

“All Things New”
(Revelation 21:1-8)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our *risen* Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. While it is easy for us to understand what it means for something to be new, it is not so easy for us to grasp how something that is *used* can *become* new. “New” and “used” seem to be basic opposites. Once you drive that new car off the lot, it depreciates in value by thousands of dollars and is almost instantaneously no longer new (which is one reason why so many folks avoid purchasing brand new cars).

A couple of Christmas’s ago, Traci responded to my wanting a new Camero (and I meant the actual car one drives...you know the one that big guys who are 6’5” can barely squeeze into). But when I unwrapped my gift, I was like a little boy all over again and was so enthralled by my brand new Camero -- and I was happy to settle for this toy version which is slightly more affordable – that I’ve done something rather silly: I haven’t had the nerve to take it out of the box. So here it sits...in the box...absolutely no use to anyone; just sitting here as I desperately try to retain that which is now getting old (even in the box) as something that is “new”...this is yet another way in which newness seems so elusive and in fact impossible for us to retain!

But dear Christians, thanks be to God that He doesn’t share in our limitations! He is going to take that which is thoroughly used and make it new. Revelation 21 is a picture of heaven and it is gloriously magnificent. It is also about the miracle of making that which has been thoroughly used into something that is wonderfully new.

We have to check the sinful idea that God treats that which is used in the way we often do: He doesn’t throw His creation away as if it were trash. Revelation 21:1-2 says, ***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*** And then the Lord says as recorded at verse 5: ***“Behold, I am making all things new.”***

One commentator brings out the overall theme of Revelation’s “new”: “The saints of God will bear their new name, Christ’s own name (2:17; 3:12), and sing unendingly their new song (14:3) in a world where God makes all things new (21:5), on a new earth and under a new heaven, in a new holy city, a new Jerusalem. All things are “new,” not merely as more recent in date but as created and designed to supersede and replace the old...new with an astonishing end-of-time newness, unheard-of and wondrous...(Franzmann, *The Revelation to John*, 137).”

But by definition, this is a newness that does *not* annihilate the old or first creation. Andrew of Caesarea: *“This passage does not speak of the obliteration of creation but of its*

renewal into something better. For as the apostle says, 'this creation will be freed from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God [Romans 8:21]. '...The renewal of that which has grown old does not involve the annihilation of its substance but rather indicates the smoothing out of its agedness and its wrinkles (Weinrich, ed., Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XII Revelation, 354).'

In other words when Revelation 21:1 says that the first heaven and earth “pass away” or when 2nd Peter 3:10-13 uses the extreme descriptor of what happens to the old as in being *dissolved*, these are not about elimination, but *transformation*. Again, God doesn't throw away His creation and the proof is in the resurrection of our Lord. His body that was buried, that was *used* to bear the sins of the world, was resurrected. In other words, the heavenly version of “new” amounts to that which is perfectly restored, where life triumphs over death, and where time will no longer have its aging effect on those who were formerly under the curse of sin (*Lutheran Study Bible*, 2233 and 1197).

So we are in a good position to begin to answer the question, “What will heaven be like?” The Scriptures give the answer of perfect restoration: the creation without sin; a restored creation that never gets marred by the effects of being used, while at the same time fully enjoyed and fully employed (it won't be static or stuck in a box). You will get to “use it,” but the new creation will never suffer the effects of sin and will never get old. You will use a new creation that will never show signs of having been used.

Again, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the best view. He was renewed in glory when He rose. The new heaven and new earth will be filled with God's people with their new bodies, which will be their old used bodies raised, transformed and glorified...real bodies in a real city in a real heaven and earth in the presence of the real Lord. The parallel Old Testament version of Revelation 21 which is Isaiah 65 takes it a step or two further; those in the new heaven and new earth: ***“...shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit...[and this Scripture goes on to mention the heavenly versions of the wolf, the lamb, and the lion] (vv 21 & 25).”***

Without getting into the nuances of the language here being used, there seems to be a basic idea in God's Word about heaven, esp. when you take into consideration that in 2nd Kings 6 Elisha's servant was permitted to see heavenly horses and chariots of fire. ***God loves His creation...the things you and I love...the fields, the trees, the animals, our bodies...these things will be in heaven, but in such a way that they will be transformed, perfected, and in the condition of a newness where corruption is gone!***

But where is the Law in this epistle? I found it absolutely fascinating that even though Revelation 21 treats verses 1-8 as a unit, that the liturgical assignment (what we have printed

on the back of our bulletins) excludes verse 8 and only keeps verses 1-7! I suppose we didn't want to end on a negative note, but it's God's Word and God put it there for a reason! This is verse 8 that concludes the vision of the new heaven and the new earth in verses 1-8:

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Of all the vices that could have headed this list, of all the possible sins that could have been first mentioned, the first one is the word “cowardly.” And it is this word that describes our sin today. In Matthew 8:26 Jesus once called His disciples *dilos* when He said, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” The word means, “fearful one or timid one or coward.” Jesus was asking them (more literally), “Why are you fearful ones; why are you cowards?” I like the way the venerable Bede describes this sin: “[God] mentions the cowardly along with the unbelievers, since those who doubt the rewards for those who conquer will certainly be afraid to undergo trial...(Weinrich, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XII Revelation*, 360).” An important part of this vision of the new heaven and the new earth is this word in verse 7: ***“The one who conquers will have this heritage...”***

But in our sin, the last thing we feel that we are, are conquerors! In our sin, it is rather easy to feel not as one who conquers, but as one conquered. Our sin tries to trap us in this thought: “How could I ever be worthy of the place that is eternally *new*, when I am so terribly and rottenly *used*?” How often have you *not* conquered your sin, but given in to it? How often have you *not* conquered your sin, but have rather been conquered by it? And this state of affairs...this state of sin...makes us cowards in the face of this glorious vision of the new heaven and the new earth.

When St. Peter realized that it was the King of heaven in that boat with him in Luke 5 – when Jesus caused the great catch of fish – Peter fell down at Jesus' knees and said as a coward, ***“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*** (v 8) That is, “I am so used by sin, that I naturally gravitate towards unbelief, I naturally return to my vomit like a dog; I naturally return to my mud like a pig (2nd Peter 2:22). In my sin I am used by sin and I feel the full affects of it...the affects are upon my body and upon my soul, so how could I ever be in the category of those who enter what is eternally new by having conquered?!”

Luke 15 on the prodigal son is well known for the themes that we typically pursue in that parable, but there is a wealth of application for what I am now describing. The prodigal son took his new inheritance from his father and used it in an abusive way. The Scriptures say ***“he squandered his property in reckless living (v 13).”*** But even when the son finally comes to his senses (v 17), he is still trapped as a coward. He cannot imagine that he would ever qualify for

newness again. When he began to confess to his father he said, ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son (v 21).”*** He was saying that he had sinned against that which is new (heaven), and that he was now thoroughly used by sin...and what is used can't be in what is new...how in the world could he ever be restored?! This is how in sin we think and it is the reason why we sinfully give in to sin over and over again.

This is what our sin does to us. The devil tunes into our sinful flesh to say, “You can never qualify for what is new!” So Bede is right: cowards doubt the rewards for those who conquer and in this way the ability to undergo trial is lost. It is as if we say, “What’s the use? I am too used to ever be new!”

Dear Christian, now hear the Good News and let the Lord cover your fear by His grace: the vision of the new heaven and the new earth is not presented as a result of your efforts to qualify for it, but is made by God (Revelation 21:5). When St. Peter cowered before Jesus, Jesus simply came back and said to His dear Peter, ***“Do not be afraid (Luke 5:10).”*** And you know how the father responded to his cowering son who felt so used by sin! The father would have nothing of it! The father covered and elevated his son with all things new! Why? Because being used is nothing in the face of perfect and new forgiveness; it is nothing in the face of overpowering mercy and love!

Hear the Lord speak: ***“Behold, I am making all things new.”*** Newness is not something you generate; newness is not something you cause. It is rather something that God *creates*. How in the world will you ever be in the category of one of those who belong to Christ and heaven who conquer? It is only because God has made you new in Christ! This is why the Scriptures proclaim so clearly: ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2nd Corinthians 5:17).”***

Remember that at the beginning of this series on Revelation I called you a seven and another reason for this is because of the seven amazing gifts that are given to those who conquer listed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 (i.e. 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26-27, 3:5, 3:12, and 3:21). These are the descriptions of you in heaven! But be clear dear Christian, you are not given the status of having conquered by your strength, but rather you are given this status by virtue of the One who conquered for you: Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who conquered your sin by His blood; it was Jesus who conquered your death through His glorious resurrection! *“The one who conquers’ is an heir (21:7) of God’s gift of eternal life in the new heaven and earth because of the victory of the one who conquered (Brighton, Revelation, 604).”*

This reality of the Gospel dear Christian makes certain that you *are* new in Christ and are among the conquerors who will inhabit the new heaven and the new earth! With this knowledge and with this faith, we are equipped to face the temptations which remain. Yes, the

battle will always be there in this life, but the battle itself has been transformed. You do not face temptation as one who is overcome and used, but you face all temptation as one who has been made new, united with the Conqueror, the Resurrected Victor over all temptation and sin. Remember who you are dear Christian. Go forth in such a way that when you feel cowardice rising, know that it is Jesus your Savior -- who has conquered -- who lifts you up and says to you, "Do not be afraid!" He says it to you, His child, who is made new; new even here in this first creation and who will be new in the new heaven and the new earth for eternity! Hear the Lord once again. He is speaking about you: ***"I am making all things new."***