

THE Best IS YET TO COME

Life in the End

Peter Hartwig

“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, 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, 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, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:1-5

Congratulations! You’ve made it the whole week! You run the gauntlet of 5 days of eschatology. May you not lose your reward...

As we end this week of NCC daily’s and as we wind down on this series, I get the chance to leave you with one last thought. What better passage to guide us here, than the very last words of the Bible itself? The end of the book of Revelation.

Revelation is a difficult book to navigate for a lot of reasons. It has an unusual structure. It has a series of fairly rich images. It has some unsettling passages. So if you get a little quiver in your liver when I suggest we look at Revelation - I get it.

But in chapters 21-22, there is perhaps the most striking and beautiful image in all of Scripture. It’s a bit longer than NCC daily usually serves up, but just get a load of this.

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That is v21:1-5.

Alright - what is this heaven and earth business? Well, right from the beginning of the Torah, we are told that creation has two parts: heaven and earth. Think back to Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth.* In other words, heaven + earth = creation. As the Bible continues, we learn that heaven is something like the place where God lives. As one professor of mine put it, heaven is where God has elected to place the divine throne. Earth, by contrast, is where we are. And in the Fall it seems that those two halves of creation get torn apart.

In the garden of Eden, God used to walk around with the human beings just to enjoy the cool of the evening breeze. Then in the Fall, God seems to retreat into the heavens. Then God travels with the people of Israel in the tabernacle, which is eventually built into the Temple. Then the presence of God comes to us in Jesus, and after him in the Spirit whose presence makes the church a living temple. And then finally - this scene from Revelation - when Heaven and Earth become one. When God is all in all.

If you keep reading ahead a few verses, you will see John's vision of the New Jerusalem coming out of the sky. But in this vision, the new Jerusalem is actually a cube. Why would that be? Well, it mimics the dimensions of the Holy of Holies - the place where God lived when the temple was still standing. The New Jerusalem is the New Holy of Holies. It is an entire city. In other words, when heaven gets married to earth, now even whole cities are the Holy of Holies.

This breathtaking vision of God's presence so close and so intimate that the city won't even need lamps - this is the best that is yet to come. This is the END that Christians are taught to hope for by the New Testament. This is exactly what we talked about back on Monday. We hold out hope for the day when God is the everything in everything.

I'd like to leave you with my favorite eschatological blessing, written by the novelist Frederick Buechner. Usually, Buechner's quotes come from his books. But this one actually comes from a letter that he penned the day his grandson, Benjamin, was born - it was sealed and meant to be read on Benjamin's 21st birthday. "My wish is that after wandering through many a street for many a long year to come, you may find your way at last to the fountain in the square."

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God bless, NCC. The best is yet to come.

Where are you headed? If you have not, will you make a decision, or recommit yourself to surrender your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?