

This morning we will be hearing and paying close attention to what God says to us in Revelation 21:5-8. In these verses and in much of the book of Revelation, John, is describing for us what he saw when God opened a door so that he could see into heaven. God enabled John to see into the throne room of heaven and from there he was given to see in symbolic form how God was going to fulfill his purposes on earth for the salvation of his people and the defeat and destruction of his enemies. We are near the end of the book and in the last couple of chapters John is given to see what it will be like in the final state when God brings his plan for this world to the goal to which he has been heading all along. Through John's eyes we are given a glimpse of what it will be like for the followers of Jesus when God brings the new heaven and new earth into being. We are also given to see what will happen to those who have refused to heed the call to follow Jesus.

Last time we ended by thinking about the process by which believers grow in their longing to experience the blessings of the new creation. We saw that we tend to be too attached to this life and that our longing for the next life is not strong enough. Part of our growth as Christians is to gradually shift that balance so that we love this life with more moderation and increase in our longing enjoy perfect fellowship with God in the new creation. An important part of the way that we nurture our longing to experience the fullness of life with God in the new creation is to meditate on what the Bible tells us about glory of the new creation. And that is really the application for this sermon. We just want to think about – to dwell on – to ponder - what God is telling us about the wonderful future that God has in store for his people so that our desire to be there will grow.

So in verse 5, we read, "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" The key attraction of our glorious future is God himself. God is at the center of the Christian life and our relationship with God is what our salvation is all about. When we are perfected we will love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. That is what we will be doing in the new creation. So an important part of growing in our longing for the new creation is growing in our love for God. And we grow in our love for God by thinking about him as he tells us about himself in the Bible. We also learn about God in the creation and through going through the ups and downs of life with him. But right now we are focusing on the Bible.

Verse 5 refers to God as "he who was seated on the throne." The book of Revelation often speaks of God on his throne. Back in chapter 4 John had written, "At once I was in the Spirit, and behold a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ... From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God."

We don't have time to unpack all of that. But we can see that God is sitting on the throne in heaven and that he is glorious. He is awesome in the fullest sense of that word. He fills us with awe. That is hard to put into words. The Psalms try to do that. So we read for instance in Psalm 97:2-5, "Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his

adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.”

So those few words in our text – “he who was seated on the throne” – they convey something of the greatness of God. This is not just some throne on earth. This is the throne in heaven and the one who is seated on it is the king over all the earth. This is the one before whom the earth trembles. This is the one before whom the mountains melt like wax.

And he speaks. He says, “Behold, I am making all things new” These words like most words in the book of Revelation have a history. Very often in the Bible when God speaks, he is reaffirming and elaborating on words that he has spoken earlier. Back in Isaiah 43:18-19 God had said to Israel, “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old, Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” In the context in Isaiah, God had been speaking about how he had delivered his people from Egypt in their past, and then he speaks of the future when he was going to bring a new deliverance. That deliverance is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the application of what Jesus has done in the lives of God’s people. Paul is drawing on this same verse in Isaiah when he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.”

In our text God is referencing the new thing he has prophesied in Isaiah and the initial fulfillment of that new thing in Christ and in the salvation of his people. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the beginning of the new creation – it was the firstfruits of the general resurrection. When people believe in Jesus they receive eternal life – the life of the coming age. They are part of the new creation. That is why Paul says, “The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” And now in Revelation 21:5 God speaks from his throne in heaven and says “Behold, I make all things new.”

There are a number of references to things passing away to make way for the new in this context. 21:1 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away....” In verse 4 we are told that “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” The making of all things new is closely related to other things passing away.

At the beginning God made a beautiful world including human beings. God and man lived together in fellowship and it was paradise. Then sin entered the picture and the rest of the Bible is how God unfolded his plan to get rid of sin and save his creation including his people. The “all things new” is the result. Jesus is at the heart of it. Saving his people from their sins is at the heart of it. The Christian life is about being forgiven, but also being renewed in holiness. And the newness that God is talking about here is the ultimate goal of a renewed creation including a renewed people which will be perfectly renewed so that all sin is gone and God and his people delight in one another and God is glorified and his people are satisfied in him.

“All things new” means whatever struggles you now face in your relationship with God are gone. “All things new” means perfectly renewed – all that is sinful has passed away and the new has fully come. The way that God speaks of this in the verse that I quoted from Isaiah emphasizes the great contrast between what God has done in the past and what he is going to do in the future. “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old, Behold, I am doing a new thing;”

God had done great things in Israel’s past. And there is a great emphasis in the OT on remembering the great things that God had done in Israel’s past. But here God is telling Israel not to remember the past. And his point is that the new thing that God is going to do will be so great and glorious that they will no longer think of what God had done in the past. This is not an absolute thing, but it is a comparative thing. God expresses this in Isaiah 65:17 when he first begins to speak explicitly of a new heavens and a new earth. There it says, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

This is the context in which we must understand God when he says in our text, “Behold, I am making all things new.” The new is going to be so glorious that it will overwhelm thoughts of the past – not absolutely, but comparatively. We will be present in the moment enjoying the richness of perfect fellowship with God and life in the new creation.

That is something for us to dwell on. We experience many blessings as Christians. We are reconciled with God. We are his adopted children. Jesus is our shepherd and our saviour and our Lord. We experience the beginning of the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us. But when God completes his plan of making all things new – the blessedness we experience then will be so much greater than anything we have known on this earth that our whole attention will be on the joys of the moment. We need to think of that. The best things that we experience in this life – the most profound joys and satisfactions of our lives as believers are just a taste – a foretaste of what we will experience when God makes all things new.

And we can count on that. In our text God goes on to say, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” This refers to the whole book of Revelation and by extension to the rest of the Bible, but given the context in which we find these words, what God says here has a special application to what he is saying right here in this passage about the new heaven and new earth.

So God says, “write this down.” God wants these promises concerning the glorious future for his people to be preserved by writing them down. That means that they are not just for John’s encouragement, but for the encouragement of the church in John’s time and for the church for the rest of time. The words “write this down” means that God wanted these promises to be preserved for you and for me. He knew how important it would be for you and I to read and dwell on these promises of the future that God is working towards for his people and for his glory.

And he stresses the truthfulness of these words. "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." This is a huge part of the Bible's claim. God's people have always been surrounded by people who do not believe in the God of the Bible and his message to the human race in the Bible. The people of God have always lived surrounded by people who worshipped other gods and who were deniers of God. So the truth of God's word has always been contested and it has often been costly for the people of God to believe and confess the truthfulness of the word of God. But here in this passage, just to focus on this context, this text is making the claim that these wonderful promises concerning the glorious future for God's people are trustworthy and true.

How can we be so sure? We must be sure of the truthfulness of these words if they are going to be of any encouragement to us. The text claims to be trustworthy and true. But many books make truth claims and in our day it has come to the point where many of the philosophers of the world are claiming that no one can know absolute truth about anything. If this passage is going to be of any real encouragement to us, how can we know that it is trustworthy and true.

Well, we begin with the claim. This text describes God speaking from his throne in heaven saying, "Behold I am making all things new" and "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." The claim is not supported by any philosophical arguments. The text claims to be a word from God asserting the truthfulness of these promises. How can we be confident that these words are trustworthy and true?

There is something mysterious about this. There is an authority in the word of God itself that convinces some people of their truthfulness. God does not convince us of the truthfulness of his word by arguments, but by the power of the word itself. In John 10:4 Jesus says that his "sheep follow him, for they know his voice." The followers of Jesus perceive that Jesus is speaking to them by recognizing that he is speaking to them in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit has a role in this as well. In 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul writes, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God."

So we know that these words are trustworthy and true because we perceive God speaking to us by them. There are arguments supporting this claim and they have their place, but mostly the Bible does not give arguments but simply addresses us as the word of God and through the power of the word itself and the working of the Holy Spirit we are convinced that the word are trustworthy and true. And in connection with his promises of a glorious future beyond this life God here in our text underscores this for us. "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." This is not a fairy tale. This is not the product of John's overactive imagination. God is assuring us that these words are absolutely true. God is making all things new.

And he goes on to say, "It is done!" God spoke these words near the end of the first century AD. That was a long time ago. And we are not yet living in the new heaven and new earth. How can God say, "It is done!" He can say it because he is God. Because he is God he can speak of the future as if it were already here. He does

that quite often in Scripture. It is one of his ways of emphasizing the certainty of his promises. The future that God has planned is as certain as the past. Think of that! The past is there. It has happened. It cannot unhappen. There is something very solid about the past. That's how solid the future God has planned and promised is. God's promised future is so solid that that it is no less certain than what has already happened. And sometime God makes that point by speaking about the future as if it were already done.

So this making of all things new – this plan of God to renew his people and his creation so that the result will be a newness so awesome that the past will be almost forgotten – that is more certain than any other certainty we may have. Apart from God's promises, there is really nothing future that we can be certain about. We cannot be sure that the universe will continue to exist in its present form for another moment. We cannot be certain of living for another moment on this earth. But our future with God in the glorious new creation is absolutely certain, so certain that God can now already say – “It is done.”

And of course, it is this absolute certainty that can and should help us deal with the struggles and the uncertainties of life between now and the new creation. It is this certainty that enabled the martyrs to lay down their lives rather than deny Christ and that still enables them to do so through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our hope for the glorious future that God promises us is very different from the meaning of the word hope in our everyday speech. When we say that we hope for a sunny day on Saturday – that expresses a level of uncertainty. We hope but we are not sure. The biblical hope is not like that because it is more certain than the sun coming up tomorrow.

So God says concerning the future – “It is done!” He goes on to give us the reason that he can say that. He says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” The Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. The Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. God is saying that he is the beginning and that he is the end. God is eternal. He has always existed and he will always exist. He brought the creation into being. He is responsible for the beginning. And he will bring it to its conclusion – to its goal. And in order to bring it to the goal that he has ordained, he is in control of everything between the beginning and the end.

This is a great comfort to us in the light of the temporary nature of this life. The fact that our time on earth is so short is incredibly sad. Psalm 103 expresses this in verses 15-16, “As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone and its place knows it no more.” One the one hand our lives are so meaningful – so significant – and yet as far as this earthly existence is concerned, a generation after we have died, and it is as if we have never lived. The great comfort here for God's people is this truth that God is the Alpha and the Omega. Psalm 103:17 says, “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him”

God is there at the beginning. He is there throughout history. And he will be there at the transition from this age to the next and into all of eternity to come. And it because of that that our lives now matter forever. Our

relationship with God is something that will last forever. The love of God in Christ began in eternity past, secured our salvation during our earthly life, and will rest upon us for eternity to come. The fact that God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, and the end gives us eternal significance. We have a beginning, but we will have no end and the reason that that is so is that God is eternal. And when we know that our eternal future is the life of the new creation in the loving presence of God we can live in the here and now with a sense of anticipation knowing that we have a future before us that is beyond what we can imagine.

Next God tells us how life with him in the new creation will satisfy all our legitimate thirsts and longings. "To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment." As human beings made in the image of God we are created to have desires and longings that can be fully satisfied only in God and in life with God and other people. Because of sin those longings become disordered so that we often long for the wrong things or we thirst for the right things in an excessive way. When we are saved God begins to renew us so that gradually our desires and longings become ordered according to God's priorities and when we end up in the new creation God promises that our thirsts will be satisfied from the spring of the water of life.

Think of all the legitimate things that we long for as believers. Think of how those longings are satisfied to some degree in our worship and our service and in our life with God and his people. We know something of joy in the worship of God. We know something of peace in the love of God. We know something of living in a way that is pleasing to God. We know something of the joy of loving relationships with others. But all of that is partial in this life. We are never completely satisfied. We are never completely full. But in the new creation we will drink from the water of life freely and so we will experience fullness of life so that we will know a fulfillment and a satisfaction in life that we only get hints of in this life.

Verse 7 adds a condition and a further promise. "The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son." That is a description of our relationship with God. God here is speaking about adoption. We are now sons of God. We will know that in perfection in the new creation. WE will experience in perfection the love of God as our Father. Not everyone in this life experiences the kind of love a father should have for his children, but many of us have experienced it in a healthy way though imperfectly and we all can imagine what perfect fatherly love would be like. We will be loved. We will be delighted in. We will be valued. We will be cared for. We will be nurtured.

But there is a condition mentioned here. This glorious future that these verses describe are for those who conquer. That is a big theme in the book of Revelation. The Christian life is a battle. The Christian life is lived against opposition. The Christian life requires endurance in the face of persecution and temptation and weariness. Those who persevere do so by the grace of God, but we must persevere.

And there is a warning for those who do not. "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murders, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolators and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with

fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” The book of Revelation will not let us forget the dark side even in a context with a beautiful description of the blessings of the new creation.

The glories of the new creation are a powerful motivator and encouragement to us in the struggles of the Christian life. It is good to dwell on whatever details the Bible give us. But the Bible consistently warns us that the way to the new creation is the way of endurance and perseverance. The wonderful promises are there to help us to continue on the narrow way that leads to life and the warnings are there to help us avoid the wide way that leads to destruction. And one of the refrains of the book of Revelation is that “the one who conquers will have this heritage.”