

# All Things New (Family Service)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our scripture reading today comes from Revelation 21. And we have Bibles on the sides and upstairs as well at the back. So if you'd like to have a Bible, feel free to get up and pick one up at any time.

And we're gonna read Revelation 21 in just four verses, verse one to four. And if you're reading from one of our Bibles, that's on page 1041.

And this is God's word. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

[ 1 : 09 ] Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. This is God's holy word. So today, as you already know, is our annual family service where we give thanks to God for his work in the lives of our children and also through our kids church teachers and crush helpers and all sorts of people that have served our children alongside the parents over the past year.

And we've based the service off Catechism question 26, which Derek looked at earlier. Let me read that one more time. Catechism 26, it says, what else does Christ redeem in addition to us, our souls?

And the answer is every part of fallen creation. And we just read from Revelation 21, this is probably the quintessential passage that tells us what else Christ redeems, every part of fallen creation, that the good news of the gospel is not only good news for our souls and for the problem that we face before God, the problem of our sin, but it's also good news that extends beyond just us.

And that's what we see right here. And so let me give you two things that Christ also redeems and then why it matters. And we'll do that in 10 minutes, okay?

That will be a record, I think, for me, 10 minutes. First, Revelation 21, Jesus Christ came to redeem earth. He came to redeem earth.

[ 2 : 49 ] Now you look down at verse one and it says, I, John sees a new heaven and a new earth coming down. And that word new there is very important because what it signals to us is that the world that God is bringing when Jesus comes again is not an entirely different world altogether, but the word that John uses is a new world.

And when you look at the way this word gets used throughout the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, you can see a couple really important things about it. It shows up this word in the Old Testament, very famously in both Isaiah 65 and Isaiah 66.

And so commentators will say that John is very likely quoting here from Isaiah 65 and Isaiah 66. We read Isaiah 65 in the call to worship.

And in Isaiah 66, God declares, behold, I am making all things new. And then it shows up again here when Jesus returns at the end of history.

And the Greek word here is a very particular word. And it means something made of a different quality. So the word new here means being renewed to a different quality or standard than the former.

[ 4 : 16 ] And you can ask, well, what exactly does that mean? And let me show you from the passage, just two details that tells us exactly what that means.

What does it mean that this earth is gonna be made new? And you can see it in both of them in verse one. It says that when the new earth comes, the new heaven and earth, that there will be no more sea, no more ocean, no more sea.

Now, this is figurative language. It's not literal language. And the reason that John sees this vision, this figurative vision, that there's no more sea is because the sea in the Old Testament is consistently taught as the place of chaos and death.

The sea is the place in the Old Testament that Israel was so afraid of. The Israelites were not ship-faring peoples. They were afraid of the ocean. And the ocean was a place where if you go under the water and you stay too long, then you can't live anymore.

Did you know that? You can't. And that means that in the new heavens and the new earth, what it means to make the earth new is to dismiss the sea from the world.

[ 5 : 31 ] Now, that does not literally mean to dismiss all water. Instead, what it means is the great symbol of chaos, the physical symbol of chaos, the ocean, the waves, is no more.

And what that means is that the word new here means that Christ has come not only to redeem us, but to push away the chaos of disaster that has fallen upon the land.

In other words, this is a reference to ending the curse of creation from Genesis chapter three. It's the same curse that we saw in the four images that Derek put up of drought and fire and flood, et cetera.

This is exactly what it means. When the new heavens and earth come, that the sea will be no more. There will be no more chaos. The earth will be renewed.

The second thing he says is that the first earth will pass away. This language actually comes up in Peter's letters in both first Peter and second Peter, that the earth will pass away.

[ 6 : 35 ] And this is how Peter explains it. What does he mean by the earth will pass away? John is using that language that we see in other places in the Bible. Second Peter 3:13, we await a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The first earth will pass away, and then we will have a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

And so if the negative side of the earth's renewal, what it means to be new is that chaos will be pushed away, Peter says the positive side is that righteousness and justice will dwell.

And so what does it mean that Jesus Christ has come to renew the earth? It simply means that there will be no disease, no disaster, no death, no sin, that he will cleanse the world in the same way that the human body will be resurrected.

It will pass away and it will come back to life reborn without any of the stain of sin, curse or death.

All right, so that's the first thing. Jesus is coming to renew the earth.

Secondly, and finally, the second thing, Jesus Christ will redeem all things so that we will see God.

All right, this hope, Christ's cross and resurrection is so tangible, it's the forgiveness of your sin.

[ 7 : 58 ] It is the only way to God and it is physical. It's the renewal of creation, it's the resurrection of the body, it's trees and rivers, it's relationship, it's life.

It's everything that you long for. It's Edenic nostalgia, it's the home we've always wanted to have, it's all of that. But what John teaches us here is that that is not our greatest hope.

Physicality is not our greatest hope. The resurrection of the body is not our greatest hope, it is good. The renewal of the earth is truly great, but it is not our greatest hope.

And he tells us exactly what the greatest hope, the true purpose of redemption in Christ really is here in this passage. And we see it in verse two, it says that John saw the holy city, heaven coming down to earth.

Now this is a revolution of theology. Because for many of us perhaps, if you've been in the church any time, you've thought or you've been taught or you've grown up thinking that ultimate salvation is me going up into heaven to see God, to be with God.

[ 9 : 14 ] But John comes here and says, no, heaven, true heaven is when God comes down to earth to get to you. That the ultimate hope of new creation is not human ascension, but divine condescension.

That God is bringing heaven down, it is not that we are going up. And what that means here is that heaven, very particularly in the Bible, isn't just some spatial place, heaven is the term to describe wherever God dwells, wherever God chooses to live, His holy temple.

And so at the end of history, John says, God is going to bring heaven down to earth. And that means ultimately verse three, and here it is, here's the purpose of redemption.

Behold, the dwelling place of God is now with humankind. And you see the greatest hope of salvation, the very purpose of the cross, the purpose of the incarnation is fully and finally this, that one day you will actually see the living God.

That God will come down from heaven and He will dwell in your midst and you will put your eyes on Him. The vision of God, that is the ultimate hope of everything that Jesus Christ came to do.

[10:33] Now when you look at the Old Testament, you read verses like Exodus 34 that says, no one can see the living God and survive and live.

And there's this great tension throughout the whole Old Testament that we are not fit to stand in the presence of the living God. We were made to see God from Genesis one and two forward, but nobody can stand in the presence of God and live.

And then David in Psalm 27, he says, my hope Lord is that I would get to see your face in the land of the living. But David knows the impossibility of that, the sin that stands between he and God prevents him from seeing the face of God, the very thing he was made of.

And John who writes the book of Revelation comes in his letter, first John 3-2, and says, Christ came, Christ came, little children, so that you can see God as he is.

That the great tension of the entire Bible is that you were made ultimately to be redeemed unto seeing God and you can't because of your sin and Jesus Christ came so that you could see the living God.

[11:45] Christ has made him known. Now let me close with this very finally in just two minutes. What of it? What does this matter for today?

That's the question before us. And we've said that Jesus is coming back, he's going to renew heaven and earth, he's going to save our souls and our bodies, he's going to cleanse creation, he's going to bring God to you, you will see God in the land of the living.

But what of it for today as you step back into this week? And the reason that this matters so much today is the same exact reason that it mattered when John first wrote this book.

When John wrote this book, he was exiled in prison on the Isle of Patmos, he was a prisoner under the Roman Empire. And another person that was a disciple of John that wrote some letters beyond the Bible after John lived, this is what he says about the time that John was writing this letter.

He said, this was an age where people jeer, yell and mock the Christians in the streets. He says, many were thrown into the arena for spectacle and they were torn apart by the beasts.

[13:04] John wrote this book in an age of great suffering when Christians were actually being hunted down. And John is saying here to Christians in any age that experience any suffering, there is hope and a total redemption for the suffering servants of God.

And that redemption is so full and comprehensive and holistic that it's not just one thing, it's from top to bottom all the way down. And it's ultimately this that one day God himself will come to you and he will wipe away the tears from your eyes.

And he will take away the pain and the suffering and the tears that you've cried so often in life. Now, some Christians today need to hear this very specifically because of suffering for Christ, but all of us live in an age of the curse and all of us feel the weight of sin and all of us feel the weight of the curse in our lives and the diagnoses that we face and that every year we get closer and closer to death.

We need to hear the message that there is ultimate hope, a holistic redemption, that's exactly why John wrote. Now, let me say this lastly. This is also here because every single person needs this, whether you're a Christian or not.

There's lots of reasons we could say while every single person needs to hear this message that Christ has come to renew all things, but let me just close finally with one reason.

[14:46] And that's that what we think of as our future determines how we actually live in the present. So what you think about that is coming for you, whether that's in the immediate future or the farther future, that determines most of the time how you're gonna live today.

And let me ask you, let me ask you a question as we close. Which ending to world history, which ending to world history makes the most sense of a life well-lived today?

But because Christianity actually and secular humanist cultures like ours today, the West, the post-Christian culture we live in, they actually teach a lot of the same things about ethics, about how to live.

So secular humanism today agrees with Christianity. And it says that people ought to be charitable, they ought to be altruistic, that it's good to love your neighbor, that it's good to give and be philanthropic, that people have rights, that every person has the right to life and even to healthcare, we're told today.

In 1948, right after World War II, the UN declared on the Council of International Rights, they said this, that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and all rights.

[16:10] They are endowed with reason and conscience and they should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. That's the ethic of the West. Everybody in the West agrees about that.

Secular humanism in our culture also says this, that one day the sun is going to burn up and the earth will die either by heat death or by freezing cold and life will be unsustainable and everything in our solar system will collapse and there will be no more humans and no more bugs or trees or any creature for that matter.

And there will be no history because there will be no memory. There will be no one left to remember anything or say anything about the history that you've lived. And so get out there and love your neighbor.

Get out there and give your money away to the poor. Get out there and care for your brothers and sisters, your fellow human beings. Get out there and serve like you've never served before because today matters.

And you see, there's a message in the secular West that is rational and one that is entirely irrational. And Tom Holland has written a very helpful book, *Dominion*, that showed that this ethic in the secular West that people really do have rights and that we should love our neighbor is entirely constructed on the foundations of Christian hope but has left that Christian hope behind.

[17:45] And so it's an ethic that no longer makes sense of life. It's an ethic that can't make sense of what you're told to love your neighbor, to give to the poor, to care for other people.

And let me say this, Jesus Christ makes sense of all of our human hopes. Jesus Christ and the future that Christianity promises gives you a reason to live today like that, to love your neighbor and to spin yourself.

And the reason is this, because while you were a sinner, Christ came and spent himself for you. That's the reason, that's the reason we can say something like love your neighbor.

And so let me say that if you thirst today for a reasonable hope, one that has a future that makes sense of a present, then hear this invitation from Jesus Christ, Matthew 11.

He says, come to me today all you who are weary of narratives out around you that say, here's meaning, here's hope, here's a purpose that are empty.

[18:52] Come today. And he says, I will give you rest, I will give you hope, I will give you meaning because I promise a future where all things will truly be renewed and the world will last forever and you shall see God.

And so let's pray now and ask that Christ would give us a hope in such a rest. Let's pray, Father, we ask now that you would give us hope in a life that makes sense.

And we plead Revelation 21 and we recognize that without that future, that the ethic of love cannot work today.

And so in that intellectual struggle, Father, we pray that you would come and break into our hearts and renew us and revive us and make us see that the only reason that love exists is because your love pours forth into the world and that the only reason we should live a life well today is because you've created people with rights and dignity and that you've promised a future of renewal.

So we ask, Lord, for many today that they would come either for the first time or afresh to believe in Jesus Christ. And we ask for this in Christ's name. Amen.