

Revelation 21.1-8

- I saw a new heaven and a new earth -

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Introduction

- ❖ This world is not a paradise.
 - There is war and there is terror.
 - There is oppression and there is persecution.
 - There is discrimination against people.
 - There are many refugees in this world because of war and climate change.
 - There is sickness and there is death.
 - There is poverty and there are people without hope.
- ❖ And there is the Christian message of
 - Peace of God.
 - A message of grace and forgiveness.
 - Freedom of the Spirit.
 - A message of equality, rest and life.
 - The Kingdom of Christ.
 - A message of faith, hope and love.
- ❖ God will make everything new! A new heaven and a new earth!
 - The apostle John had the privilege given by God himself to see a glimpse of this new creation, which is at the same time:
 - Future for the those who live on this earth;
 - Reality for those who live with Christ Jesus!
 - “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” (Rev 21:1-4).

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Revelation to John. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a stand-alone. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ The book of Revelation is like a painting. It is impossible to study one passage without looking at the book as a whole.
- ❖ A brief outline of the Book of Revelation:¹

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction (Rev 1:1-3) | |
| | The origin of and the command to write this Revelation. |
| The Book of Revelation (Rev 1:4-22:21) | |
| Rev 1:4-8 | The opening liturgical setting. |
| Rev 1:9-3:22 | PART 1 |
| Rev 4:1-22:11 | PART 2 |
| Rev 22:12-21 | The closing liturgical setting. |

- PART 1: The risen and exalted Christ sends his seven messages to the seven churches in the Roman Province Asia.
- PART 2: The heavenly courtroom and the judgment of God, ending with the descent of the new heaven and earth.
 - PART 2: Three main stages can be distinguished in this part of the Revelation. Each stage is introduced by a vision of the heavenly courtroom where God resides as the Creator-King and Judge of all creation.

¹ This outline for sermons is very brief and does not discuss all the (many) different theories about the structures and outlines of the Book of Revelation. Beale (1999) provides a detailed outline. For discussion see Garrow (1997).

| Part 2 (Rev 4:1-22:11) | |
|---|--|
| Stage 1 | Rev 4:1-7:17 > the first six seals. |
| Stage 2 | Rev 8:1-11:14 > (the seventh seal) and the first six trumpets. |
| Stage 3 | Rev 11:15-22:11 > (the seventh trumpet) and the seven bowls of God's wrath > the two cities: Babylon versus the New Jerusalem. |
| Stage 3 (Rev 11:15-22:11) – in more detail | |
| Rev 11:15-16:21 | <p>The war between Christ and the powers of Satan, the Beast, the false prophet, and Babylon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 11:15-19 > The heavenly courtroom. • Rev 12:1-14:20 > The war between Christ and Satan, the victory of Christ. • Rev 15:1-16:21 > The seven bowls of Gods wrath, the victory over and the destruction of Babylon. |
| Rev 17:1-21:8 | <p>The destruction of Babylon and the final judgement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 17:1-19:10 > The fall of Babylon. • Rev 19:11-21:8 > The final judgement. |
| Rev 21:9-22:11 | The vision of the New Jerusalem and the New Creation. |

- Revelation 21:1-8 is the final part of those chapters in which John describes the victory of Christ and final judgement of the death and the living. This important for the explanation and understanding of Revelation 21:8.
 - The final judgement can be divided into four parts. Each part ends with the execution of the judgement: **the fiery lake of burning sulfur**.

| Rev 19:11-21:8 > The victory or Christ and the final judgement. | |
|---|---|
| Rev 19:11-22 | <p>Christ and his Victory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The beast was captured, and with it the false prophet (...). The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Rev 19:20). |
| Rev 20:1-10 | <p>Christ and his Victory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| | had been thrown” (Rev 20:10). |
| Rev 20:11-15 | Christ and his Judgement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). |
| Rev 21:1-8 | Christ and his Judgement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Rev 21:8). |

Form and structure

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>John saw:</i></p> <p><i>The new heaven and a new earth:</i> (verse 1, 2)</p> | <p>Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.</p> <p>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.</p> |
| <p><i>John heard:</i></p> <p><i>A loud voice:</i> (verse 3, 4)</p> | <p>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,</p> <p>“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”</p> |
| <p><i>The voice of God:</i> (verse 5, 6a)</p> | <p>He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”</p> <p>Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”</p> <p>He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.</p> |
| <p><i>The promise to the faithful</i> (verse 6b-7)</p> | <p>To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.</p> |
| <p><i>The warning to the unfaithful</i></p> | <p>But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all</p> |

(verse 8)

liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

Verse 1-2

- ❖ Compare the ESV and the NIV:
 - “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.**”
 - “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, **and there was no longer any sea.**”
 - The difference is found in the word “**any**,” which is not found in the Greek text.
 - Although the meaning of “the sea” seems to be clear: “the physical sea”, the word “sea” is also used to denote the border between heaven and the earth:
 - “Also in front of the throne there was what looked **like a sea of glass**, clear as crystal” (Rev 4:6; compare Ex 24: 10: under his feet was **something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli**, as bright blue as the sky.)
 - There is another reference to “the sea” within the context of Revelation:
 - “And I saw what looked **like a sea of glass** mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:2-3). This verse reminds the reader of the exodus when God delivered Israel from the oppression in Egypt.

heaven

sea of glass

sea – earth – sea

Verse 3-4

- ❖ To dwell = “σκηνώω”: **live, settle, take up residence**. *With them* Rev 21:3. *Over or above them*, that is, **shelter** them, of God (Rev 7:15).²
 - To shelter has also the meaning of providing protection, which is not needed any longer. The image of a tent is applicable. The people reside within the tent and God is sheltering them like a tent, and by doing so, he has taken up residence with his people.

Exposition

Verse 1-2

- ❖ After God has passed his judgement on “the beast and the false prophet” (Rev 19:20), “the devil” (Rev 20:10) and “anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life” (Rev 20:15), John sees a new heaven and earth (Isa 65:17-19; 2 Pet 3:13) The old world order has passed away (Mt 5:18; Mt 24:35).
 - “And the sea was no more” indicates (see below) that heaven is not any longer separated from earth as the two (separate) realms of the Kingdom of God. There will be one realm. The new creation might be called a “heavenly earth” or an “earthly heaven”, because “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them” (Rev 21:3).
 - The Revelation doesn’t mention how the first order will pass away. 2 Peter 3:10-13 tells that this world will pass away by fire.
 - The old order must be understood against the background of wars, death, and famine (Rev 6:1-8), persecution of Christians (Rev 2:12-17); the destruction of the old city of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).
- ❖ Part of this new creation is the new Jerusalem, the city of peace (Ps 48:1-3; Ps 87; Heb 11:10; 13;14). It is the Holy city, dedicated to God. She is like a bride (Eph 5:31-32).
 - This image stands in contrast with the harlot of Revelation 17:5: “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES, AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”
 - A bride in the imagery of Revelation is clothed with white garments, which means a new start, and that all the sins have been forgiven. She is a new creation (Eph 4:24).
 - The bride is an image of the total communion of Christ and his disciples, the church victorious, all the believers who overcame persecution, temptation and who stayed faithful.

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 925).

Verse 3-4

- ❖ **“A loud voice from the throne saying.”** This is not the voice of God, as it is in verse 5-8. We cannot identify this voice. This voice comments on and stresses the fact that God will dwell among his people. He will be in their midst. The promise of Leviticus 26:11,12 and of Ezekiel 37:27 will be fulfilled. Paradise (Gen 2:8-15) will be restored (Jn 1:14; 14:23).
 - **“Now”** is emphatic.
- ❖ **“They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”** This is a **solemn declaration of the covenant**. (Compare Deuteronomy 29:10-15; Jer 11:4-5.)
 - Some manuscripts have a different reading: **“They will be his peoples.”** This reading has some preference because the covenant of the Old Testament was with the people of Israel (Ex 19:5-6). The new covenant in the blood of Christ is with all the peoples of the earth, with all who call upon the name of the LORD. Revelation 21:24 reads: **“the nations”**, which is also plural.
 - This covenant will be an everlasting covenant. **“Nothing impure will ever enter the Holy City, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful”** (Rev 21:27).
- ❖ **“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.”**
 - Our God is a very personal God. He will touch the eyes and wipe away every tear. He is the great comforter.
 - These are the tears, due to injustice and sin, persecution and oppression of the children of God (Mt 5:4).
 - See also Revelation 7:17: **“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”** (See also Isa 25:8).
- ❖ **“For the former things have passed away.”**
 - The former things refer to the world as we experience today (Rev 21:1; Isa 65:17-19). **“No longer will there be any curse”** (Rev 22:3).

Verse 5-6

- ❖ God himself declares: **“I am making everything new!”**
 - Everything means everything. Although there will be differences compared to the first order, for instance, there will be no marriage (Mt 22:23-32) and procreation will not be necessary, the new creation will be a physical and spiritual world and not only a spiritual world. And there will be no night (Rev 21:25). The apostle Paul wrote about the resurrected bodies: **“The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body”** (1 Cor 15:42-44).

- The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a creative God!
- ❖ And he assures: **“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”**
 - Although one’s circumstances can be very hard due to sin, oppression, persecution, imprisonment, famine and death: don’t doubt. The words of God are trustworthy and true.
- ❖ **“He said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.”**
 - These descriptions of God are important for the understanding and the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ (Jn 17:3).
 - The “Alpha” and the “Omega” are the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet. This means that God encompasses everything. The history of this world is in his hands and will find its fulfilment in him. He is at the same time the Beginning, the Source of the creation, and the End. Past, present and future are not successive periods in the timeline of God, as they are in the timeline of mankind. The past, present and future is – “he who was, who is and who is to come” – at the same time in his hands. That is why it is possible that the Lord God declares: “It is done.”
 - To us, who live nowadays, this promise points to the future. For those who have died in Christ, it is reality (Rev 14:13-14). And Paul wrote to the Galatians about the existence of the New Jerusalem: **“the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother”** (Gal 4:26).
- ❖ **“To him who is thirsty.”** God is calling all those who are thirsty for righteousness and the life in communion with Christ (Isa 55:1-3; Mt 5:6; Rev 7:17, Rev 22:1).
- ❖ **“I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.”** This water can be real water, as it was in paradise and it will be in the new creation, flowing out of the throne of God. But Isaiah as well as Jesus in his talk with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (Jn 4:10-14) speak of the words of God, the eternal gospel of forgiveness and peace, faith, hope and love, of eternal life, which is a life in communion with God and Christ and in the presence of God and Christ (Rev 22:1).

Verse 7-8

- ❖ **“He who overcomes”** are those who are faithful to the word of Christ (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 21).
 - “This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints” (Rev 13:10).
 - “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

- When Antipas as a martyr was sentenced to death, he was not defeated! To the contrary, he overcame this world. This is true for all martyrs, who were faithful witnesses of Christ.
- ❖ **“will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.”**
 - Paul wrote to the Romans: “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. **Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory**” (Rom 8:15-17).
- ❖ But not all will inherit the new heaven and the new earth. The list presented in verse 8 mentions all lukewarm Christians, those who still live a sinful life. It is a severe warning.
 - This warning was already announced as part of the messages to the seven churches:
 - “The one who is victorious **will not be hurt at all by the second death**” (Rev 2:11).
 - “The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. **I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life**, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels” (Rev 3:5).
 - Similar lists are found in other parts of the New Testament:
 - “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19–21).
 - “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 3:3-5).
 - See also Revelation 22:15.
 - Jesus did warn his followers: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Mt 7:21-23).

- Lukewarm Christians will receive the same judgement and punishment as the beast and the false prophet, the devil, and anyone whose name was not written in the book of life.

Application

Verse 1-2

- ❖ This is an awesome visionary experience of John. The old order with sin, death, oppression, persecution and unbelief will pass away. The separation between heaven and earth will be dissolved. The new creation will be a heavenly earth or an earthly heaven. God will dwell among his people.
- ❖ The new Jerusalem symbolizes the new community of all believers who will be united with Christ for ever and ever, like a bride and a bridegroom.
 - Every Christian wedding day is not only important for a new couple, and their family and friends, but is also a witness of the great day to come. Compare Ephesians 5:32.
- ❖ The new Jerusalem, the new community, and the new creation are a free gift, a free heritage for the people of God.
 - It is by grace!
 - It is a wonder of his creativity. There will be continuity, but also discontinuity. The bodies of men will be glorified.

Verse 3-4

- ❖ The covenant in the blood of Christ will be fulfilled:
 - “Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood of the covenant,** which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on **until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom**” (Mt 26:27-29).
- ❖ Our God is a personal God. He will touch the eyes and wipe away every tear. He is the true heavenly father for all his children.
 - Where can people find true comfort? Not in this world, the old order.
 - Death, mourning, crying and pain will belong to the past.
 - Sometimes people are worried about the life to come.
 - They ask themselves the question: will we recognize faces of other people? Perhaps of those who have done so much hurt to others? Or, will we be searching in vain those beloved ones, who didn’t come to faith in Christ?

We will probably recognize faces. Jesus Christ made himself known after his resurrection. And Matthew describes when Christ died the deceased saints appeared to the people of Jerusalem (Mt 27:51-53).

But God will wipe away every tear! At the same time, this vision is a great incentive to preach the gospel. Christians are people hoping for and expecting the world to come.

- Other people are worried about their activities: What are we going to do, when we will inherit the new heaven and the new earth? Some are even afraid of boredom.
Don't worry. We will marvel at the creativity of God and we will enjoy his presence and communion.

Verse 5-6

- ❖ There is a double reality:
 - There is the old order in which we live nowadays. It is a world full of sin, war and terror, a world of oppression and persecution, imprisonment and even sentences to death of Christians.
 - At the same time, there is the new Jerusalem already descending from heaven, the new creation of God. Because he said: it is done.

Verse 7-8

- ❖ There is the promise to all the faithful Christians who are longing for righteousness and mercy, for forgiveness and peace. They have overcome this world.
- ❖ There is a severe warning for all lukewarm and unfaithful Christians. They are at risk of deceiving themselves.

Quotes³

- ❖ "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (Martin Luther King Jr.).

³ Dream (n.d.). Popular Quotes. Retrieved September 27, 2016, from <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag?utf8=✓&id=dream>

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