

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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All Things New

Revelation 21:1-8

Key verse: “The one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new!’” (Revelation 21:5).

For me, one of the most powerful scenes in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, takes place toward the end. Jesus, bloodied and mangled almost beyond recognition, is struggling under the weight of the cross that he is carrying to Calvary. Weakened by the brutal torture of his captors, He stumbles and almost falls. Regaining his footing, Jesus suddenly is looking into the face of his mother, Mary.

Managing a weak smile, Jesus says something surprising. Taking these words from Revelation 21:5, Jesus whispers to his mother: “See, Mother, I am making all things new!” These words are not spoken by Jesus in the Gospel accounts, of course. They are placed here by the film makers. But they are powerful nonetheless.

For by His death and resurrection, Jesus set in motion a divine process through which all things are being made new. Now, those who trust Jesus as Savior and Lord experience new life in Him. History, the Bible tells us, is headed toward a time when all things will be made new—new heaven, new earth, new humanity, new creation! Revelation 21 gives us a glimpse at what that new creation in Christ will be like.

“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” (v. 1). In this new creation, John notes, there will be no more sea. John wrote Revelation from a Roman prison colony on the island of Patmos. In effect, the ocean waters surrounding that desolate island had become John’s prison bars. John saw that in God’s new creation the things that limited him or held him prisoner would be “no more.”

“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (v. 2). It is significant that John sees the holy city “coming down out of heaven.” N.T. Wright says of this verse: “We notice right away how drastically different this is from all those would-be Christian scenarios in which the end of the story is the Christian going off to heaven as a soul, naked and unadorned, to meet its maker in fear and trembling....It is not we who go to heaven, it is heaven that comes to earth” (from *Surprised by Hope*, p. 104).

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them’ (v. 3). For the believer, there is an ongoing desire to get closer to God. In this life, we can grow closer to God, but there is a limit to that closeness. But in the new creation, God will make his home among us!

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (v. 4). Imagine! No more broken relationships, no more fractured families, no more late night calls from the hospital, no more following hearses to gravesides. In God’s new creation, the old order—always subject to sin, sickness, and death—will have “passed away.” The present creation will not be annihilated, but made new, the completion of God’s original plan.

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new’” (v. 5). Remember these words from *The Passion of the Christ*? Could it be that Jesus carried the cross to Calvary with this very goal in mind? “See, Mother, I am making all things new.”

“Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children’” (vv. 6-7). John speaks of the water of life again in the next chapter: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2).

N.T. Wright has some intriguing ideas about these verses: “The living God will dwell with and among his people, filling the city with his life and love and pouring out grace and healing in the river of life that flows from the city out to the nations. There is a sign here of the future project that awaits the redeemed in God’s eventual new world. So far from sitting on clouds playing harps, as people often imagine, the redeemed people of God in the new world will be the agents of his love going out in new ways, to accomplish new creative tasks, to celebrate and extend the glory of his love” (*Surprised by Hope*, p. 105).

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (v. 8). Verse 8 is a startling reminder that not everyone will live with God in this new and beautiful eternal city. Repentance and faith are necessary.

But if you think about it, how could it not be so? Heaven would not be heaven if God allowed those who would cause crying, mourning, pain, and death to be there.

Thank God that salvation is still available to all who will receive Christ, including those who are guilty of the sins listed in verse 8. His blood can “make the foulest clean” and fit them for heaven.

Thanks be to God!

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