

## The End isn't the End; it's a New Beginning

Revelations 21:1-7  
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If you pay attention to the news or are at all interested in doomsday prophecy you will know that the world ended nine days ago... at least it was supposed to. December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 was the last date recorded on the two thousand year old Mayan calendar. But even if you didn't know that you can probably guess that the end of the world means big business for some people.

If you were in California, and drove fifty miles into the Mojave Desert down an unmarked road you could find yourself on the doorsteps of the world's first "everything-proof" underground community. And for fifty thousand dollars a person Robert Vicino will sell you and your family a suite behind a 3000 pound nuclear bomb proof door. "When the inevitable End of the World occurs whether brought about by climate change or nuclear war" Vicino says, "you and those you love could have a place to go the next day."<sup>1</sup>

Brothers and sisters it is true that we live in a world with an inevitable end, but the good news I have for you today is that being prepared for the end doesn't involve buying shares in a bunker.

Please turn to Revelations 21, the second last chapter in the Bible and a text in which God tells us what we can expect the day after the world ends. Today our big idea is as follows: **Because God is in control the End poses no threat to Christians who are being prepared for everything to be made new.**

As we come to our text would you please join me in prayer.

[pray]

Because God is in control the "End" poses no threat to Christians...

Look with me at the first part of verse 3 and then the first part of verse 5 in our text today.

[Read Revelations 21:3a and 5a]

Wherever you look in the media today one thing is clear – everything seems out of control. Whether you are talking about global warming or the looming fiscal cliff, the future is uncertain and the impending end is fearfully before us. But residing in fear is a choice brothers and sisters; we don't have to give in to.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.popsci.com/technology/article/2010-09/can-you-save-house-end-world> accessed Dec 26th, 2012.

And the simple reason is that the largest theme in the Bible confirms that in spite of what things look like God is in control. From the very first page in Genesis to the last chapter of Revelations the Bible makes it clear that history is playing itself out according to God's plan.

Here are just a couple of the verses I came across as I was studying this week:

The first verse in the Bible, Genesis 1:1 tells us:

"In the beginning God created..." (Genesis 1:1)

It wasn't Zeus, or Isis, it wasn't Ba'al or random chance. YHWH is the one who stands in control behind creation.

Or listen to the words of the psalmist who writes:

God is our refuge and strength,  
 an ever-present help in trouble.  
 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
 and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
 though its waters roar and foam  
 and the mountains quake with their surging....  
 The LORD Almighty is with us;  
 the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46:1-3;7)

Whether the mountains that are falling into the sea are made of rock or glaciers God is our fortress. Those are words of comfort to the person who places their hope in this God. Or listen to the words of Jesus when He tells His disciples:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Anything the world can throw at us has already been overcome by Christ! Or finally consider God's own promise:

Do not fear, for I am with you;  
 do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
 I will strengthen you and help you;  
 I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

Aren't those incredible words? While fear of the unknown is big business in the world, Christians have the ultimate antidote to fear – a God who is in control. Amen?

And that is why two times in our passage today John is careful to point out that the words of the end he records for us come from the throne in Heaven.

Friends it is true that the details of the End are largely unknown, but the one thing that is clear is that there is no question about who is on the throne. There is no struggle for power in Heaven. God is in control and His control is absolute.

And **Because God is in control the end poses no threat to Christians.**

Look with me at verses one and two in our text.

[Read Revelations 21:1-2]

John, who was the youngest of Jesus' disciples is writing this close to sixty years after Jesus had been crucified and risen again.

At this point in history Jesus' message has been carried by His followers all across the known world and each of His original 11 disciples have died for their faith and John alone remains, but even he is imprisoned on the island of Patmos where he will live out his days.

And one day as John sat looking out over the sea he heard a voice behind him and turned around to see the risen Jesus standing there in all His glory. And Jesus took him in a vision into heaven and to the end of time.

And John wrote down what he saw in the book of Revelations that we are reading today. And as we get to our text near the end of the book Judgment Day has come and gone and now John describes what life for the faithful, for those who have put their trust in Jesus for salvation, will be like after the end of the world. As it turns out the end isn't the end; it's just a new beginning.

And what John sees is amazing! God who is the great Creator is also the great Re-creator. And He is preparing His people for a whole new existence.

**Because God is in control the End poses no threat to Christians who are being prepared for everything to be made new.**

Look with me at the first part of verse 5.

[Read Revelations 21:5a]

Now this is quite a statement, but let's face it I'm not all that good at embracing new things and perhaps some of you are the same. What does Jesus mean that He will make everything new? That actually sounds a bit scary! What will this mean for the world and what will this mean for us?

What I would like to do for the rest of our time this morning is look at the four things that our text tells us will be made new, because these things have been written so that the hearts of those who have put their faith in Jesus might be at rest. While the details of the end are uncertain, Christians needn't live in fear.

1.) After the end, the first and probably most dramatic aspect of change that will come about will be a freedom from sin as Jesus makes us morally new.

Let me see if you resonate with this...

The greatest frustration for Christians today is that in spite of our true identity being in Christ we still sin. Amen? Or is it just me? Paul, one of the greatest men to ever follow Christ admits that this was true for him; he says:

Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? (Romans 7:22-24)

Paul here is admitting that while his intentions are right he still ends up doing what he doesn't want to as he wrestles with his flesh which seeks to serve another master.

How about you? Have you overcome and left sin behind once for all or do you still find yourself falling prey to selfishness, pride, anger, gossip, the lusts of the flesh – and we will just leave gluttony off the list today seeing as we've just come through Christmas.

The reality is that when we become Christians a transformation begins within us, but this process is never complete while we still live. And our spirits long for complete deliverance from our innate propensity to sin.

And in the face of that kind of failure John recounts an incredible picture of a radiant bride prepared for her groom. This is what Jesus promises to make us into the day after the end of the world.

Look at the words John uses in verse 2.

[Read Revelations 21:2]

Here the Holy City, the New Jerusalem is both a place and a people. Christ's followers, the church, appear here as a bride prepared for marriage.

Notice first the verb tense that is used here as John says "I saw". No longer is there any process occurring here, the transformation is complete. And it isn't a physical transformation but a moral one as our hearts are finally made ready to commune with a holy God.

A few verses later John describes the moral beauty of the bride further when he says:

One of the seven angels... came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (Revelations 21:9-11)

In John's vision the way that God prepares His church for His Son is by giving us His brilliant glory. And once God's glory gets over and on and in us our brilliance will be like His – precious like jasper, clear as crystal – perfect.

Don't you long for that? For your nature to be truly in line with Christ and dedicated completely to God's glory? Aren't you hungry for the day when there will be nothing in you that will distort His image, but instead you will be a perfect reflection of God's glory? I do.

That is the first way that, as Jesus says in verse 5, we will be made new. God will make us morally new, prepared to be united with His Son in marriage.

**2.)** The second way we will be made new will be physical as our bodies are renewed.

When people think of Heaven most often they are confused about what we will be like there. You have all seen pictures of partially see-through people with angel wings sitting on clouds and playing harps. The thought is that because Heaven is a spiritual realm then its inhabitants will be disembodied spirits.

And this is actually quite an old idea. In the first century AD there was a break-off from the church called "The Gnostics", and they followed Greek philosophy that originated from guys like Plato which said the Spirit is good but the body is bad. And so the thought was that at the end of the age our spirits will be freed from captivity in our sinful bodies and we will go on existing as bodiless spirits.

But that isn't what the Bible teaches. Instead we are taught that in God's re-creation He won't take away the physical reality that we know, but instead He will make it new – and this includes our bodies. And we see this in verse 4 John writes:

[Read Revelations 21:4]

He will wipe the tears from our eyes, but He won't take our eyes away. We will live in a reality where our bodies will no longer know any decay, or pain or death – in other words they will be radically changed from their current states, but we will still be bodies.

In Philippians Paul unpacks this idea when he says:

Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)

After the transformation our new body will be remarkably different. It will be like Jesus' body after His resurrection. He could eat and be touched the same as

you and me, but He also wasn't subject to pain anymore nor did physical things like doors and walls pose any restriction to Him...

There are a lot of people today who feel that they got a bad deal when the bodies were being passed out. Many even in our midst have struggled with blindness or deafness or chronic pain. Some have had skin blemishes and others have suffered from deformations. And all of us have suffered from aging bodies regardless of whether you are 30 or 80. But the good news is that for those who trust in Jesus a time is coming when the bodies we know will be transformed into bodies that are no longer susceptible to these ailments.

Do you look forward to that reality? When everything negative that has been connected to the body you know now will be removed and yet all the positive will remain? This is what Jesus promises to those who put their faith in Him when He says "He is making all things new." And that is the second transformation we can expect.

**3.)** The third transformation that will occur as a result of Jesus making all things new will affect creation itself.

This is what John refers to in verse one where He says: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

If you ever read any Christian fiction you will probably have heard of the "Left Behind" series. In it the idea is painted of God whisking His followers away while everyone else gets "left behind". If you haven't read those books but still recognize the idea you may have seen the movie in the 70's.

But while God certainly could do that, what the prophets and writers of the New Testament seem to be saying is that instead of being taken away from earth the earth we know will be transformed and freed from the curse of sin and we will be staying right here.

Now this may be a new idea for some, but in Romans Paul puts it like this:

The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:21)

So where did this idea of Christians being taken away come from? Well, primarily it comes from a verse in Matthew that is taken out of context. In Matthew 24 Jesus warns people about the unpredictability of the End and says:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. **(Matthew 24:37-41)**

But Notice the parallel to the flood and who gets taken and who gets left behind!

Friends, like Noah we want to be left behind to enjoy the New Creation! Those without faith will be swept away and it will be here on earth that God re-makes Creation sinless like it was before the Fall.

In our text today we get the fullness of this picture at the end of verse 1 with some words that may seem a bit strange.

John says “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”...

Now here it is important to understand some Old Testament symbolism. In ancient times the Sea represented untamable chaos that fought against God’s control. That’s what Old Testament Israel thought of when they looked at the Sea.

We don’t have time to go into all the scriptures that support this, but imagine people with only small fishing boats watching the storms on the Mediterranean.

It is no wonder they thought of the Sea as home of the depths and sea serpents like Leviathan and even Satan Himself.<sup>2</sup>

And so in the New Creation there will be no Sea because nothing will exist outside or in rebellion to God’s will. Even creation itself will be made new – that’s the point.

So God will make us morally new – free from sin once for all. And He will make us physically new – no longer susceptible to tears or pain or mourning or death. And He will make creation new around us. The world will be free from the curse of sin.

**4.)** But there is one more thing that we will be made new that trumps them all. Finally humanity will enter a new relationship with God Himself.

In verse three we get the most incredible words from the very throne of God. It reads:

[Read Revelations 21:3]

Wait a minute, you say. Isn’t God with us now? The answer to that question is both “Yes” and “not yet”. First we must affirm that Jesus promises He will never

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<sup>2</sup> See Isaiah 27:1 and Job 41:1-34

leave us or forsake us<sup>3</sup> and even that His very Spirit lives within us now<sup>4</sup>, and yet we also know that in our current state we are separated from Him.

In Second Corinthians Paul writes:

As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:6-7)

And in another place he wrote:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain... Yet what shall I choose?... I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:21-24)

So we currently live separated from the full extent of God's presence. While we have some vision we only see Him dimly as through a glass. But one day when He makes everything new He will make new our relationship and we will see Him face to face. And that is the fourth and ultimate newness that our text speaks of.

In the end when God finally makes all things new, this will include us being morally re-created as pure as crystal, we will have new bodies that will perfectly reflect His glory, all creation will be free from the curse of sin, and finally God Himself will come and dwell with us in person.

At this kind of promise do not our hearts cry out "Come Lord Jesus"! Do not we long to be left behind while sin is swept away, while everything that separates us from intimacy with Christ is eliminated? Amen and Amen.

But one thing Christians don't have to do in the face of the inevitable end is fear. **Because God is in control the End poses no threat to Christians who are being prepared for everything to be made new....**

It turns out, anthropologists tell us, that the Mayans whose calendar ended last week never thought this meant the end of the world. Instead, just like our calendar rolls over the day after tomorrow and becomes January 1<sup>st</sup> the Mayans calendar just begins again as well.

And that is an interesting parallel of what Revelations tells us will happen in the end of the age. The end isn't the end; it's just a new beginning.

And Christians have the assurance from God Himself that the day after the world ends we, along with nature around us, will be re-created and made new. Friends, don't be tempted to prepare for this end by buying shares in a bunker, instead prepare your heart to be made new by getting right with the Great Re-Creator. [Let's pray]

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:11