

## Revelation 21:1-5 Making All Things New

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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Every now and then in the ministry, a season comes along that is full of hurt and pain and trials. They're always there, but sometimes a wave of them comes rushing in all at once.

We're in one of those seasons right now. In the midst of all the good that God is doing, there is a lot of pain and heartache as well. People are dealing with the sudden and unexpected loss of a father, others dealing with aging parents and their serious declines in health; people struggling with their own health or the scariness of having to take their spouse or children to the hospital. We have people who are confused emotionally - they don't know why they're here and they wonder if God could really pick up the pieces that are left from the wreck they've made of their lives. Others are dealing with the horrors of spousal abuse. These are just a few of the issues swirling in the lives of the people living, worshipping, and sitting around you. These are just a few of the things people are living through, or helping others live through.

And then we're all aware of the issues in the world today. You have massive earthquakes in Nepal, and then a bunch of US service members go in to help rescue people and a Huey full of Marines crashes and kills everyone onboard. We have racial tension escalating in our cities, and Islamic terrorists attacking events in Texas where now the rains are so severe they've caused tremendous flooding.

If you're paying attention to what's going on around you, it can all be a little discouraging and depressing at times.

And that is why I'm so thankful for what have before us in Scripture this morning. From chapter 6 to 19 we saw the reality of the judgment that will fall on those who persistently reject God but we finally hit the breaking point in Chapter 20. And now, now we're ready to end on a high note as we explore what Heaven is like in Chapters 21 and 22.

We've been moving along and taking a look at a few chapters at a time recently, but now we're going to slow down again and just soak up the glorious hope that we find in these final chapters of the Bible.

My friend, if you came in here carrying a heavy load this morning, if some part of life has you beat up, tired, fried, exhausted, burnt out or broken down, I want you to know - God has some good news for you. It's not here yet, but it's coming, and it's a promise from God. A promise that the way things are, and the way things have been, is not the way they will be forever. God promises you something of immeasurable value - He promises to make things new. Read with me:

1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

I'd like to start by drawing your attention back to verse one. John says, "Now I saw" or your translation may say, "Then I saw." The point I want to make is that there is an order to these things. John saw the new heavens and the new earth *after* he had seen the judgment and suffering of Chapters 6-20 – events described as the Great Tribulation. The darkness of that reality made the brightness of this sight shine all the more.

Friends, we are aware of the blackness of this world. We are aware of the trials and difficulties on planet earth. But are you aware of what is coming next?

After your time on this earth is through, you will experience one of two things – eternal suffering apart from the God you rejected or ignored during your life, or eternal friendship with Him in a new city on a new earth. Your life is either going to get worse, or get better, and it's going to stay that way forever.

If you have been adopted by God, if you are a citizen in the Kingdom of Heaven, this is your future, this is your hope: eternity spent with a gracious, caring, considerate God who daily demonstrates His love for you! This is your hope. This is your guarantee when the sufferings of this life are over. The new heaven and new earth come after the trials and judgments of this world.

Notice how comprehensive this newness is too: there is a new heaven - the idea of the heavens can mean just the sky above you where the birds fly, or the expanse of the universe where the stars shine, or it can mean the place where God dwells. Most likely, we're talking about either a new sky or a new sky and a new universe. There's no need for a new heavenly throne room because the heaven we think of when we think of God was never infected by sin like our planet.

So, the earth, and whatever is above it will be made new. Now, there's actually a debate among scholars as to whether this means God will refurbish and refresh everything, or whether it will be genuinely new. You know sometimes you go to buy a new piece of electronics, or an appliance, and you can either get one that is brand-new or you can get one that has been 'factory re-conditioned' and save a few bucks, but you never really know, "is it worth it?" Why did they have to recondition it? What's wrong with it? What if they didn't really fix it?

Well if, for some reason, God decides to factory recondition the heavens and the earth, I guarantee you won't be disappointed. He'll just wipe out everything that is not functioning properly and restore what should have been, and you probably won't even be able to recognize the new thing because it will be spectacular.

After all, isn't that what He's in the process of doing with us? He saves us, makes us new, gives a new life when we're born again, He even promises us a new body in Heaven – but it's still us. Some core aspect of who I am at the level of the soul will not change, if anything, it will be polished and magnified and I'll be the best possible version of me – all those noble aspirations inside that seem so hard to embody now will naturally flow. So, it's possible that He will restore the heavens and the earth as well.

And on this new earth there will also be a new city – the Heavenly Jerusalem – where God will dwell once again with man. The Scripture tells us the city comes down out of heaven from God. In our next study we'll take a closer look at what the city is actually like, but for now, we just need to know that it is stunning – and it's what God has in store for you.

John says the Heavenly Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God, *“prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*

Now that wording should sound very familiar to some of your Bible readers. What did Jesus say to the disciples in the Upper Room on the night before He was crucified?

*“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, you may be also.”* (John 14:2-3)

Jesus promised us that right now, while we are waiting, He is preparing a place for us. One day, the new Jerusalem will come down, having been prepared.

Now think about that. “Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Men, you think you understand this, you think you get what that illustration means, but you don't. In order to really appreciate what it means for a bride to prepare and be adorned for her wedding, you have to be a part of the secret world of women. Go to any wedding and you'll find the bride's room is a place of frenzy and fervor and sprays and paints and glosses and bobby pins and curlers and straighteners and irons and all kinds of things that most men will never experience. And that's all after the weeks and months of preparation leading up to the actual wedding day.

So ladies, today, at lunch, tell your kids, tell your friends, tell your husband – what did you do to prepare yourself for your wedding day? There's all kinds of shopping, and appointments, and diet and exercise, and plucking and primping that goes into it, isn't there? You see, you ladies understand this verse better than the men, so help them appreciate what it says.

Weddings are amazing events – they’re one of my favorite parts of being a pastor. Because all of that effort, all that preparation, comes together in a majestic and splendid moment where it doesn’t matter what else is going on in the world – we’re in the middle of a fairytale for a few moments when that woman comes walking down the aisle and as she stands at that altar. She’s stunning and we are touched, we are hushed, by her. Every woman is a beauty queen on her wedding day.

And that’s the image God wants you to have in your head. That’s what He wants you to know is in store for you. He is generous, He is kind, He is even extravagant, and what you’ve experienced on earth is only the slightest little foretaste of what He has for you in eternity.

But, and here’s the most important detail of it all – it’s not just what you get – we could preach that all day long and sell it to anybody – who doesn’t want a new life on a new earth in a new city? Aren’t all religions telling people about paradise? Again, it’s an easy sell. But the Christian idea of heaven isn’t just a land of fairytales and make believe where everyone gets a pony and a popsicle – no, the core, essential idea of the Christian afterlife is not where you spend it, but Who you spend it with.

3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be their God.*”

This is what makes Heaven truly heaven – an uninterrupted, unrestrained, nearness with God.

In the very beginning God dwelt with man. We read in the first pages of the Bible that God would walk with Adam in the Garden of Eden. They would talk to each other. Before sin entered the picture they had a relationship we can’t fully understand.

But when sin came it separated God and man. The Bible tells us that God is Holy, He is perfect, He is pure and clean, He is light and in Him is no darkness. But we are stained, unholy, and not only are we attracted to the darkness around us, at times we find dark desires in our own hearts and our own thoughts and they just come spilling out of us with no particular effort on our part.

But God had mercy. And He initiated a relationship with men. He called Abraham and then promised to work through his offspring, the nation of Israel. He appeared to Moses and sent him back to Egypt to lead and love His people. And as they left Egypt, God appeared to them in a cloud that accompanied them as they traveled, but there was always distance between them and the cloud. He was present, but not close.

Eventually God called Moses up onto the mountain and told him how to build a tabernacle, a dwelling place for God among the Jewish people – it was a tent they would set up and then tear down each time they had to move. Eventually they settled into the land of Israel again, and after King David, King Solomon, his son, built a permanent structure – the

Temple, a place for God's presence to be known among the people. But in both the tabernacle and the temple that presence of God was separated from the people by a veil that closed off the Holy of Holies and only the high priest could go inside, and that only once a year – sin was still separating God from man and though they were offering sacrifices something more needed to be done.

So, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us – Jesus Christ came down and walked among men on our sin-sick planet. And some people, a very few in light of all history, were able to hear Him, see Him, and even touch Him. But then, He gave up His life for us all so that anyone who was redeemed by Him and the blood He shed on Calvary could be forgiven of their sins and finally have a direct, personal, connection with God again. And so He promised that though He was leaving – going away to prepare a place for us – that He would send the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter and enabler in the rest of our time on earth.

So now, all who are Christians understand that we dwell with God today, right now, just as we are because when we are saved, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and promises never to leave...even when we might want Him too because we feel convicted by our sin.

And we live in that tension – we have forgiveness of sin, we have a relationship with God, but we still have the presence of sin in our lives. Sometimes we're the one sinning, sometimes we're the one being sinned against, but sin is regularly affecting us, *even though* we have a relationship with God.

In Heaven it won't be that way. You see, the death of Jesus delivers us from the penalty of sin, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is delivering us from the power of sin, and one day, God the Father will deliver us entirely from the presence of sin. And then we will live together with Him for eternity. He will tabernacle with us, He will dwell with us, we shall be His people. **“God Himself will be with [us] and be [our] God.”**

So, for nice as heaven is – for as great as the new earth may be, for as much as the streets of the new Jerusalem are paved with gold – what really matters is simply that it is an environment unaffected by sin where we can have true, direct, unfettered and unobscured relationship with God Himself.

And now look at what that means for us – what it means to have God so close and sin abolished.

**4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”**

Now, I love the order here. In another study we will see what Heaven is like, we'll get an actual description of *what it is*, but here we're told *what it is not*. After all we've been through, after all we've seen and done and experienced in this life, God wants us to know first and foremost, what there will be none of.

There will be no more tears. No more death. No more sorrow or crying. “For the former things have passed away.” Another translation says, “for the old order of things has passed away.”

Friend, I want you to hear this, and know this. Feel the hope of what God is trying to tell you here. The things that hurt in your life right now will not hurt forever – no matter how deep the pain, no matter how severe the wound, no matter how long ago it all started – your tears, your embarrassment, your shame, your pain, will not last forever. And why is that?

Is it because God promises you a spiritual marriage and your own planet to populate? Is it because you get forty virgins and a bunch of dates and palm trees? Will you get a dozen angels to be your servants?

No, you get Him. *He* will wipe away every tear from your eye.

Friends, the intimacy of our relationship with God has just been coming to life for me lately as I read this book. You remember we noticed it back in chapter one where John had a vision of Jesus and fell down, flat on his face in total shock, fear, and awe, and Jesus reached out His hand and touched John.

Now, sometimes we talk of that, maybe you even pray that: “God, I need a touch from You today.” Or, when someone is sick, “God, please touch them and heal them.” And that is all right and good, but we’re speaking metaphorically, or spiritually, in that case. Here we see God actually, really, touching people. Friends, what is that like???

Do you know, and do you understand, that God doesn’t outsource His care for you. He doesn’t have a customer service department. He doesn’t have a secretary or an aide. You don’t spend three minutes with him getting a diagnosis and then 30 minutes with a nurse or a tech filling out forms. You get Him. Direct access, to Him. And He will touch you.

Some of you need to close your eyes and meditate on that truth today, you need to really chew on that, to know that God will touch you – that He will have an even more personal relationship with you than He already does because no sin will be in the way. For as much as you try to know God on earth, as much as you struggle – you WILL know Him in Heaven. The Bible says one day we will know Him, just as He already knows us. (1 Cor 13:12).

There will be no more death – no more searing pain from the loss of a loved one. No more having the fabric of your life torn into a frayed edge as someone you loved is ripped or fades away. Sin is the author of good-byes, of separation, of division. God says, never again. God unites us and promises to never be apart.

And therefore, there will be no more crying, no more pain – whether physical or emotional.

Some of us have just learned how to live with pain. It’s been there so long we almost don’t even think about it, we’ve just learned how to limp our lives around it. But it’s not gone.

We're still limited by it. We're still afraid it will clear its throat and start speaking into our lives again, only louder this time. But God promises, one day it will be gone and you won't live in the fear of its return.

He gives that His personal guarantee:

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

God is making this incredible boast – He says, "look at what I do! Look and marvel. Stare and be amazed. Seeing is believing." And once you've seen it, John, write this all down and share it with others.

There are a lot of things in this world that change. But this is settled. Write it down, in pen and ink, it's not going to change – what I'm telling you is true and faithful.

The only problem is – this is all about heaven, and we're not there yet. We're here. So what do we do? Well, we look forward, we anticipate, we hope. We remind ourselves of what is coming and how great it is. And we turn to the God who promises all of this and we ask Him if we can have a little bit of it today? Can we have a spoon full of the cookie dough before it goes in the oven?

But friends, you don't get any of this then, unless you have all of Him now. So let me ask: have you received new life in Christ? The Bible says we are all sinners – we all, by nature, choose to do things our own way. We don't make a priority of God in our choices - if we pay Him any mind at all, it's on our terms. Maybe you even came to church today because it seemed like a "good thing" to do. But God isn't your priority – He's one of your options – you didn't have anything else going on, or you could squeeze it in, so you came.

That's the life we're all prone to – a life that is concerned with me and what I can do and what I want, and when life hurts I want God to make it stop, and when it comes to Heaven, I want a paradise. But do you want God? Do you want His touch? Do you want to tabernacle with Him? That's a different, and a bigger question my friend. Heaven isn't heaven because of what it's like; it's heaven because of Who you are with.

And you can be with Him today. You might not get the streets of gold, you might not get the world of peace and tranquility, you might not get the pearly gates – but you can have, or many of you already do have, a relationship with God. He has made a home in your life already. But if He hasn't – the Bible promises you can have a new life today by simply coming to God and telling Him you see what He's saying – you recognize that you are a sinner – you intentionally and unintentionally do things that are not pleasing to Him, but you want to be forgiven for that through the work of Christ on the cross - you understand that He offers to put His suffering toward your account.

And then you want to have the Holy Spirit living in you – here and now, today and forever – to experience as much of God on this earth as He wants to reveal to you, and to use you to reveal Himself to others as you love Him and love others in His name.

You can settle all that with Him this morning, right now. And if you have already settled all of that – I want to encourage you with the reminder of what you have in store – this is your hope – this is your promise – a new heaven and a new earth where you will tabernacle with God and where you will experience His direct touch in your life.

The things that hurt today will not hurt forever. And even when we are down here, facing the trials and difficulties of this life – yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. God is walking with us through it all – He is a very present help in our time of need – so take your burdens, your pain, your hurt and your hangups and give them to Him and ask for His help in patiently enduring until the glorious day comes when you too see the New Jerusalem come walking down the aisle like a bride adorned for her husband.

Let's pray.