NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH, AND NEW CITY

Revelation 21:1-22:5

Key Verse: 21:5a “He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

 Some Bible scholars see the structure of the whole Bible with the lens of the Kingdom of God. The word ‘the Kingdom of God’ is replaced with paradise. So, according to them, the Bible starts with the creation of the Kingdom of God (paradise), the loss of the Kingdom of God (the Fall of men), the promise of the Kingdom of God (promises and prophecies), the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Gospel through Jesus Christ), and the completion of the Kingdom of God (Revelation). According to these viewpoints we’ll study the completion of the Kingdom of God, the great climax of the whole Bible.

 In chapter 21 John finally see the Kingdom of God which is extremely beautiful and glorious. It reminds us of the Garden of Eden in the beginning before Adam’s Fall. The kingdom of God is our final destination where we have sought for on this earth and where we will live forever. Also, the kingdom of God is our final reward in heaven. As Paul said, we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Ac 14:22) The kingdom of God is our final goal for our faith and finish line for our race. How, then, does the kingdom of God which John saw look like?

First, new heaven, new earth, and new city (1-8) Look at verses 1-2. “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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband***.” Before the eyes of John, new heaven, new earth, and a new city appear. The Bible says that it is not only John who saw this, but also the prophet Isaiah who lived BC 700. In Isaiah 65:17-19 Isaiah said, “*See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more*.” (Is 65:17-19) As Isaiah had seen, John also saw new heavens, new earth, and new city. Here the word ‘new’, which is ‘*kainos*’ in Greek, does not mean ‘totally different kind’, but ‘the same kind, but fresh or recently made.’ Paul used the same word *kainos* in 2 Corinthians 5:17, which says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ Jesus, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here*.” The first heaven and the first earth, which are the former heaven and the former earth which had been created in Genesis chapter 1, will pass away as well as the seas. This is because God made everything new. God said in verse 5. “***I am making everything new***.”

John also saw the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven from God like a beautiful bride. At the wedding ceremony when a bride, beautifully dressed in white wedding dress, is entering into the wedding hall, all guests rise and welcome her with applause while her bridegroom welcomes her in his arms. In the same way New Jerusalem, the Holy City, comes down from heaven like a pure bride.

While John was fascinated by the beautiful scene, he heard a voice from heaven. Look at verses 3-4. “***And 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. He 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***.” The message from heaven is that God will dwell among his people and he will be their God and they will be his people. God’s dwelling place is translated as ‘tabernacle’ in other versions. God tabernacles among his people. God who dwells among us will wipe every tear from our eyes. We shed many tears while we live on this perishing world. God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Last Thursday morning my sister-in-law who used to serve San Diego UBF passed away. My brother-in-law who took care of her for the last 15 years was in deep sorrow with many tears. Jesus will wipe his tears from his eyes. Jesus will wipe the tears of his wife in heaven. Wiping tears is the perfect expression of heavenly comfort and healing. Now my sister-in-law is with the Lord Jesus in heaven where there is no more death, or pain or cancer. In fact, she suffered much from pain of bone cancer. But now she is there where there is no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, because the old order of things has passed away. We are comforted by faith that she now has her new body, glorious resurrection body in heaven.

In verse 5 Jesus said, “***I will make everything new***.” This is very meaningful word. Jesus makes everything new, better, glorious, and eternal. As long as we live according to the old order of this perishing world, we can’t escape sufferings and price of our cursed body. What is the old order of this world? When we get older, we become sick, and finally die. No one escape or exempt from this order. But in heaven we live with new order, which is once we enter in heaven, we live forever. In fact, we go back to our original order before Adam fell into sin.

Even though we are born-again Christians, our struggle against our sinful nature continues until we die. We call this the process ‘sanctification’. Without crucifying our sinful desire and with its passion to the cross, we become soon slaves of our old sinful desire such as lust, sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, rage, anger, slander, hatred, jealousy, and so on. We often become frustrated because of our unchanged sinful nature and evilness. So, even Apostle Paul cried out from his weakness and sinfulness in Romans 7:24-25, “*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord*!” Jesus will make everything new—new person, new self, new desire, new body, new character, and so on.

The voice of the Lord continues. “***Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true***.” (5b) Look at verses 6-7. “***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 without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children***.” In these verses when the Lord said, “It is done”, he did not mean ‘It is finished’ (*teleo*) when he said on the cross. He did not mean ‘it is completed’, but ‘it became’ (*ginomai*) new world, new heaven and new earth. Now the world became new and fresh. Jesus also said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” These words show Jesus’ faithfulness as the beginner and the finisher of new creation and new world. Jesus’ faithfulness is described by Paul in Philippians 1:6, “*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*.” Jesus promised to give the spring of the water of life to those who are thirsty. We remember what Jesus said in a loud voice in the last day of the Festival of Tabernacle in John 7:37,38, “*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them*.” John said that rivers of living water indicate the Holy Spirit. Verse 7 says that those who are victorious will inherit the Holy Spirit and become God’s holy children. (7) Imagine we are filled with the Holy Spirit 24/7 forever. Imagine we bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit such as love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control forever. Imagine we become new creation in new heaven and in new earth!

What is the destiny of those who are not chosen? Where will they go? Look at verse 8. “***But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death***.” Someone said, “Those who are born twice die once, and those who are born once die twice.” This tells the second death for those who are not born again. Those who are in these eight categories are destined to be thrown into the burning hell as their second death. Burning hell is not a symbolic location, but a real place where fallen souls are tormented permanently. (20:10) The choice is always given to us between life and death, between blessing and curse. This choice has been given from the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Those who choose to follow Christ will have eternal life, but those who choose to follow evil will be condemned and face to the second death.

Second, the New Jerusalem (9-27) One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues took John to a high mountain to show him the Holy City, New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God. (9,10) How does the Holy City look like? Look at verses 11-14. “***It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the lamb***.” When Missionary Mary Choi visited the city of St. Louis first time, she was so impressed by its cleanness and safety. Indeed, St. Louis is cleaner and safer than the city of Chicago to my eyes. Still, the city of St. Louis is known as one of the most dangerous cities in this country, whether you believe it or not. But the city of Jerusalem, the Holy City, is completely different city from any cites on this earth. It shines with the glory of God and its brilliance is like that of very precious stones. Its great and high walls are not for protection or safety, but proclamation of God’s glory. The twelve gates are famed by the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelves foundations of the wall are honored by the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. This indicates that the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, is founded by the redemptive heroes of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

 Verses 15-21 describes the dimension and the beauty of New Jerusalem. The city is laid out like a square with 12,000 stadia long and wide and high. In modern measurement its size is 28 times bigger than the size of Missouri. All the city walls are made of jasper and pure gold. The foundations of the city walls are decorated with every kind of precious stones such as jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, ruby, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, turquoise, jacinth, amethyst. (18-20) The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. (21) Imagine we walk on the street of gold and pass the pearl gates. Any other painters or artists on this earth cannot draw or picture the beauty and glory of the Holy City.

 When Jews hear the holy city, Jerusalem, they remember the temple first. The temple was built on the highest place in the center of Jerusalem. The temple was the emblem of the holy city and the center of their lives. When Daniel was in exile in Babylonia, he went up to his upstairs and opened the window toward Jerusalem and knelt down and prayed three times a day regularly. He prayed toward Jerusalem where the temple of God was. (Dan 6:10) So, John sought the temple in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. But he didn’t see a temple in the city. This is because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. (22) The city does not need the temple because God and Jesus are the temple itself. Look at verses 23-26. “***The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives its light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.***” The city of St. Louis levy taxes for the residents who uses electricity and gas. But in the Holy City we don’t have to pay taxes for utility because the glory of God gives light and energy. 1 John 1:5 says, “*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all*.” The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. When it gets dark, I lock the entry door of the Bible house. I use the double lock when I feel unsafe. But in heaven I don’t need to lock at night because there is no night. There is no thief, no burglary, no crime in New Jerusalem. But all people cannot enter the Holy City except those whose names are written in the book of the Lamb. Look at verse 27. “***Nothing 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***.” Only those whose name are written the book of life can enter into the pearly gate and walk on the streets of gold. Indeed, those whose names are not written in the book of life will walk in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Third, paradise restored (22:1-5) The city of St. Louis is surrounded by three rivers, the Mississippi River, the Missouri River, and the Meramec River. Among them the Mississippi River is the biggest and is the gateway of Missouri. One of my friends who visited me was eager to see the Mississippi River and touch its water. So, I took him to the riverfront. But he was soon disappointed and hesitant to touch the water because it was dirty and contaminated by oil. But the river of the water of life in the city of New Jerusalem is different. Look at verses 1-2. “***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***.” The river of the water of life is as clear as crystal because it is flowing down from the Holy throne of God and the Lamb. We can drink this living water welling up to eternal life as much as we can. This is not all. The river flows down in the middle of the city, and the tree of life stand each side of the river. The tree of life produces its fruit every month. The pear tree planted in James Lee’s backyard yields its fruit every year. The pear often does not grow and ripe enough to enjoy. But the tree of life provides fruits of life every month. We don’t need the whole food or organic fruit anymore. We drink the living water and eat the fruits of life every day. The leaves of the tree are much more effective and useful than any other herb medicine. The leaves of the tree of life are for healing of the nations. We America need these healing leaves. We need healing from division, injustice, violence, idolatry, unbelief, and many other spiritual and social diseases. Let us pray that the Lord may heal this land from all sickness of sin by his healing power. Amen!

 Let us read verses 3-5 as conclusion. “***No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever***.” Amen! Let us pray that we may overcome hardships to enter the city of New Jerusalem. Indeed, we gain the heavenly citizenship through faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain. I believe that our names are written in the book of the Lamb, the book of life so that we can enter the pearly gates and walk on the streets of gold. We will see Him face to face. He will be our God and we will be his people. His kingdom will never end! Amen.