

UNEDITED MANUSCRIPT
REVELATION 3 THE REVEAL
2 IF THEN... WHAT NOW?
08.13.23 • SFC

I. INTRODUCTION

Ok, Today is the day. It's the day when the curtain is fully pulled back and the great reveal takes place. It reminds me of one of my favorite movies growing up — **The Wizard of OZ**, accept this is no fake it the real deal. Do you remember the movie after Dorothy, and her rag tag team of the Scarecrow, Tinman, and the Cowardly Lion return to OZ after fulfilling the request of the Great Wizard and ask for their promised rewards? Well the "great" Wizard begins to hem and haw about keeping his promises. So the last team member, Toto, Dorothy's faithful little dog does a surprise reveal of the Wizard and he turns out to be not so great.

Not so with our God. After all the renovation reconstruction, and deconstruction the ribbon is cut, the curtain comes down, the doors are open and in the Great Reveal we finally get to see the finished product. We get to finally see a picture of heaven our eternal destination. It's the clearest picture in all the Bible of what heaven will be like for believing disciples.

I don't know about you but I'm interested in what the final destination is going to be like. In the Reveal, John describes in vivid 4k HDR resolution detail—what God has prepared for our final destination in heaven. So today I get to be a tour guide showing you all the wonderful aspects of the Reveal.

As we look at and examine the Great Reveal, I want to help you with some new thinking that works like this.. **"IF THEN... WHAT NOW?"**. In life we usually talk about "When and Then".

The thinking works like this "When 'this' happens, then I'm going to do 'that'..."

- When my money is straight in then I'm going to start giving to the Lord.
- Or when the kids are out of the house then I'm going to really start serving in the church.
- Or when my marriage starts to be more fulfilling then I'm going to really work on it.

When and then thinking usually doesn't. I want to give you a new way of thinking today, an entirely different way to think instead of **WHEN AND THEN THINKING** how about **THEN AND NOW THINKING?**

So as we check out the Reveal and see what's going to happen THEN, I want to help you take that truth and put it into Now. If God's going to do that for me Then, what does that mean for Now? If I have that kind of hope then, what does that mean for now? If I've got that kind of security to count on, what does that mean for now?

II. SOME THEN'S OF GOD'S GREAT REVEAL

A. NEW-CREATED HEAVEN & EARTH

I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea. I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband. I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: "Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone." The Enthroned continued, "Look! I'm making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate."

Revelation 21:1-5 (MSG)

What about then? What do we look forward to? Then – we are looking forward to a new-created heaven and earth. The Bible's an interesting book. It begins with a beginning. You know the first verse of the Bible.

It says, "In the beginning..." and as with any good book, it begins in the beginning and it ends with an ending. But the Bible doesn't. The Bible doesn't end with an ending. It ends with a new beginning. At the end there is this great reveal of a new-created heaven and earth. When you read to the end of the Bible it's like we're just starting. We're just getting this thing started because God is doing a new thing and we'll live with Him forever.

There's a couple of different ways people think about how this is going to happen. There are some people who think that this old heaven and earth, the old heaven that you see in the sky and the earth that you see will be entirely wiped out and God just sort of starts over.

There are others who think, and I agree with this second way of looking at things that the Bible teaches that God is going to somehow take this earth and just like He's going to take these old decaying bodies of ours and resurrect them somehow to become like Jesus' imperishable body (1 Corinthians 15 talks about that.)

Somehow or should I say GOD-how He's going to take this earth and He's going to resurrect it just like He resurrected our bodies.

Think about the glory of an earth where everything is perfect. In eternity everything is perfect. It's a new heaven and a new earth and it's God saying, ***"Look! I'm making everything new."***

If you a disciple of Jesus this is the final destination this is what God has prepared for us. I don't care what your week was like. This is what you have to look forward to. There is no doubt about it. If that's what's going to happen then what does that mean right now?

Here's what John said about it in his letter. The same apostle who wrote down the revelation that he received from Jesus Christ also wrote some letters to the churches. In one of those letters he wrote about this world,

Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity. 1 John 2:15-17 (MSG)

The question for me comes down to a question of investment. What am I going to invest? If I had two stocks in my two hands. One stock was guaranteed to decline – day after day, month after month, year after year until eventually it goes bankrupt. The other stock, is guaranteed to raise in value – day after day, month after month, year after year for eternity.

Which stock would you invest in? A simple question and yet where do you invest your life? Why do we find ourselves investing our lives in things that will pass away instead of investing our lives in things that will last for eternity?

Investing in eternity doesn't mean you don't invest in what's happening here and now. God's got a lot of eternal things He's doing in people and through people right here right now. So if I know that that's where I'm going to spend eternity, what does that mean for now? How am I going to spend the now? **Then there will be a NEW-CREATED heaven and earth.**

END HERE

B. A NEW-CREATED JERUSALEM

There's a second "then" that John talks about. There will not only be a new-created heaven and earth but there will also be a new-created Jerusalem. If I were writing this I'd want to know a lot about the new heaven and the new earth. But there's just a couple of verses on that. Most of the verses focus on the new-created Jerusalem. The main focus is on what God is going to do in this new Jerusalem. And there's a reason for that.

A lot of what God talked about in this new Jerusalem is a fulfillment of what He said He was going to do all along.

A lot of what he talks about in the new Jerusalem fulfills much of what's in the Old Testament and also much of what God promised He was going to do in the future.

One of the Seven Angels who had carried the bowls filled with the seven final disasters spoke to me: Come here. I'll show you the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb." He took me away in the Spirit to an enormous, high mountain and showed me Holy Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God, resplendent in the bright glory of God.

Revelation 21:9-12 (MSG)

As you read about this new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from God, you realize that this is telling us that this is one of the places we're going to live in eternity. God pictures it as a city. We read in the last chapters about a city called Babylon, a place

of evil. It's called the harlot. Then we read in these chapters about a city called the new Jerusalem. It's a place of greatness. It's called the Bride. It comes down out of heaven from God.

When you think of heaven and you think of what God's going to create would you have expected a city? When we want to get closer to God, do we say, "I'm going to go into the Fredericksburg City, B'More, NYC or Southeast DC or the mountains."

Which way do we usually go when we want to feel closer to God? There's something about the city for us that makes us feel far from God. Cut off from God, even. It's like we're surrounded by people and steel and concrete. We want to get back to nature to feel close to God. But here in eternity it's right there in the middle of a city where all the people are, that's where God is. You don't have to get away from people to get close to God. The closer you get to people, the greater the concentration of people there are, the closer you feel to God because that's what heaven is like. Human history began in a garden, here

it ends in a city. People celebrating together who God is.

He says, there's the city and as in that day often a city had walls around it and gates into it and the city inside of it.

The City shimmered like a precious gem, light-filled, pulsing light. She had a wall majestic and high with twelve gates. At each gate stood an Angel, and on the gates were inscribed the names of the Twelve Tribes of the sons of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, three gates on the west. The wall was set on twelve foundations, the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb inscribed on them.

Revelation 21:12-14 (MSG)

He said on its gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The gates are all made of one thing – pearl. They're not made pearly they're made of a pearl.

The Bible talks about a pearl of great price that was the most valuable jewel that could be found in that day. When the Bible says that each gate was one huge pearl, what value is there!

Then the Bible says that on its foundations are other names. On each of its gates – three on each side – are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Then on its foundation are the names of the twelve apostles.

A couple things here: First, the fact that you have the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament – all the saints of the Old Testament are represented there. Then the twelve apostles – New Testament – all the saints of the New Testament are represented there. That shows that together, Old and New Testament, all the saints of all ages are going to be there together in heaven.

So from every direction, those twelve gates that are all the way around the city, people are brought into this city through the witness of those tribes, that nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

And every people – all nations – rest on the foundation of those twelve apostles that shared with us the truth about Jesus Christ. What a picture these names that are on the gates and are on the foundation is of what heaven's really like!

How big is heaven? The Bible tells us its size, at least the New Jerusalem part of heaven. Obviously there's a lot of symbolism here and I would not take this too literally. But the picture that's behind this is very clear.

The Angel speaking with me had a gold measuring stick to measure the City, its gates, and its wall. The City was laid out in a perfect square. He measured the City with the measuring stick: twelve thousand stadia, its length, width, and height all equal. Using the standard measure, the Angel measured the thickness of its wall: 144 cubits. Revelation 21:15-17 (MSG)

It's as long and wide as it is high. That makes it a perfect cube. The interesting thing about that is in the Temple there was a place called the Holy of Holies.

It was God's dwelling place. That Holy of Holies was 30 feet by 30 feet by 30 feet – a perfect cube. Any Jewish reader would have seen this right away – another perfect cube. In this case it's 1500 miles on a side. But even if that was all there was to heaven and it's not, that's pretty big, a city 1500 miles on a side. In this place just like in the temple you've got God's dwelling place in the temple and God's dwelling place in all eternity.

The picture here of its size is saying one thing– there is room enough in heaven for everybody and it is God's dwelling place.

The main street of the City was pure gold, translucent as glass. But there was no sign of a Temple, for the Lord God—the Sovereign-Strong—and the Lamb are the Temple. The City doesn't need sun or moon for light. God's Glory is its light, the Lamb its lamp! Revelation 21:21-22 (MSG)

It's light. The Bible says its light is the Lord. There's no need for a sun, there's no need for a moon. God is all the light you need in heaven.

You walk in through the gates what's in there? Is it all noise and cars? What does it look like.

Then the Angel showed me Water-of-Life River, crystal bright. It flowed from the Throne of God and the Lamb, right down the middle of the street. The Tree of Life was planted on each side of the River, producing twelve kinds of fruit, a ripe fruit each month. Revelation 22:1-2 (MSG)

As you walk into the city there's the feel of a garden. One of the things you see going down the middle of this city is the river of life, right down the middle. For us, we think of the life part of that. But for them reading it in that day, they would certainly have thought of the water part of that. Any city in Israel, any city in the desert, one of the main concerns was where is the water going to come from. They had vast, many different ways to get water into the city for the numbers of people that would be there. A well dug outside, aqueducts into the city – there were many, many creative ways to get water into the city.

This city has the source of water right in it, right at the throne. And the river flows right through the city. It's the most incredible picture of abundance they could have imagined. That's what heaven's like. More abundance than you could ever imagine.

On each side of the river is the Tree of Life. Do you remember the Tree of Life?

Remember back in the first chapters of the Bible in the book of Genesis? God talked about two trees in the Garden of Eden – a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and a Tree of Life. And Adam and Eve ate of the tree they weren't supposed to, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is what Genesis says about that event

God said, "The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything, ranging from good to evil. What if he now should reach out and take fruit from the Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!" Genesis 3:22 (MSG)

What was God saying? He didn't want them to eat of the Tree of eternal life and live in a fallen state like that. He didn't want us to live separated from Him. He wanted us to live together with Him. Here it is again, the Tree of Life, planted right in the middle of heaven. Why? because now God wants us to eat of it for all of eternity.

Now God wants us to live like we're going to be when we meet Him, when we see Him eternally. Old Testament and New Testament come together in that Tree of Life.

In fact, if you read the first chapters of Genesis and the last chapters of Revelation, there are some great parallels.

- *In Genesis 1 the heavens and earth are created. In Revelation heaven and earth are new-created.*
- *In Genesis 1 the sun is created. In Revelation there is no need of the sun.*

- *In Genesis night is established. In Revelation there is no night anymore.*
- *In Genesis the seas are created. The Revelation there's no longer any seas. That's talking about separation. Seas separate people. There's no separation any longer.*
- *In Genesis the curse is announced upon all mankind. But in Revelation the curse is removed.*
- *In Genesis man is driven from the tree but in Revelation we are restored to paradise.*
- *In Genesis sorrow and pain begin. In Revelation there is no more sorrow, no more pain.*

The leaves of the Tree are for healing the nations.
Revelation 22:3 (MSG)

It's a long description of the new Jerusalem. But He wanted us to be sure to see what a valuable place heaven is going to be.

III. THE WHAT NOW'S... OF GOD'S GREAT REVEAL (WHAT DO THE THEN'S MEAN FOR US NOW?)

But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.

Philippians 3:20-21 (MSG)

What's going to happen when we get there? What does God have prepared for us in all of eternity.

Never again will anything be cursed. The Throne of God and of the Lamb is at the center. The Throne of God and of the Lamb is at the center. His servants will offer God service—worshiping, they'll look on his face, their foreheads mirroring God. Never again will there be any night. No one will need lamplight or sunlight.

The shining of God, the Master, is all the light anyone needs. And they will rule with him age after age after age. Revelation 22:3-5 (MSG)

I don't know everything we're going to do in heaven but here's three things:

WE'RE GOING TO WORSHIP AND SERVE HIM

WE'RE GOING TO RELATE TO HIM

WE'RE GOING TO REIGN WITH HIM FOR

ETERNITY

That's where you're headed. That's your future.

The truth is in this world we don't have much of a future compared to what God has prepared for us in heaven. Every one of us as believers in Him have a future to look forward to in the final destination of God's Great Reveal. Service, relationship, reigning is the Then of the Great Reveal for us.

What does that mean for now? If you know you're going to serve Him some day for eternity, if you know you're going to reign with Him some day for eternity, since you know that some day you're going to see Him face to face and have a perfect relationship with Him, what does that mean right now? I don't know about you but my mind was in overload as I prepared this message.

I think my favorite verses are those I read earlier in Revelation 21 that describe heaven. When God says what it's going to be like for us on a personal level...

I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea. I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband. I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: "Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone."

The Enthroned continued, "Look! I'm making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate." Revelation 21:1-5 (MSG)

Every funeral service that I do I read those words.. one day fear, pain crying and tears will come to an end. Don't you want to be in a place like that? Don't you get tired of the crying? Don't you get tired of the pain? Don't you get tired of the fact that life doesn't work out like you thought it was going to work out? We all do. But then God will dwell with humanity and when He dwells with us none of that will be there any more.

If I had to use five words to talk about the What Now of that sense of dwelling with God, it'd be these five words that He speaks to us. I encourage us to anticipate with all your heart, all your life these five words: **"LOOK! I'M MAKING EVERYTHING NEW."**

In heaven you'll never hear the words "been there, done that." Because everything is new in heaven.

In this world we're going to be unsatisfied. In this world we're going to realize we don't have all there is. That's what heaven is for. When you feel that way what you do is realize, "I'm going to anticipate those five words." One day I'm going to live in a place where God is saying, every moment, everyday, "I am making everything new." We live for that day. That's where we find our joy – in the future. That's the What Now.

Then there's a final thing, and you might expect the book of Revelation to end with this.

The Angel said to me, "These are dependable and accurate words, every one. The God and Master of the spirits of the prophets sent his Angel to show his servants what must take place, and soon.
Revelation 22:6 (MSG)

And then we hear a new voice, not the angel.

'Yes, I'm on my way!' [Jesus Himself says] Blessed be the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.' Revelation 22:7 (MSG)

Remember it's His revelation, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. These are His words to us.