
A Look at the New Heaven and Earth

SCOTT HOEZEE

Whether inside of the Church or outside of it, lots of people have pop[ular] conceptions on what we usually call *heaven*. Cartoons often picture people standing around on clouds and white robes with wings sprouting from their backs, and perhaps waiting at the pearly gates; or perhaps we think of heaven as merely being “up there” in some realm above the clouds; and certainly, most people picture heaven as being completely different from anything we have ever experienced here on earth. But is this the biblical vision? Although very symbolic, the end of the book of Revelation gives us pause on how we picture what it will mean to go to heaven after we die. Today on *Groundwork*, let’s dig into the second to the last chapter in the whole Bible. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the fifth of six programs...five of six...on the Bible’s last book, the book of Revelation. So far in this series, the first four programs, we have looked at the opening of the book, at the letters or sermons to the seven churches, at some of the initial visions John saw in Revelation 4 and 5, as well as depictions of God’s history-long battle with the forces of evil. So, now the last two episodes in this *Groundwork* series are going to be on Revelation 21 and 22; and today we are in 21.

DARRELL DELANEY

These are the passages that when people think of what comfort means, and how they are encouraged to see what we are looking forward to, these are some of the chapters they come to. We preach a lot of these chapters in funerals and places where people need encouragement; and so, I am looking forward to us being able to dig into it today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we said at the outset, a lot of people have different ideas on what we often are wispily referred to as heaven; that going to heaven means going up somewhere...being whisked up from the earth...getting beamed up, like in *Star Trek*, to someplace different; and realm of cloud and vapor and golden streets and stuff that looks like nothing we have ever seen before; but right off the bat in Revelation 21 we are actually told something quite different. So, listen.

John writes:

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. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud 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. ⁴He 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.” ⁵He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, so beautiful, this passage. I looked at what you were saying here, Scott; and the new heaven and new earth...the first thing is that it says it comes *down*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It doesn't say we are going up anywhere!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; quite the opposite.

DARRELL DELANEY

The idea that this new heaven and new earth is coming *down* is a beautiful picture that really changes what our perception was of what Hollywood and all these other places give us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ultimately, we could say we are not going anywhere. God is on the move, and God is coming down here. It is a new heaven and a new earth; and Darrell, that, of course, flashes right back to the very first words of the Bible in Genesis 1, that God...in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; and as we have noted on *Groundwork* before, that phrase "heavens and earth" is a literary device called a *merismus* in which a writer takes two extremes...two opposite ends of something...and uses it to stand for everything in between. So, when you talk about God created the heavens and the earth, that is like saying God created everything A to Z, and now we are being told God is going to *renew* the heavens and the earth. So, God is *renewing* everything from A to Z.

DARRELL DELANEY

What I am hearing you say, Scott, is that God is hitting the refresh button. He is revitalizing. He is not creating something...scraping the old heaven and earth and doing something different...no; he is actually going to redeem and restore the heaven and earth that we currently have.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; as a friend of mine pointed out a while back, God does not say here, as John writes it down: Behold, I am making all *new* things. No; he says I am making all things new; and there is a huge difference. God is making new what has existed since the dawn of creation. So, God isn't creating things that never existed before. He is shining up the things that he created all the way back in Genesis in the first place. God is not going to create weird creatures that you see in science fiction movies that have never existed. He is going to remake bobcats and horses and goats and daisies and mountains and rivers and apple trees and vineyards. I (God) am making all *those* things new.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that, Scott, because not only is he making bobcats and animals and these things new, he is making people and relationships new; and the way that we relate to one another new. The brokenness that we had when we were hurting each other and sinning against each other will be gone. So, we will have a new...a renewed way of interacting with each other; and of course, we will see God face to face, which we have never seen before. So, these things are actually the encouragement that we look forward to because he is making them new.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and the dwelling of God will be with us, John tells us here in Revelation 21: I am making all things new. A longtime teacher at Calvin Theological Seminary years ago in the Twentieth Century was a man named Anthony Hoekema; and he wrote an influential book many years ago called *The Bible and the Future*; and Dr. Hoekema made an interesting observation, and that is that if we don't picture heaven...if we don't picture the new creation as something that includes bobcats and goats and daisies, that would almost be like conceding defeat to the devil, because the devil's goal from the get-go, Darrell, was to ruin creation...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To pollute it...sully it. Creature extinction makes the devil happy. So, Dr. Hoekema pointed out the fact that the vision of the Bible is for all of those things to survive, and being part of the new creation; that is a real sign of the victory Jesus worked, that the good creation was not ruined by the devil; it was not corrupted finally; it was preserved.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is a beautiful thing. Also, I was looking at that, too, where it says: Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people. He will dwell with them; they will be his people and God himself will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. No more death, mourning or crying. So, the fact that he will be their God and they will be his people, that theme, that is what he has been working for the whole time. Ever since Genesis 3, he has been trying to get us back to that, where he would be our God and we would be his people; and now, in this passage, we see he is wiping away every tear, he is getting rid of mourning, getting rid of sickness, getting rid of death; and these are the things that we remind people of at funerals and things where there is a lot of brokenness, that he is coming to restore those things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is such a famous image from the book of Revelation, that he will wipe every tear from every eye. You almost wonder when God's dwelling comes down to us, will we still have tears in our eyes? Maybe we will; a remembrance of the sad things that were, or wonder at the new things that are; but if there are any tears left in our eyes when the dwelling of God comes down, God is going to dry them and say there will not be any need for that anymore; unless there are tears of joy maybe...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Maybe we will have tears of joy; I can only imagine, Darrell, that John had tears of joy when he saw these visions here in Revelation, but in terms of the normal way we shed tears, because of sorrow and sadness, no; no more. There won't be any cause for that.

So, this is a breathtaking vision here in Revelation 21, but as they say on TV commercials: Wait! There's more. And there is, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are going to move on here in this fifth episode of our six-part series on Revelation. We are going to move on here in Revelation 21. Let's just real quick loop back to a detail

from verse 1 that we didn't mention a minute ago, but it is this line, where John writes: 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.

Now, for all of us who like swimming and snorkeling and scuba diving or going on whale watches, for all of us who love dolphins and sea turtles and otters, the line that there will be no more sea at first sounds like a real bummer, like, oh; so, God is going to make all things new, but apparently not in the oceans because, well, there is no more sea; but I think we have to understand this as the symbol it is. The sea, for ancient Israel, and partly for them, they were kind of a land-locked people, you know. Israel was never a sea-going nation, you know. There were ancient cultures that set to sea, but the Israelites were very afraid of the sea; and biblically, the sea was kind of shorthand for chaos...for sin...for the opposite of God's glory.

DARRELL DELANEY

For death and the grave.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you could drown in the sea, right? The sea was threatening. So, symbolically John is saying here, the things that threaten human flourishing won't exist. So, will there be right whales and humpback whales and sea otters in the new creation? I am sure there will be, but the sea itself as a threat to human life as a source of drowning and death will be no more.

Similarly...and we are going to hear in just a minute...we are going to hear that there is no more night. Well, what if you like looking at stars. What if you love looking at the images of the Webb telescope that have been coming out in recent times? Will we never see another star? The sun will never set? Well again, not literally. I am sure that if we want to stargaze and look at the planets, we will be able to; but the night was also a fearful thing in the ancient world. They didn't have streetlights, right? The night was when things go bump in the night.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we've got to understand that symbolically.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, that passage actually picks up here. In verse 22 it says: I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of the God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. (Like you just said.) ²⁶The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have noted before, Darrell, here on *Groundwork*, scholars like N. T. Wright have pointed out in more recent times that if you read Genesis the right way in the description of the Garden of Eden, it is actually described as a temple. This is where God lived with Adam and Eve, right? That is what a temple is, where God and people meet; and it seems like in the original creation, Eden was one big temple, and then we sinned and we got exiled. Ever since that happened, ever since Adam and Eve were forced to dwell east of Eden, God has been trying to bring the temple back.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right; so, not only does he give Moses the tabernacle descriptions so that they can build the tabernacle...a tent where God could meet them...but then Solomon gets to build a temple where God's presence is supposed to dwell with the ark of the covenant. Then Paul, in the New Testament, says that we as people are

the physical temple in which the Spirit dwells. So, this whole temple image is never going away; and even in this book of Revelation, we see that now God is making everything the temple...the whole city...the lamp, the light, everything...is going to be part of the temple, where God will dwell with the people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and the Gospel of John, of course, is the...I mean, we get this all over...but the Gospel of John is also the one where Jesus is the final temple; and then, right, because we now live in Jesus, we are all living temples, as you just said. So, what God is going to do in the end is restore the creation to what it was in Eden; a temple; and everything will be the temple, right? I mean, so, the temple is where you go to be with God, and in the new creation, you won't be able to get away from God. God will be all in all; and so, everything will be the temple. You won't have to say: Let's go to church to worship God, we worship God everywhere because God will be all in all; and that is mindboggling, that the glory of God itself will be the light; but there is something else really, really interesting mentioned twice here, Darrell, and it has to do with kings and the glory of nations.

DARRELL DELANEY

I picked that back up again in verse 24. It says: The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

So, that word *splendor*...and what are the king of the earth bringing into it that is necessarily defined as splendor? This is a very interesting part of this passage.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, in verse 26: The glory and honor of the nations will be brought in.

I think what it means, Darrell, is that we just said in the previous part of the program, God will make, not all new things, he will make all things new. So, God is going to redeem what he made, but it looks like God really likes stuff we made, because when God created us in God's image, one of the things God endowed us human beings with was a spark of his own creativity...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so apparently cultural artifacts...maybe brilliant music, like written by Mozart and Bach, or John Rutter. Maybe silk paintings from the Asian world; or sculptures by Michelangelo; or Aztec and Mayan pyramids; Japanese pagodas; textiles and masks from Africa. The artifacts of human culture are going to get redeemed, and they will have a place. So, the stuff that are in art museums today aren't going to get wiped out by God, they will become part of the new creation, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am so glad that God is not going to scrap all the creative things that we have done. What he is going to do is, he is going to scrap the sinful nature out of them...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, then we will be able to enjoy those; and I am so glad I will be able to hear some hip-hop. It will be really great to hear different kinds of artistic expressions that God has given, and it will be redeemed—it will be without sin—it will be beautiful, and we will be able to celebrate it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, we are seeing that what we often wispily refer to as heaven as being something completely unlike this earth, quite the opposite. In terms of the creation, it is going to look a lot like this earth; and even in

terms of the cultural artifacts and some of the beautiful things that people have made across the centuries and the millennia, that too will look very familiar to us. So, rich and startling and stunning, but as we conclude the program in a minute, let's wonder why pondering this is vital for us right now today. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As we wrap up this program on Revelation 21, the penultimate or second-to-the-last chapter of the whole Bible, let's go to a similar passage, Darrell, in 2 Peter 3, where we read: ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, even though Peter is kind of warning them here that the day of the Lord is going to come like a thief and there is going to be fire, I don't think Christians should be intimidated or afraid by this, because this word is designed to help them to persevere their faith in the middle of, like I said, persecution is happening; things are happening where they are making it harder and harder for Christians, and Christians are being put to death; and so, Peter is trying to encourage them, just like John is trying to encourage them, that they need to live a certain way because they know a certain thing. So, as we get the revelation, we are challenged by God to live a certain way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is an example of how our vision of the future, if you will, Peter is saying that is going to have a huge influence on how you act in the present...today. Now, we should note, Peter does say here that everything is going to melt, and you know... So, it sounds like the opposite of what we have been saying, that God is going to renew the creation. But he is saying: Yes, that is how it is going to happen. He is going to cleanse it, then remake it. So, Peter is still saying we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth; no conflict here with Revelation 21 and what John saw. As Eugene Peterson said: The new creation will be landscaped with righteousness...I love that...landscaped with righteousness. But the main thing is...so, Peter says: So, you are looking forward to that; how ought you to live now? What kind of people ought you to be? Well, live godly lives now, because what you do now is also going to be preserved.

DARRELL DELANEY

They always say hindsight is 20/20, Scott. When you look back at something, you realize that you might have responded differently knowing what you know now; and I think that as Jesus has given us believers the revelation now, we have a certain way that we can choose to live that brings honor and glory to God's name. As citizens of the kingdom today, we have a certain way that we can live that would honor him, because we know the end; we know what is coming; we know that Christ is victorious; we know that we will end up with God; and we know that Satan will be defeated; and because we know that, we get to live with hope now; we get to live with the expectation now; we get to live as kingdom citizens today. So, knowing that actually changes how we live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In recent years, some of my seminary students who are in their twenties, so now a lot younger than me, they taught me a new phrase that has been going around: YOLO! YOLO! I said: What is YOLO? You only live once: YOLO. Well, Peter is saying: No, you don't. You don't only live once. If you only lived once, sure, lie,

cheat, steal, do whatever you can to feather your nest now; go for the brass ring; go for the gusto; live it up, because tomorrow you die. Peter is saying: No, we have a different expectation. You don't only live once. This whole creation is going to have a future, so act like you know that. Act like you know that; live consistently with God's ways now, because our story doesn't end when we die. We all have a future. Our deeds of kindness and love and mercy now will also endure. So, we live like we believe this isn't the only life.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we only live twice, is that what you are saying?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is not you only live once, it is you live twice. So, if we live twice in that afterlife, in the new heaven and new earth living that we will have with God matters; then that means that what we do here for Christ on earth matters. The Bible says only what you do for Christ will last, so those are the actual things that we want to do; not to earn our salvation or to prove our worth, but to do it out of gratitude for the finished work of Christ; the Lamb who was slain for us and for our salvation; out of gratitude for what he has done, we live as kingdom citizens, being ministers of reconciliation and agents of transformation in this broken world here today, and he gives us the strength to do that; and to endure, even when there are hard times, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; everything good and moral and lovely and beautiful that we do now are going to become like the musical notes in the grand symphony that just will be God's new heavens and the new earth; but I think we need to notice something important here, because here is where cynics and critics of Christianity might jump in, Darrell, and say: Oh, sure; you only live good now so you can get to heaven...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, God has bribed you with this vision of heaven, and if you didn't have the hope of heaven, you would live just as selfish as anybody else. That is not true. We live these transformed lives now, not so that we can get to heaven, but because we are already there...spiritually, that is where we are.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; Paul actually picks this up in Philippians 3; verse 20 says: But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ 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. So, we are citizens now, today; the day that you become a Christian...the day you profess your faith and the day you repent of your sins, that is the day you become a kingdom citizen; and the kingdom is not something we leapfrog over to get to in the by-and-by and pie-in-the-sky later; this is the life we live from today until eternity; and we are citizens now. So, we represent it now.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As the preacher Barbara Brown Taylor said in a sermon I often show to my intro preaching students: Frisk us and you will find two passports on all of us Christians. One passport says I am a citizen of the United States of America, the other passport says I am a citizen of the kingdom of God...right now! You know, to use Paul's favorite two-word prepositional phrase, which he uses all over all thirteen of Paul's letters in the New Testament: We now dwell *en Christo*...in Christ!

DARRELL DELANEY

In Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as the theologian Lewis Smedes once said: That means we are already now living inside the new situation that Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension made possible. Our spiritual zip code is new creation, 70707; or maybe 77777. That is where we live; and so, that is why Paul, all through the New Testament...he may have a lot of commands and imperatives in his letters, but he never says: Behave so that you will go to heaven. He always says: Be who you are. You're baptized; you dwell in Christ; act like it.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, for those of us who are believers, this is the current climate in our character. We display that each and every day. It is not about some pie-in-the-sky later on down the road; it is in the middle of the brokenness. In the middle of the world that sees bleak and dim futures, we live as Christians who love him and follow him, and we want to make sure that everyone knows that John wrote this book of Revelation to encourage us, and we are encouraged, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God; and thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we close out our study of Revelation with a look at its final chapter in Revelation 22.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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