, "Verily, verily" or "Truly I say unto you." Here He is speaking from the throne and is continuing this same pattern of speech. He is saying that the words "I make everything new!" are trustworthy and true.
- That is why I am taking this passage to be a reference to our life on earth now and not our life in heaven. There is no need to dry tears or make everything new there. But Jesus is making things new now. Paul wrote:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him

so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:4-7)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation (Galatians 6:15).

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds (Ephesians 4:22-23).

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:9-10).

- Are you waiting for heaven to be a new creation, or are you walking in newness of life now? If you are, what are the implications for you in your walk with the Lord?

6 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.

- Revelation is beginning to finish its message. Jesus referred to Himself as the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 1:8 and now He refers to Himself again.
- I had someone recently write me about a song entitled "Working the Middle." The message of that song was that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. That is His role, so to speak. Our role is to work out everything "in the middle," in between His start and finish, His being the Alpha and Omega.
- Jesus promises to give a drink to those who are thirsty. This reminds me of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well:

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give

me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4:10-15)

- Here in Revelation, Jesus said, "It is done!" He also said that from the cross:

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30).

- Jesus work on the cross is available free of charge to all those who thirst after God. There is no price; Jesus paid it all!

7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

- We revisit a word that was used frequently in the first three chapters and that word is "overcomes." We must overcome through Jesus the trials that come our way. When we do, we inherit "all this." Only family or those specified in the will can inherit anything. What is the "this" that the overcomers will inherit? Let's look at some other passages:

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:50).

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5)

- Our inheritance is not only heaven, but it is heavenly or eternal life now. Remember that Jesus said if He cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom was in our midst. He does and it is!
- Are you living in your inheritance? Are you experiencing righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

8 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."

- I can understand that the idolaters and murderers will be in the lake of fire, but what are the cowardly doing there? What are the unbelieving doing there? I don't usually associated cowardice and unbelief as sins worthy of hell, but there they are! Maybe the fearful would have sinned, but their fear stopped them instead of their love for God.
- The second death is the final judgment where all are assigned their eternal destination: either heaven or hell.
- I am glad that heaven is my destination, but I'm also glad I don't have to wait until heaven before I can enjoy God's blessings. That is another message of Revelation: no matter how bad things are now, we can live in the kingdom of God right here and right now. Praise the Lord!