

Something Absolutely New
Colossians 1:18

Well, scientists have studied the human brain, and through experiments using MRI technology they believe they can now prove that people like new things.

Really. Not exactly groundbreaking information, is it? Advertisers have obviously known this for years! We like new things and how they make us feel. Kids, don't you like that feeling when you get something new? Grown-ups like it, too.

Think of whatever you enjoy, or whatever you find useful or entertaining, and there's just something about getting a new one.

That's not to say we don't like old things. I have a pair of jeans that I love to wear. I've had them for many years; they're my "go-to" pair. So naturally I was disappointed last week when I realized, while at the soccer field, that they were split in the seat. I didn't know; I don't examine my pants before I put them on!

Those jeans are now retired, but at one time, they were new. That's the thing about new stuff; it never stays new. Newness fades. But something about newness satisfies us, and now there's science to back it up.

However, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments have been telling us this for ages. The OT prophet Isaiah spoke of new heavens and a new earth that will be made by God. The apostle Peter is just one of the disciples of Jesus who writes about those things in the NT.

We've been preaching through the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, and it begins with these words: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* "Heavens" refers to the skies and outer space. So *"the heavens and the earth"* basically means *"the universe and everything in it."* Why would God need to make new ones, replacing or restoring what we already have?

Well, we know that the world is a beautiful place, but also, a cruel place with evil, troubles, suffering and death, all the result of sin. And so the prophets of God spoke about a new universe to come, one without the presence of sin.

God gave a vision of that new universe to the apostle John. In the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, the apostle John described what God showed him, and he wrote that at the end of time as we know it, God will make *"a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."* John goes on to say that he heard a loud voice from God's throne saying, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."*

Apparently God likes new things, and being made in God's image, so do we. In fact, we long for something new, for what is decaying to be restored. The more we see in this world, the more we yearn for things to be "*made new.*" The longing intensifies with suffering and with age.

The Scriptures teach that only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a pathway made to something that will never lose its newness. It's a doorway to freedom from sin. If the resurrection of Jesus opened that door, shouldn't we walk through?

But how did Jesus' resurrection open the way? These words printed for you at the top of page 6 in the WG answer that question. Some explanation is necessary; I'll do my best. This verse from Colossians begins with the words, "*And he is the head of the body, the church.*" But for our time today, we are going to focus on these three, short groups of words about Jesus: "*He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*" And my friends, this is God's holy and powerful Word; may He write His eternal truth on each of our hearts.

First of all, "*He is the beginning.*" Notice that this sounds like the words I read from Genesis 1. In the beginning, God began to make the present heavens and earth. All of it was affected by sin, and though Jesus Christ did not sin, he did take upon himself a body like ours so that death, which is produced by sin, could affect him.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he was no longer affected by sin in any way. His resurrection was not simply His dead body brought to life again. Bible scholar George Eldon Ladd describes the resurrected body of Jesus as "*the emergence of a new order of life.*" Ladd calls it "something utterly new," something absolutely new. Jesus rose to immortality. In that way, He was no longer of this world. He was now of that world to come.

What do I mean? Well, for example, John 20 says that after the resurrection, on one occasion the disciples were in a locked room and Jesus appeared among them. John doesn't say how Jesus entered the room, but the implication is not that Jesus simply picked the lock. Rather, the laws of this physical world no longer restricted Jesus as He did during His earthly life, when He was born, and lived, and died.

At the same time, in His resurrected state, Jesus still ate food and walked around. It was a transformation of the old creation, of that old created order than we first see in Gen. 1.

At His resurrection, Jesus began the new creation. On that day, He began the new heavens and new earth. What we long for, and what the Scriptures described, Jesus founded it at His resurrection. He broke ground for the new order.

Imagine that some business advertises a grand opening here in Florence, and there is great anticipation. People are excited. So the day of the grand opening comes, and there's a short ceremony. And then you go to the front door because you want to go in and shop around. Or if

it's a restaurant, you want to have a meal. But the owner stops you at the door and says, "I'm sorry, we aren't actually open yet. We aren't ready." Then why did you have the grand opening?!

When Jesus rose from the dead, He cut the ribbon and opened for business. He began the new creation on that day. Do you think about the resurrection of Jesus Christ in this way? I admit that I lose sight of it. But it has begun, and this gives us tremendous hope!

Now, look with me at this second group of words. Jesus is "*the firstborn from among the dead.*" What this tells us is that not only did Jesus open the new creation, but He went first into it. Just as Jesus lived a perfect life in the place of His people, and just as He died a sinner's death in our place, so He defeated sin and death by rising from the dead on our behalf.

At His resurrection Jesus experienced the new creation.

Saying that He began it and that He experienced it may sound redundant at first, but again, think back to Genesis 1. In the old created order, this one in which we now live, when God made it all, He put mankind in it, but God did not put Himself in it in the way that Jesus now experiences.

I read to you earlier from Revelation 21, but I saved this part until now. John wrote, "*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.'*" In the new heavens and earth, God will live among His people in a way that is unlike how He has ever done before.

Often, you'll hear people who doubt God's existence say that they don't see evidence of Him. Which isn't really true. This whole present reality declares the existence and power of God. But I do empathize with those folks because God does sometimes seem far away. That's what sin has done to us.

But you see, in the new creation, the barriers that seem to exist between us and God will be gone forever. The estrangement we sometimes feel from God will be removed. The distance we feel from Him will be taken away. The new creation is another reality; again, the transformation of this present created order into something absolutely new.

It is eternal life, and Jesus went first, experiencing the immortal state that all God's people will know on the last day. We will rise to eternal life. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul writes that on the last day, the people of God will be changed, "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'*"

Death will no longer have a hold. The Lord Jesus experienced it first, and so will we. Consider the hope and the promise of realizing that Jesus now experiences that newness for which we long. The great preacher Matthew Henry stated that in His resurrection, Jesus *“has given us an example and evidence of our resurrection from the dead.”*

Now this final group of words says, *“that in everything he might be preeminent.”* Earlier I mentioned the apostle John, who wrote the NT book of Revelation. He also wrote a history of Jesus’ ministry. We call it the gospel of John. And to start that book, John uses some familiar language. The first three words are *“In the beginning.”*

He says, *“In the beginning was the Word.”* “The Word” was a term or a title used in reference to the divine nature of Jesus. Jesus was God come to earth. John goes on to say, *“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”*

We understand from all of Scripture that God is triune in His nature, three distinct persons and yet not three gods. One God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three in one. God the Son was there with the Father and the Spirit at creation. This why John goes on to say about Jesus that, *“ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* God the Son, being one person of the triune God, was present and involved in the creation of these heavens and this earth that we read about in Genesis and that John refers to at the start of his gospel.

And being the creator, God the Son is also the ruler over the creation as a member of the Godhead. Earlier in the worship service, when we proclaimed what we believe, we read, *“by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”*

Jesus ruled over this present creation, and when rose from the dead to immortality, when He began and experienced the new creation, He was installed as the ruler of it as well.

Jesus was now king over all creation, old and new. Therefore, in everything He is preeminent, which is to literally say that He holds first place. It’s not that Jesus will be installed as King on the last day, although at that time, His kingship will be visibly apparent to all.

But He was essentially installed at His resurrection. Having created the new order and being the first to enter, Jesus demonstrated His supremacy over all things. And as the ruler of the new creation, He alone makes the terms for entrance. He calls us to turn from sin and trust in Him, that we may come into that new creation. But entrance is not far off like you might think.

Romans 6 tells us that Christ was raised from the dead so that we might walk in newness of life. On the last day, yes. That will be the completion of it. But the newness of eternal life has broken into our present reality by the power of God.

When a person is born again by the power of God's Spirit, that person is raised to spiritual life by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. The Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit brings a person to life, making him or her able to turn from sin and trust in Jesus Christ by faith.

That salvation is our introduction, in a personal and real way, to the new creation yet to come. At His resurrection, Jesus opened the door to what one old hymn calls "*a foretaste of glory divine.*" We experience it individually through salvation, and then corporately, as the body of Christ, as the church, we experience and enjoy that newness together.

And incidentally, that is how Colossians 1:18 begins. It says, "*he is the head of the body, the church.*" Jesus is the one who brings those saved into the new creation; now in part, and one day, in full.

Have you been carried into the new creation by Jesus Christ? You cannot earn your way in. He earned His way, but we could never accomplish that. He must bring us in. For our part, we must only surrender in faith, admitting that we are sinners, with a desire to turn from sin, proclaiming our trust in Him, proclaiming our faith in Him. And for those saved by faith, we have this promise: "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*"

Please bow with me in prayer.