

What's New?

Revelation 21:1-22:5

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It's only eight days until Christmas — until we get *new stuff*. As a child I could barely wait, because if I got what I wanted, my life would be complete and I would be happy ever after. Do you remember that thrill on Christmas morning? I remember my electric race car set — *paradise*.

Tony Campolo describes the Christmas morning he got his train set:

I was overcome with joy. A sense of ecstasy surged through me. I loved everything. I loved everybody. The world became radiant and wonderful. A sense of aliveness permeated my consciousness. . . . I stayed in my state of heightened awareness and sensitivity for almost three hours. Then something happened to the trains. They didn't break. (Broken trains can be fixed.) Something far worse than that happened to them. They became old.

I remember that my race car set was such paradise and ecstasy, but by about 7:00 p.m., after watching cars go round and round, it had gotten old.

Material possessions get *old*. So we should be less materialistic and appreciate the wonder and beauty of God's creation—sky and land, heaven and earth, the wonder of life . . . less toys and get the kids into nature.

A few months ago Susan and I came home from a date. We walked into the house and all the lights were on. The hamster cage lay broken and open on the floor. No hamster . . . but hamster bedding and refuse was spilled on the new carpet. It looked like a bomb had gone off. We heard Poppy (Grandpa, my dad) upstairs reading stories to the children.

He would explain to us later that the neighbor girl brought *her* turtle over to see *our* turtle and then decided to bring *her* hamster to visit *our* hamsters. In fact, the children had already done this and learned about the wonder of reproduction. So our neighbor's hamster had new babies, which technically are my kids' grandbabies, and Poppy told them they shouldn't hold the babies, but they did.

About that time my son's gecko escaped from its cage and couldn't be found. My son was distraught . . . I imagine the dog was barking . . . and then the mother hamster got so nervous she began to kill her babies and do uncivilized cannibalistic hamster things.

The kids were so horrified to see this, that our daughter's friend went into a hysterical rage and threw her hamster off the top deck. Somehow our hamsters got out, everyone was screaming and yelling, Poppy was on his oxygen and couldn't move so fast . . . He told them to calm down, and my son yelled, "You don't understand our pain!" One child fell on the floor screaming in uncontrollable agony; there was open wailing and general pandemonium. All hell broke loose. My father said it was such chaos that he decided to sit down and read a book.

Finally, when the chaos had died down, my two youngest came to Poppy and said, “We need some Bible stories. Would you say our prayers?”

If you idolize nature, spend some time on a farm or in a stable . . . or get some hamsters . . . and nature can get old really quickly.

Toys get old, this world gets old . . . in every new experience we hope for fulfillment and ecstasy. We may even *taste* it for a moment, but then it gets old.

Church gets old. New people will sometimes say, “Oh, I’m so glad we found this church. The worship, the preaching, the programs . . . !” And I wonder, “Will they leave when it gets old?”

Religion gets old. At the time of The Revelation Judaism was thousands of years old and had become cynical and dead, *so* dead that Jerusalem had murdered the Messiah.

People get old. How many times have you met someone and thought, “This person has it all together.” Then they get old.

C. S. Lewis writes:

These things are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. [They get old.] For they are not the thing itself, they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.

So I got a new race track for Christmas . . . and it got old.
I got a turtle, snake, dog . . . and they got old.
I went camping . . . and it got old.
I got a new church . . . and it got old.
I made new friends . . . and they got old.
I married a bride . . . and now I’m going to change the subject.

What is it that makes a thing old?

1. On a physical level it’s when a thing decays and breaks down — entropy.
2. On a personal level things get old when they get old *to us*, when we think we have them figured out, when there’s no mystery left . . . no wonder, no newness. People’s physical bodies get old, and when we think we have them figured out they get old to us. For some, God is old news and not wonderful, because they think they have God figured out. The higher the percentage of things you have figured out in your world, the older you are, and the older is your world, and the closer it is to dead. A toddler has nothing figured out, and everything is wonderful.
3. Decay and a loss of wonder makes things old. In short, anything in time ("chronos") gets old.

Well, now . . . we all want the new and wonderful, but the older we get the more we know that *new* gets *old*. So we get cynical. We all want the new, but we're all fearful of the new, because to get the new is to lose the old (that was new).

So we say:

- "Give me that old time religion! It's good enough for me."
- "Careful of that *new* stuff."
- "Play it safe."
- "Stay at home."

Somewhere in life we switch strategies: We give up on the new and hang on to the old. Instead of wanting a new house, we want a home. Instead of wishing for new experiences we guard the old. But just as the new becomes old, we can't stop the old from being replaced by the new. We *cannot* stop time.

Some people leave church because it gets old.
Some people leave church because it gets new.

When we move across the highway we expect some folks may leave. They'll say all kinds of things, but the bottom line is, "Church just doesn't feel like home. Remember how it *used* to be?" They may try to find another church, but like they say: "You can never go home."

Sometimes I drive by the house where I grew up in Littleton and I think, "You can never go home. Dad will never work in that yard again while I play in my fort, while Lydia and Rachel play with the rabbit, and while mom makes fried mushroom sandwiches in our kitchen with the mustard yellow countertops and the avocado refrigerator. I'll never go home."

And then I want to grab my dad and hang on, because he's eighty-two with heart trouble and a lung disease. But, "You can't go home."

The folks in the seven churches in Asia Minor were probably mostly the Diaspora (dispersed Jews). Jerusalem was their *real* home. Jerusalem was Abraham, David, Solomon, Exodus, the exile . . .

It was the twelve tribes and also the twelve apostles (Peter, James, John).

It was the temple: the place they met God. And John had memories of meeting Jesus there.

It was history, energy, religion for 2000 years, and in 70 A.D. the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem. They literally plowed the temple into the ground. All that energy gone, laid waste . . . all that labor in vain. They must have thought, "You can never go home."

I remember when my bride came down the aisle. I was afraid, afraid that the new would get old, and I was afraid the old was being replaced by the new; that is, I wasn't going home. In fear,

hanging on to the past and worried about the future, I almost *missed* the bride coming down (the aisle). I remember thinking to myself, “Stop it! Stop worrying! Live this moment. Don’t miss this moment. Live NOW!”

The “now” is what is actually new. And if I don’t live in the now (which is new) it will never be the old. I won’t have the new *or* the old, and I will have never lived. And I will have missed the bride coming down, because I was preoccupied with fear. And at the end of our marriage she will say, “Depart! I never knew you. You never made our house a home.”

NOW is when I can know another.
NOW is when I live.
NOW is when I make choices.
NOW is when I create.
NOW is when the new is created into the form of the old.
NOW is when I enjoy a gift or make a home or see a bride.
NOW is the moment eternity touches time.

Scientists say that if I traveled at the speed of light, all time would be eternally present; all past and all future would be eternally new; all old would then be forever new . . . at the speed of light. And God said: “Let there be light.”

“Moses, my name is I AM.”
“*Now* is the acceptable time; *now* is the day of salvation.”

“Jesus” means “God saves,” and Jesus said, “I came that you might have life and have it abundantly.”

Eternal Life
New Life
A Life of Newness

Remember that at His cross Jesus redeems every page of our book, every moment of our lives. At His cross “He makes all things new.” When we’re with Him in each moment, we live new.

Well, I just got real mystical and Biblical. (Sorry.) So I’ll summarize:

In this world of time ("chronos")
Every new thing gets old,
Every old thing is replaced by the new;
It dies in time.

Last week I had a burrito with my dad. He’s getting pretty old — eighty-two — and I worry that one day he may die. He’s getting old, but I remember one moment, looking into his eyes. He was so *excited* and *animated* and *grateful* about something, and, well, he just seemed so . . . *new*. Maybe he’s not totally living in time.

My bride just turned forty-one. But to me she's more new and wonderful than ever. She's still coming down that aisle.

Revelation 21:1:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband . . .

John sees "a new heaven and a new earth." John sees a "new world"; it violates our three-dimensional laws of physics. That's not because it's *less* real but *more* real than this world. Jesus' resurrected body wasn't *less* real but *more* real than brick walls.

"A new heaven and a new earth" . . . and I have a theory that it is disproportionately populated with goldfish and hamsters (set free from their bondage to decay, having obtained the glorious liberty of the children of God through little pet-loving children saying their prayers before bed.)

It's back to the Garden, but not just the Garden. John sees a city. (Cities are made with human hands, but this city comes from God.) Maybe it's built like a "good work which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in it." It is adorned with the "righteous deeds of the saints" (Revelation 19:8).

At the end of the chapter "the kings of the earth bring their glory into it," stuff like computers and microwave ovens and electric trains, I suppose. So I fully expect to see my electric race car set in heaven, and it will never get old, and it will never get old to me.

John sees a city, but not just *any* city, he sees Jerusalem . . . the New Jerusalem. I guess you *can* go home.

I asked my dad, "Are you scared to die?" He said, "Oh no. In fact, I had a dream . . . I think it was a dream of Heaven. The old farmhouse . . . Mom and Dad and my brothers and sisters . . . we were all having such fun. I dreamt of home."

Maybe you can go home,
but it's never old . . .
it's always new.

And I saw the . . . new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men."

"God with us." If you say that in Hebrew it is pronounced "Emmanuel." That's what they called the baby in the manger in the stable.

"He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

And 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 from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son."

"But as for the cowardly [fearful], the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators [fornication is sex outside of marriage], sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

But He said He makes all things new. That must mean "all kinds of things new" or "all new, He makes new" or that some things are made new after the second death or that those people and the Dragon and the Beast aren't really "things" but vessels of wrath and shadows of things. I don't know, but He makes all things new . . . old but forever new.

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

In Revelation 3:11 Jesus says, "He who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God." This Jerusalem is that temple (it appears), and it is built with people. Names are inscribed on the gates and on the foundations . . .

. . . names like Judah, who sold his brother Joseph into slavery and fornicated his daughter-in-law Tamar . . .

. . . names like Peter, who lied about Jesus and ran like a coward . . .

. . . names like John, who wanted to murder an entire Samaritan village, who is also seeing this vision.

The city is built with liars, fornicators, and murderers who have been redeemed. It's built with John, who must have wondered at times as he was exiled on Patmos, "Is all my work and struggle and ministry just in vain? Was Jerusalem all in vain?"

All the people,
 all the faith,
 all the hope,
 all the love
 that went into building
 that old Jerusalem
was not in vain.

In time they built a Jerusalem of stone, which the Romans destroyed. But with their faith, hope, and love God built the heavenly Jerusalem in eternity. Faith, hope, and love abide . . . that labor is not in vain.

We think faith, hope, and love are tools they use for building the city. Maybe building the city was the tool God used for building faith, hope, and love . . . the eternal city.

Well . . . He makes all things new,
so nothing you give Him is wasted.

Some of you are discouraged; some of you are tired; some of you are confused; some of you feel wretched because of sin. Surrender it . . . give each moment to Jesus in the obedience of faith, and that moment becomes gold brick in the eternal city. It fits perfectly, for it was prepared before time by God.

History is like a backwards explosion. Do you remember in school when the teacher would play a movie backwards—reverse time? We would watch an explosion or a wreck backwards. All the burnt, confused, old pieces would miraculously fly together, from the end to the beginning, and make something new that was old.

Jesus is end and beginning. He can play the Big Bang forwards and backwards. I think the biggest bang is not the *beginning* but the *end* of time, when it all comes together in wonder through His cross. He is playing the biggest bang backwards.

The night the hamster bomb went off at my house and all hell broke loose and then my children repented, read Bible stories, and prayed — all the pieces will come together in the new creation . . . hamsters everywhere and a city built with the faith, hope, and love of children.

Well, the New Jerusalem is built with people. II Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation." My dad's body is old, but his spirit is new. My bride's body is . . . great (but getting old). Her spirit is a new creation. She is a mystery and wonder far greater than the day I met her.

The new creation is already here in God's people. Church will get old or new . . . unless you realize church is God's people, and then the old is forever new.

"We no longer view anyone from a human point of view," writes Paul. "Once we saw Christ from a human point of view; we see Him that way no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

The new creation has already invaded the old creation. It was born into an old, dirty stable and lain in a manger.

In that manger,
In human flesh,
Was the bottomless depths
Of the Father, our Lord God.

Mysteries unimaginable and wonders that will never cease.

In Revelation 3 Jesus says, "The New Jerusalem is coming down." It is coming down, but do you have eyes to see? Most people walked past the stable that Christmas. But some shepherds entered in through that stable door, and they wondered, and they lived.

Hebrews 12: "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking." When we hear the Word in faith, New Jerusalem comes down. In faith, hope, and love the New Jerusalem builds us.

Paul said, "The Jerusalem above is our mother." Eternity gives birth to our temporality. "Anyone in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come." (For those people, their world must be wonderful!)

My dad came over while I was writing this sermon. All he does any more is talk about how *wonderful* everything is. He said, "Peter, gosh, that church is *wonderful*, and those people are *wonderful*. Oh, Peter, I love this house, and your kids are so *wonderful*. Even your wife . . . she's *wonderful*." Then he said this, and I quote: "I love C-470. I love going up and down that highway. I *love* those foothills. They are just *wonderful*." And I started laughing.

Sometimes I think my dad is kooky. But he's not. I think he's starting to see the New Jerusalem through that stable door. Maybe he's getting so new that everything is new to him.

You know, whenever we receive a moment in faith (thank you, Jesus!) instead of fear, we live in that moment. That moment is *now* and eternal and new, and that's where "I AM" is—"God with us"—and "He makes all things new."

Maybe whenever we believe the *new* covenant and so sing the *new* song with a *new* heart and *new* spirit and *new* life, walking in *newness* of life . . . maybe we begin walking into the New Jerusalem *now* . . . or at least see it by faith through the stable door.

Whatever the case, one day a trumpet will sound, and there will be no doubt. You'll see it . . . with a new body and new eyes. And you'll say, "This is *it!* I'm *home!* Hey, look! It's C-470 made of gold! . . . and Dan Hiatt, but he's built like Arnold Schwarzenegger!"

Everything old is forever new,
and you recognize it,
for you have visited this country
in faith, hope, and love.

In the Chronicles of Narnia the world of Narnia comes to an end at an old stable, but it's a magic stable, for once you're in it everything is new. Lucy remarks, "In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world."

Well, some look in the stable door and see nothing but refuse. But for those who love Aslan (the Great Lion) they see a whole new world.

At the end Aslan comes to the stable door and roars, "Time!" and the giant named Time wakes and enters the stable. The stars fall; Narnia ends. Those who could see enter the open stable door. And those who would *not* see walk into the eternal night. Inside the children find themselves in a new outside, a new world. Lucy and Peter mourn the old world, and Digory says:

"Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream."

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right forehoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried: "I have come home at last! This is real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in!"

They go further up and further in, and it gets better and better, "more real and more beautiful," "world within world, Narnia within Narnia," unceasing wonder. They find their parents from England, and then Aslan appears and says:

"Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story . . . which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Listen to the One who is speaking: “Behold, I make all things new.” Believe the Word and live.

Look outside. It’s *beautiful*, isn’t it? But if you wander out there tonight you’ll *freeze* to death, and a mountain lion will eat you! You see, nature has been subjected to futility in hope. That means it’s a taste, but it’s not the real thing.

However, there are stables in this world, and the new creation is born there. Let your heart prepare Him room to receive her King. In Jesus’ name, Merry Christmas.

Amen.

Further Reading

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.”

-Isaiah 51:6

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

-Romans 8:19-21

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

-II Peter 3:11-13

In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

-Hebrews 8:13

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

-II Corinthians 5:16-17

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

-Ephesians 1:9-10

“It seems, then,” said Tirian, smiling himself, “that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places.” “Yes,” said the Lord Digory. “Its inside is bigger than its outside.” “Yes,” said Queen Lucy. “In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world” . . .

He [Aslan] went to the Door and they all followed him. He raised his head and roared, “Now it is time!” then louder, “Time!”; then so loud that it could have shaken the stars, “TIME.” The Door flew open. . . .

“The Eagle is right,” said the Lord Digory. “Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan’s real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream” . . .

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“I see,” she [Lucy] said at last, thoughtfully. “I see now. This garden is like the stable. It is far bigger inside than it was outside. . . . This is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below, just as *it* was more real and more beautiful than the Narnia outside the stable door! I see . . . world within world, Narnia within Narnia. . . .” “Yes, said Mr. Tumnus, “like an onion: except that as you continue to go in and in, each circle is larger than the last” . . .

Then Aslan turned to them and said: “You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.” Lucy said, “We’re so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.” “No fear of

that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?” Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them. “There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

-C. S. Lewis, The Last Battle

What the caterpillar calls the end, God calls a butterfly.

-James Hewitt

“Behold, I am making all things new.”

-Revelation 21:5

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

-Hebrews 12:22-25a

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