

Theme: God is making everything new!

In the name of Jesus Christ, who freely gives living water from the spring of the water of life. The word of God for our consideration today comes from Revelation 21:1-6 as previously read.

Two different people can look at a world that is full of death and mourning and crying and pain, and they come to one of two conclusions, both of which leave them feeling forever broken. Either, 1) God is almighty but he's not good. Or 2) God is good but he's not almighty.

A woman who has endured terrible atrocities at the hand of a man who is supposed to love her and protect her can't help but feel that maybe God is almighty, but he's certainly not good. After all, she reasons, "He sat up there on his throne watching me suffer and he didn't do a thing about it. He had the power to stop what was happening. He had the power to help me and he didn't." So she's angry, to the point she can't let it go. "So what if he's powerful! He must not be good." And the brokenness of her world reminds her constantly of a God she thinks must be broken too. Do you find yourself carrying this kind of anger?

A different man comes to the totally opposite, and yet similar conclusion, because both conclusions leave them feeling broken. This man has grown up knowing all his life that God is good, and he's seen that goodness. But now he's had the person he loves the most in this world torn away from him by death and he can't help but feel like even God wasn't powerful enough to stop it, to hold back death, to deliver on his promises and answer his prayers. Maybe God is good, but even he can't do anything about the brokenness of this world, with all its death and mourning and crying and pain, his real and personal pain. And if God can't do anything about that, then what good is he? What's the use in bothering with him if he's good but not powerful enough to do anything about it? So he despairs of God. Do you fight with this kind of despair?

Two different people, with two very real and heartbreaking conclusions, both brought on by the real brokenness of this world. Today, we have to ask ourselves, "Is one or are both of those conclusions right?" Is that all there is? Is this world hopelessly broken? Is God somehow broken? Or is there something more that we fail to see, a different answer that's hidden from our eyes underneath all the pain and wreckage.

Today, our text from Revelation 21, the second last chapter of the Bible, gives us that other answer, God's final answer, the answer for how God deals with the wreckage of sin and brokenness of this world. It shows us how God, in his grace and with his almighty power, brings this broken world back to everything he wanted it to be. But he doesn't do it the way we'd expect, or the way we'd like. This answer calls us to walk by faith, and not by sight. It calls for patience. It calls for endurance. It calls us to set aside our anger and to trust in the promise of him who sits on the throne and says, **"I am making everything new."** (Rev. 21:5)

That's maybe the hardest part. Will you take him at his word and believe, that even now, no matter how deplorable and painful it feels to live our lives in this broken world, that he is making everything new. That even now, in the midst of whatever real and terrible pains

you're living with, he is fashioning you into a new creation and preparing for you a new heaven and new earth.

That's the glorious vision of our final triumph that Jesus gives to the Apostle John in Revelation 21, to encourage his people to remain faithful. **"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."** This world is not all there is, and its pain will not last forever. It will be wiped clean in preparation for it to be made totally new. Peter tells us that in this same thing in his second letter. **"The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done it will be laid bare... 13 but in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:10,13).**

His promise that Peter mentions there is a promise that God made through the prophet Isaiah 700 years before. From Isaiah 65, **"See I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, no will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people, and the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard no more." (Isaiah 65:17-19).**

Don't think God forgot that promise over the centuries? No those are exactly the same things John's vision mentions—a new heaven and a new earth. John saw, **"the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."** And next we John hears the voice from the throne saying, **"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."**

God is not ignorant of the shape this world is in. He knows exactly what needs to be done and will do exactly what he promised so long ago. He gives John a glimpse into the future to assure us of what we are waiting for and hoping for at the end. And then we must remember those words we find so nearly impossible to trust. **"I am making everything new!"**

Well, how can we know that he is busy doing all of that? Sure he says, **"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."** (Revelation 21:5). But what assurances do we have, especially when the appearance of things might lead us to believe that he's not doing anything, or that he's just up there napping while we're down here suffering. What's the guarantee that it's true?

The guarantee comes in looking at what he has already done, the work he has already accomplished. There's a brilliant scene, from Mel Gibson's movie the Passion of the Christ, that put the words of God's promise to make things new into the context of Jesus' work in a way I'll never forget. The scene shows Jesus carrying his cross on the way to Calvary. He's been

condemned to crucifixion. He's been beaten to within an inch of his life. The crown of thorns pierces his head, and he stumbles under the weight of the cross. The soldiers seize another opportunity to pile on blows and insults. It's the most excruciating suffering anybody could possibly imagine.

His mother, watching from the road, reaches out for him, and Jesus turns to her, and utters these words, "See, I make all things new!" and then he shoulders the weight of the cross and presses onward to be crucified. Now, there's no gospel account that records Jesus speaking those words in that moment, but the Scriptures proclaim the certainty of truth that in that moment as he endured the cross, he was making all things new and holy. Ephesians 5 tells us, **"Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** **"And if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old is gone."** (2 Cor. 5:17)

That's you, and every believer in Christ, your loved one who have already died in Christ. You're the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for his husband. You can be sure that God will deliver the final perfection he has promised because Christ has already lived, and suffered, and died and finished the work to make it new. He endured the worst of the crying and mourning pain and death that this world can offer, and at the end of it all he cried, "It is finished." Now the voice from the throne in John's vision reminds of the same. Jesus says, "It is done." These words, that are trustworthy and true, are done. We must only wait to see the end at last.

So how do we wait? And how do remain prepared and hopeful? And how do we cope with the sensation that the wait is so long and painful? First, we know what it is we hope for, the New Jerusalem, the home of righteousness. Second, we have to acknowledge that God is carrying out his plan according to plan. **"Creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God...For in this hope we were saved. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."** (Romans 8:21-25)

And third, we start living now like the new creation God is transforming us to be. Peter says, **"So, dear friends, since you are looking forward to [the new heaven and the new earth], make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him."** (2 Peter 3:14). Amen.

Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. Thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.