

North Summit Church | All Things New
The Verb in the Middle
Revelation 21:1–5

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Happy Fathers Day!**

SERIES INTRODUCTION

- This series works a little differently than what we typically do. We just finished Malachi — a book we walked through passage by passage over several weeks. This fall we are looking to begin a new comprehensive teaching plan that will carry us through Scripture systematically over the next ten years.
- But before we get there, we've created some space. **Each of the pastors on this team has been carrying something** — a text, a theme, a theological question that has been working in them over the past year but hasn't had a place to land while we were in a particular book. This series is that space.
- **The Spirit has been at work in us as Pastors and teachers** — forming something, pressing something, preparing something for the moment we find ourselves in. And we thought it would be good for you to see it.
- My word for you this morning is from Revelation 21. It has long been one of the scenes in Scripture that I return to often, and I believe it has something to say to this church and to this season we find ourselves in, here in North Idaho.

INTRODUCTION

- **This morning I want to take us to the last scene of the Bible.**
- The moment in Revelation 21 when the one seated on the throne finally speaks again. At the beginning of John's Vision he is taken up into the heaven, the veil separating heaven and earth is pulled back, and John is shown reality from the heavenly perspective. He is taken up into the throne room of God. The vision begins in the heavenly throne room, and it ends in the throne room.
 - By chapter 21 John has seen it all. The seals broken. The trumpets blown. The bowls of wrath poured out. The fall of Babylon. The rider on the white horse. The great white throne. The sea giving up its dead. Death and Hades thrown into the lake of fire.
- It is the most staggering sequence of visions in all of Scripture. And then — after all of it — there is a new heaven and a new earth. The holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

- And here at the end the voice from the throne declares that God will dwell with man. That every tear will be wiped away. That death and mourning and pain will be no more. The former things have passed away. This is our future, this is where history is headed.
- And then, for the second time in this entire book, the One on the throne finally speaks again.
- In all of Revelation, God speaks directly only twice. The first time in chapter 1. I am the Alpha and Omega. **The second time at the end of the book, pulling it all together.**
- And what He says is this:

“Behold, I am making all things new.”

- I want us to ponder of this for a moment. Those six words, spoken to a persecuted and troubled church. A church in the middle of very real tribulation.
- **Notice what He doesn't say.** He doesn't say *“I will make all things new.”* He doesn't say *“I have made all things new.”*
- He says: **I am making.** Present tense. Present active. Ongoing. Right now.
- **The Maker is mid-work. And that single verb changes everything.**

Revelation 21:1–5 NASB

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 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 mankind, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them and be their God; and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”

1. THE VERB: WHAT GOD IS ALREADY DOING

The new creation is not what God is planning. It is what God is doing. And what history is headed towards.

- Most Christians, if you ask them about the new creation, will say it is coming. They will point you toward Revelation 21 and say: *“that’s the future.”* And they are right — the full arrival of what John sees is still ahead of us.
- But here is what we miss when we read verse 5 only as a future promise: **the verb is already conjugated.** God says *I am making*. Not “I will.” Not “I planned.” The action is present, ongoing, already underway.
- And Paul confirms this in a way that validates this reality.

2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

- Notice what Paul does not say. He doesn’t say you *will be* a new creation. He doesn’t say you *hope to be* one.
- In fact — in the Greek — Paul drops the verb entirely. It reads, stripped to its bones: ***“If anyone is in Christ — new creation.”*** The new age has arrived in a Person. In Jesus Christ. And everyone who is in Him is already living inside that arrival.
- **Unfortunately we often act like we are waiting to become something Paul tells us we already are in Christ.**
- **And then Ephesians gives us the cosmic scope of this making:**

Ephesians 1:9–10 NASB

“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He set forth in Him, regarding His plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.”

- “Bring all things together” — the Greek — to sum up, to gather under one head. Everything. Things visible and invisible. Things in heaven and things on earth. **This is not a rescue operation for souls escaping a doomed creation. It is the reclamation of all things under the headship of Christ.**

- So here is the first thing I need you to hear: **The Maker is not waiting. He is actively working.**

2. THE INTERVAL: WHERE WE STAND

We live between the lightning and the thunder, in the charged interval of a making that has begun and is not yet complete.

- If the new creation has already begun in Christ, why doesn't it look finished? That's the honest question. And the New Testament gives it an honest answer.

1 Corinthians 15:20, 23 NASB

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep... But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.”

- The language of firstfruits is agricultural. When the first ripe grain appears before the full harvest is in, you are not looking at the whole crop. You are looking at the first installment — the down payment that guarantees the rest is coming.
- **Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits of the new creation harvest.** He is the first. He is not the only. And because He is the firstfruits, the rest of the harvest is guaranteed. The kind of harvest it will be has already been previewed.
- James tells us something that shines more light on this idea: *“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”* (James 1:18)
- **The church is not waiting for the new creation. We are the early harvest of it...living in advance of the rest.**
- But firstfruits means: not yet the full harvest.

Romans 8:22–23 NASB

“For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only that, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our body.”

- Notice what kind of groaning Paul is describing. He does not call it a death rattle. He calls it birth pangs. There is a world of difference between the sound of something dying and the sound of something being born.
- **The groaning of Romans 8 is not the sound of a world in its final decay. It is the sound of a world in labor. Something glorious is being born.**
- **Here is an image that might help.** When lightning strikes, there is a delay before the thunder arrives. Light travels faster than sound, so you see the flash before you hear the crack. If you are right in the storm, they arrive together. If you are at any distance, the flash comes first — and then the rolling sound follows, sometimes seconds later, sometimes more.
- **The cross and the resurrection were the lightning strike.** The victory was won, decisive and final, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The flash already happened.
- **We are living in the acoustic interval.** The thunder is still rolling through history. We live between the light that has already appeared and the sound that is still arriving in its fullness.
- We are not waiting for the storm. We are living inside it.

- And here is what that means for how we carry ourselves:
 - **We are an engaged people.** The wedding supper of the Lamb is where this is headed — that feast, that day, that final union of heaven and earth when the making is complete.

- **But you do not wait for a wedding the way you wait for a bus.** An engagement is real. The ring is on. The covenant is made. Priorities have already shifted. The relationship has already changed everything.

- **You are not someone hoping to meet someone. You are betrothed — and the One who is coming has already made His intentions unmistakably clear.**
 - That changes what you do with today, and tomorrow, and the rest of your life.

3. THE WITNESS: WHAT WE DO HERE

We are to be ambassadors of Christ's church as a sign, a foretaste and an instrument of His Kingdom.

- 2 Corinthians 5 will not let Paul’s theology remain in the abstract. He declares the new creation in verse 17, and then immediately — without pausing — he turns and says this:

2 Corinthians 5:18–20 NASB

“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their wrongdoings against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

- **We have been given a ministry. We have been entrusted with a message. We have been named ambassadors.**

An ambassador does not live in the home country. They are sent somewhere else — to a foreign land — and they carry the passport, the authority, and the message of the government they represent. Everything they do in that foreign place says: *“There is another King, another Kingdom, another way of ordering things — and I have been sent to represent it here.”*

- **That is what we are. That is what this church is called to be.**
- Now I want to get particular. Because Sandpoint, Idaho is a particular place, and we are not a generic church in a generic town.
- A lot of people move to North Idaho looking for something. And it’s worth asking: what are they looking for?
 - Many come for the land — the lake, the mountains, the space. That’s a genuine gift, and there’s nothing wrong with wanting it.
 - But a lot of people come for something else. They come for what feels like a slower pace, a set of values that looks more traditional, something that resembles what they remember or imagine the country used to be. Many of them are, if I can say it plainly, **running from something**. Escaping the coast. Retreating from where the culture is headed. Pulling back.
 - And I understand that instinct. There are real concerns underneath it.
- **But you cannot escape into the kingdom of God. You can only be sent from it.**

- **Retreat and resistance are not a calling.** They are a posture. And a church built on retreat and resistance will eventually become more concerned with protecting what it has than with bearing witness to where history is headed.
 - **Jesus said that He would build His church and gates of Hades would not prevail against it.** Gates are not offensive, they are defensive. That means that the principalities and powers of darkness don't have the upper hand, they only win when the church retreats.
- Here is what I believe about our Church, the Church at large, and this region:
- God has been drawing people to this place — and to this congregation specifically — not primarily to give us an escape, but because **He is doing something here.** He is building a community that can bear witness to the new creation in the middle of a region that is asking hard questions about what comes next.
- People are moving here. The conversations are loud. The stakes are real. And in the middle of all of that, we have an opportunity to be a people who already know where history is headed, who are already living as citizens of a different kingdom, and who hold out something better than either a retreated past or an anxious future.
- Lesslie Newbigin — one of the great missionary thinkers of the twentieth century — described the church as a **sign, foretaste, and instrument** of the kingdom of God.
 - A **sign** points to something that is coming. It says: *“This is real, this is on its way, and here is the evidence.”*
 - A **foretaste** gives you the actual flavor of something before the full thing arrives. It says: *“Taste this — this is what it will be like.”*
 - An **instrument** participates in what it is pointing to. It is not a passive billboard. It is a tool in the Maker's hand.
- **As Christ's Church in North Idaho our call is to be a sign, a foretaste, and an instrument of what God is making.**
- We pray that we can be more than a refuge, but that we can be a witness.
- **What does that look like? It looks like:**

- A community where genuinely reconciled relationships are possible — across the lines that commonly divide within Christ's church
 - A table where the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the wedding feast, not merely a ritual we observe
 - Lives restored in ways that cannot be explained by a change of scenery or a different zip code
 - Generosity that makes no sense in an economy of scarcity
 - A welcome for the person who moved here running from something, who finds out they've found the One who has been with them all along, but they just needed a place that gave them the space to ask the hard questions.
- **This is what the making God is doing. And He is doing it, as a foretaste, here in our midst. And it is a blessing to get to be part of it.**

CONCLUSION

- **Let me bring you back to the verb.**
- God was making before the foundation of the world — Ephesians 1:4 tells us that His plan was established in Christ before anything else existed. He made definitively in the resurrection of His Son...the firstfruits declared that the harvest had begun. He is making right now, through the Spirit's work in His church, in this room, in this city, in this region. And He will make it all complete — finally, without remainder — at the wedding supper of the Lamb.
- From before creation to the new creation. **It has been the sovereign God working one continuous present-tense making.**
- **We are not spectators of that making.** We are materials in the hands of the Maker. And by grace, through the Spirit, **we have become something more: participants in the making itself.**
- This series is called "All Things New." That is not just a title we chose for the calendar. It is the name of what God is doing right now — in this building, in this town, in the lives of the people sitting around you.
- Each of the pastors on this team has been carrying something God has been working in them, something they've been studying, wrestling with, praying through this past year. That is itself a kind of new creation work. The Spirit pressing something into the heart of our shepherds, and an opportunity to share that work. Over the next several weeks, you'll hear from each of us.

- What I want you to leave with this morning is not complicated:
 - **The Maker is not done. He is working. He has been working since before you were born, and He will be working until the last thing is made new.**

- And He has placed you — in this town, in this season, in this church — on purpose. In the middle of all that He is making.
- Yes, we look forward to the completion of the New Creation, but we have a foretaste of it now.

- **You are living in it. And the call is to live accordingly.**

[Let us pray]