

## **HOME MAKERS**

### **Revelation 21:1-3**

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*A sermon preached for First Baptist Church of Amarillo, TX*

*April 21, 2024*

I made my decision based on doughnuts. When I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, my school decided to revamp the schedule, moving from 7 periods to 8 periods. For most of us, it meant adding another elective class to an already complete curriculum. At my little school, there weren't that many options remaining by the end of junior high. I was already in the band and athletics programs. If I remember right, that left choir and art. I was already involved in other music, and I wasn't so sure that the coach who taught art in the portable building that doubled as the weight room was going to make me into Van Gogh.

#### **Home Economics**

That's when the news came. There was another way, an option we had not previously known about. There was a class where, occasionally, they get to eat. It was called: home economics. The rumor was that they even make their own doughnuts. We immediately signed up for a semester of that. As my luck would have it, the teacher changed before I got there. The new regime was not nearly as adventurous. I don't recall doing much cooking or eating or anything at all, a real let down. We did, however, talk her into letting us make doughnuts. That's my only substantive memory of home economics.

I remember thinking, even then, surely there's more to home making than doughnuts. The name of the class is a little redundant when you think about it. The word economy comes to us from its Greek origin in the words *oikonomia*, which is usually translated as "household," and *nemein*, which is best translated as "management." It is telling that, for some, "home economics" revolve solely around food. For others, the sheer presence of the word "economics" would make it sound financial.

Revelation 21 is all about God's home-making. It is all about looking forward to the home that God has for his people – the home we glimpse in times of joy and long for in times of suffering. John, himself banished from home to the island of Patmos, sees a new heaven and a new earth, a holy city, the new Jerusalem. The voice from the throne tells John what he is seeing: "Behold, the home of God among humans." John has seen suffering, martyrdom, idolatry, and judgment. Now, at the culmination of all things, he sees—God making a home. It could be a surprising image; except, we have been noticing this theme throughout the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

#### **God at Home**

We began this series by looking back. We explored God's purpose in creation to make a home in which we and God dwell together. When the first couple reached for the forbidden fruit, the writer of Genesis, as if to remind us whose house they lived in and what they were about to lose, tells us that God was "walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze." When sin

had ruined the design, Moses is given detailed plans for constructing a tabernacle, God's home restored in the midst of God's people. Later, a temple served the same purpose, the place where heaven and earth meet.

Last week, we looked at the present. John's gospel says that, in Jesus, the eternal Word of God dwelt – He tabernacled – among us. In Him, we discover a new presence of God in the world. God dwells not only "among" the people, but also *in them*. Paul added that we have His Spirit as a pledge, a down payment. Jesus sends us His Spirit to ensure that some of the splendor of God's presence can be experienced even now.

In other words, we can learn what kind of homes we ought to be making by listening to and learning from our home-making God. Having seen God's desire to dwell with us from the beginning, we look to the Bible's vision of the future, the new beginning. There we learn what it is we are striving for. Having looked backward and looked around, we now look forward. What does God's future home tell us about how we should be living now?

Turning our eyes to the new creation message of Revelation 21, I want to consider this morning: Where is it? What is it like? Who is there? (Note that I have not asked, "When?")

### **WHERE IS IT?**

The last chapters of the last book of the Bible depict the final consummation of history. John of Patmos sees the New Jerusalem and is told by the voice that this is the home of God. John's unmistakable depiction of the heavenly city is of a city *coming down* to a new earth. When John sees the end of history, he does not describe, as we often imagine it, individual souls escaping the earth to heaven, but heaven coming down and transforming the earth. This is, in part, why we speak of Jesus as the first-fruits, the first installment, of this. What God did for Jesus at Easter he intends to do for all creation.

This future City of God "is the invasion of the city by the City." Peterson explains, "We enter heaven not by escaping what we don't like but by the sanctification of the place in which God has placed us."<sup>ii</sup> The idea of new creation *coming down* is also a reminder that the home of God is not simply a human project, as if we could fashion a new world from this one if we just rearranged the parts. The Bible reminds us that we can't obey our way into salvation. It is a work and a gift of God. Something new is needed. God's plan is not to abandon this world, the world which he said was "very good." Rather, he intends to remake it. When he does, he will raise all his people to new bodily life to live in it. That is the promise of the Christian gospel.<sup>iii</sup>

Heaven and earth together are the context in which God's home will exist. If we want to stay alert to what God is doing, we need to keep our eyes and ears open to the place where he is doing it. Creation, heaven, and earth are God's workplace.<sup>iv</sup>

All that our sin has ruined, Christ's sacrifice will renew. He redeems not just your spirit, but your body as well. God's home is a perfect, real, material world and John of Patmos says it's coming

here to make all things new. That is what is on its way, and it breaks in even now! That's where it is, and this is where it will be.

Eugene Peterson tells the story of learning German in graduate school:<sup>v</sup>

*In graduate school programs, especially in theology, you to pass an exam in German. He didn't have time to take a course and get proper instruction. So, he got some grammars and reading books and tried to learn the language on his own. "When I thought I was prepared for the examination I went to my professor and told him that I was ready to be examined, he writes. "Language examinations were conducted informally in that university department. My professor took me to his study, took a book off the shelf, and said, 'Read it in German.' I read. Then, 'Translate.' I translated. It was a Syriac grammar. Grammars have a limited vocabulary, so the translation was easy. He took another book, handed it to me, and we went through the same process. I thought I was doing all right. I was understanding what I was reading and seemed to be translating satisfactorily. But a frown was developing on his face that made me apprehensive. Then a third book, this one an Egyptian history. I opened it at random and started to read from the top of the page. And read and read and read. It was one of those interminable German sentences."*

*Halfway down the page he hadn't yet come to a period, he had lost all connection between the subject and the verb, and finally stuttered to a stop. The professor interrupted, "Mr. Peterson, where did you learn your German?" He was reluctant to tell him that I had done it privately, fearing he would probe for areas of ignorance. The professor continued, "What language did they speak in your home?" Peterson told him, "A little Norwegian." ("Little" is an exaggeration — it was spoken once a year at Christmas dinner by uncles and aunts and mother.) The professor added, "You have a most unusual accent. I can't place it. I am intrigued by it." He then went on to talk at some length about accents — and forgot to ask me to translate. Peterson passed. He later learned that the professor took great pride in being able to identify accents, a pride that saved him from a fall.*

*This kind of thing happens all the time. We hear the command. In a hurry to get on with it, we read some books, ask a few questions. When we think we have the hang of it, we start putting our knowledge into action. We think we're doing pretty good. We're all right. God listens in. Then there is some slight sense of things not going well: "Where did you learn that language?"*

*It turns out that we did it privately, alone — not so we could be in living relation with other people or with God but just to pass an examination. The right words but the wrong inflection, accent, and rhythms. It is not authentic. It is not personal. Its not a living language, but a "book" language.<sup>vi</sup>*

What language is spoken in your home? I don't mean the literal language, but of life. Our task as Christians is to start learning the language of God's new world, even now. We learn it not in isolation or from books alone but in our living and breathing relationship with God and others.

Where is the new creation? I'll tell you: its coming down. Its right here. This means that the Spirit of God in you and me launches us into a new way of living, a way that anticipates in the present the home that God says will one day be ours. Christian living is not about figuring out how to make the best of earth. It's not forsaking earth while we wait for heaven. It's not following old rules written long ago. It is about practicing, in the present, the life of God's new world. We are home makers with God.

### **WHAT'S IT LIKE?**

The description of the New Jerusalem is a remarkable weaving together of various strands of Old Testament tradition into a beautiful picture of a place in which people live in the immediate presence of God. John describes it as a world rescued from the destroyers of the earth, reconciled with humanity, and filled with the presence of God.<sup>vii</sup>

Like all cities, the New Jerusalem is marked by people and places, but it looks unlike any other city. These final chapters describe the shape and size in detail, and what we discover is a city shaped like immense cube. As a cube, the city reflects that shape of the holy of holies, the site of God's palpable presence in the tabernacle/temple.<sup>viii</sup>

Surprisingly for an ancient city, it does not have a temple. Is there then no temple in which the New Jerusalem, the holy of holies, is placed? In this strange absence is a profound idea. The city does not have a temple, because it is itself the sacred space the temple was built to contain. The temple "is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev.21:22). God dwells in the new world, and the new world dwells in God.<sup>ix</sup>

God will not seek out his dwelling place in special temples. He wants to make his whole creation his home.<sup>x</sup> The story that had creation as its first word also has creation as its last word. Like the first creation, the new creation of all things begins with the light that dispels the darkness. In chapter 22, John describes its abundant life. A river flows through it and an orchard nourishes its inhabitants. Do you see what it's like? God's presence can be found everywhere, and everyone is invited to be found in God.

### **WHO'S THERE?**

Understanding the "who" of John's vision begins and end with God. He is the Alpha and the Omega. It is God's presence that dominates the scene. This is what is 'new' about new creation. It is the old creation filled with God's presence. Before chapter 21, Revelation confines the presence of God. He's "the one who sits on the throne" which is in heaven. When the New City comes down from heaven, God dwells – tabernacles – in the same language as his temple.

In the "who" of God's new creation, we find not only his presence but also his people. Revelation 21:3 reads, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." John uses the word for humanity in general (*anthropon*): with "humans." Then, he uses the more usual word "nations" (*ethne*) – for his peoples. Now that the covenant people have fulfilled their role of being a light to the nations, all nations can share in the privileges and the promises of God.<sup>xi</sup>

This means that when God remakes the world, he has everybody in mind! That's who is new world is for: everyone and anyone who believes.

### **With Everyone in Mind**

*Just a few weeks ago, we gathered in this room to worship on Good Friday. That particular service, I was reading scripture throughout the service with several others. Many of you were here in one of those services as we heard the crucifixion story and shared the Lord's Supper together.*

*After the first reading, we left the platform. Our deacons began passing out the bread, a symbol of Christ's body broken for you. I sat in a chair off to the side, knowing I would return here shortly for another reading. The bread came by, and I took mine. As I sat there holding that cracker in my hand, my mind wandered ahead. The plates were making their way through the aisles. I knew that immediately after we all ate the bread, I would be needed back in my spot to read from the Scriptures again.*

*I don't want you to lose any of the holiness of the moment, but we can all agree that communion bread has its strengths and weaknesses. With that cracker being a little on the dry side, I realized that the timing of tossing it in my mouth and immediately walking up to read for us might not be ideal. So, I thought I would prevent that problem. Praying there in my seat and focusing my heart of the gratitude for Christ's sacrifice, I ate mine a little in advance. There I sat, chewing the bread alone. I realized that so many people have received the sacrifice of Jesus in precisely this way.*

Many have been glad to receive the sacrifice of Jesus, the gifts of God, but forgotten that it was not intended for them alone. The broken body of Christ is not a sacrifice made for me, alone. If I receive it and thank God that he would do this for me but have not considered or taken into account that the broken body and shed blood of Jesus was for anybody and everybody, what kind of Savior have I created? What would his broken body mean if it were only for me?

As I think about it, it reminds me of doughnut day in home economics. There I stood poking a single donut in the hot grease. Is this really what home making is about? We get so enamored with our own little worlds that we start making decisions as if we belong only to ourselves. Our calling is to make homes that are about more than just me or you. The economics of our homes have to be about more than just me. "Why?" You might ask. "Isn't it mine, after all?"

My home can't be only about me because God's home is about everyone. If my home is going to be a part of the home God is making, then it better be made with God in the middle and with everybody in mind. He calls me to see the home that is coming here, learn the language, put God in the middle, and keep everybody in mind. We can live in anticipation of God's home, the new creation coming down where God is in everything and everything is in God and everybody is invited to be there.

Moments before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus expresses that deep desire: “that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” John of Patmos ends the Bible with God's vision of the future: “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people.” God’s plan for the new creation is that He would re-make the world into his home and that all the world would be at home in Him.

That’s the kind of home God is making. What about yours? What would it look like for your home to be more like heaven while we wait for God to make heaven our home? Surely, home making is more than food or finances. As one theologian has rightly put it: “We ourselves can be homes of God and home-makers with God while we await the coming home of God.”<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God: A Brief Story of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022) 5-10.

<sup>ii</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination* (HarperOne, 1991).

<sup>iii</sup> NT Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (HarperOne, 2021), 219.

<sup>iv</sup> Peterson, 171.

<sup>v</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation in Growing Up in Christ* (Eerdmans, 2013), 216-217.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-133.

<sup>viii</sup> Volf, 9-10.

<sup>ix</sup> Volf, 9.

<sup>x</sup> Jurgen Moltman, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 140-141.

<sup>xi</sup> Bauckham, 137.

<sup>xii</sup> Miroslav Volf, “A Story of Home,” *Seen & Unseen*, 23 March 2023 ([seenandunseen.com/story-home](https://seenandunseen.com/story-home))