

August 13, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Peace in Chaos
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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ETERNAL PEACE
Revelation 21:1-8

Religion is a category or realm of life that encompasses almost everyone. We can narrow down religion to the category of “Christian” and still discover that a large number of the world’s population is included in that sphere, as it generally includes Catholics, Protestants, and many different variations of somewhat Christian beliefs like Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Universalism, and others. So let’s narrow the field to people groups that hold to the belief that the Bible is the Word of God and can be trusted. That qualification narrows down the field within the scope of religion quite a bit.

But even still the trait “Bible Believing” encompasses a lot of people and several different opinions and preferences of religious expression. I link myself with the people who believe the Bible is the Word of God and is true. However, if I state my position fully, I wind up in a very small category of people.

I believe the Bible is the Word of God that He breathed out through the Holy Spirit as He revealed it to human writers. I believe that it is accurate, inerrant, and unchanging for eternity in the original writings. I believe that God has miraculously preserved His Word so that we have an accurate expression of it in modern translations. I believe the Bible is knowable and understandable as the Holy Spirit teaches us God’s truth. I believe the Bible reveals God’s standard of judgment for all times, all ages, and eternity.

This firm confidence explains why I preach the way I preach. Even within the larger scope of the Christian community who claim to believe the Bible, there are many methods of preaching. Some preachers teach good morals and ideas with stories. Some preachers

unpack topics that are substantiated by many different Bible passages. Some preachers tackle large sections of the Bible in one sermon, drawing out the theme of that section.

I prefer to preach a handful of verses at a time, explaining the meaning and teaching of nearly every word, substantiating the meaning by the immediate context of the statement and the larger context of other Bible verses or statements. I do this because I really believe that the words in this Bible are trustworthy. I really do believe that God will do everything He said He will do.

That opinion becomes very important, yea eternally important, when we consider God’s statements about the events at the end of time as God determines that end to be. Specifically, if the Bible is true, everything is going to come down to either enjoying eternity in perfect peace with God as He intended life to be or enduring eternity experiencing incomprehensible pain and suffering that never ends.

Such a choice ought to frighten people and arrest their attention. If you really believe that these are the only two choices in the end, you would certainly do whatever is necessary to make sure you avoid the suffering and enjoy the eternal peace. That is the problem. Most people don’t believe God’s Word. They might believe there is a God, but they don’t believe He said what our text claims He said. They might believe there is a God, but they choose to interpret His statements symbolically or mystically.

But what if the words of our text are actually words God spoke and are actually the plans He will carry out? For us who believe God and trust Him, these words contain such a wonderful promise that we can hardly contain our joyful emotions. On the other hand, the last words of our text contain a most fearful and serious warning. How interesting that at the beginning of the story of humanity God issued a warning that obedience to Him will result in perfect peace and harmony. However, God also warned in the beginning that disobedience would bring chaos and death. Adam and Eve chose disobedience, and we all are familiar with the resulting chaos. Now at the end of humanity, God offers the same choice. Trust and obey which results in eternal peace, or distrust and disobey which results in eternal chaos and agony. The best choice seems pretty obvious.

Peace is Coming.

There will be a new heaven and earth. Near the end of his heavenly vision John wrote, *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 (v.1)*. How spectacular that the original heaven and earth will pass away. Not just your house and your street or town or even state will disappear. The whole earth will disappear. And whatever “heaven” includes will disappear. Wow! When will that happen?

The typical Dispensational chronology of end times looks, in brief, like this: First, there will be the rapture of saints before the Tribulation. Then at some point comes the first half of the Tribulation when there will be judgments on the earth (Rev. 6-8) and during which time a multitude is saved (Rev. 7:14). After that will be the second half of the Tribulation with great destruction through plagues, Armageddon (Rev. 9-18). At the end of the Tribulation Christ returns and establishes the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 19-20). The Millennial Kingdom ends with Satan being released long enough to cause rebellion and final war with God (Rev. 20:7-10).

That brings us to the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). Every dead person who was not born again in all of human history will be resurrected to face final judgment. Back up a couple of verses from our text and read John’s testimony. *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done (Revelation 20:12)*.

It is difficult for us to tell where this great throne of God will be because of the great event that takes place just before the great judgment. John *saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and the heaven fled away, and no place was found for them (Revelation 20:11 KJV)*. Jesus also promised this very thing is going to happen when He told the disciples: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35)*. Peter gave even more details when he described the event within the larger context of “the day of the Lord.” *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass*

away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2 Peter 3:10).

Still we cannot know all the details or the extent of this destruction. Obviously, earth as we know it will be consumed. How much of the universe is included in the term “heavens” is hard to determine. And in this destruction God somehow has to protect the saints who are with Him and the redeemed people on earth at the end of the Millennium.

The good news after all those things we have difficulty understanding is that God will graciously create a new heaven and new earth. God promised this new creation in the Old Testament. Isaiah declared God’s promise, *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind (Isaiah 65:17)*. The Psalmist promised it. *Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away (Psalm 102:25-26)*.

We understand that sin so corrupted the creation that God will destroy the corrupted thing and create something new. Sometimes a person will buy an old house with the idea of remodeling it, maybe installing new doors, windows, cabinets, flooring and such. However, on occasion it happens that the would-be remodeler will discover, upon closer inspection of the house, that termites have so riddled the supporting structures that the house is compromised. The only option is to destroy the house and build a new one in its place. Of course we realize that Chip and Joanna Gaines never do that. But at times it would be more economical if they did. The new earth, even if God chose to do major remodeling, will be unique in ways that we cannot imagine or comprehend at this point. Certainly all of the crime, injustice, wickedness, evil, and even the dangers, droughts, sickness, and general frustrations of this earth will be absent from the new earth.

There will also be a new Jerusalem according to God’s promise. John wrote, *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (v.2)*. This unique city will be the dwelling place for redeemed saints.

It might be the “rooms” Jesus promised to go and prepare for us. It is the holy city. Holy speaking of God’s character of sinlessness, no association with sin. Set apart for God’s purposes and, therefore, God’s glory. What the original city of Jerusalem should have been but never was. Like so many aspects of this life that point to the completed, fulfilled glory of redemption.

This is the new Jerusalem. It will not be a remodeled or reworked old city. Jerusalem, like the rest of the earth, has been a place of wickedness, hatred, murder, idolatry, and spiritual prostitution. Even as God was revealing this truth to John in A.D. 95, Jerusalem had lain in rubble for 25 years since Titus the Roman general destroyed it.

But the new Jerusalem will be beautiful like a bride on her wedding day. The city will be beautiful beyond compare or probably even comprehension. Neither Solomon’s Jerusalem or modern day Dubia will be able to compare. Consider the list of jewels and precious gems that will decorate the foundations, walls, and gates of the city (Rev. 21:11-20).

But what makes the city most precious is that God will dwell in this city. *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (v.3).* The term “dwelling place” is from the Greek word that refers back to the Old Testament tabernacle. God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle that sat in the midst of His people in the desert wanderings. Moses and the priests met with God there. Everyone understood that the tabernacle represented God’s presence with them.

The new Jerusalem will be God’s throne room. At the present time God’s throne is in heaven (wherever that is), and it is glorious (Rev. 4,5). In the future, God will not be in a distant place but will be right here on the new earth dwelling among His people. And the people of the nations on earth will freely approach God. Later in this chapter of Revelation we read, *By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it (Revelation 21:24).* Also, *They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations (Revelation 21:26).*

We can only imagine what it will be like to live in the very presence of God the Creator who loves us so much that He redeemed

us with His own life. Do you have visions of sugarplums dancing in your head? Do you imagine the new earth and new Jerusalem like Christmas everyday? Some of the commonly expressed ideas are no work, perfect weather, all the food you would want to consume, and golf all day every day. Those are all passing things that don’t really matter.

We will rejoice in the presence of God because in the new earth and the new Jerusalem there will be a new, genuine, eternal peace. God will remove every evidence of chaos. *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore (v.4a).* Tears, death, crying, pain are all symptoms of a perfect Creation sunk in chaos because of sin. The effects of people’s sins cause much pain and sorrow. The effects of sin found in nature are bacterial infections, viral infections, new and stronger viruses and sicknesses. Emotional and mental imbalances and breakdowns cause deep sorrow.

In the new world all such things will be gone because of God’s mercy and kindness. He will create all things new with the total absence of sin and its consequences. He will in effect personally be responsible for wiping away all tears and all reasons for mourning, pain, and crying. Finally, after living our lives in the world of chaos, we will experience the fullness of the perfect peace that Jesus promised. We enjoy a certain amount of peace even in the midst of chaos as we trust and depend on Jesus. But in the future we will enjoy the fullness of that peace because all chaos will be removed.

The “former things” that God promised will be gone is much of what we experience in life. John saw, *For the former things have passed away (v.4b).* Almost the bulk of our lives is made up of the former things. All we know are the effects of sin we just mentioned. God will wipe all of that away – it will be past forever. The only possible result of this act of grace is perfect peace.

Peace is God’s Way.

When God speaks, things have to happen. That is because, as John saw, the Creator is seated on His throne (v.5a). God seated on His throne is a symbol of authority. In life, a king seated on his throne typically indicated that he was about to say or do something that

demonstrated his authority. So in the Revelation, when we see a picture of God seated on His throne, He is in the process of bringing all things in creation to the culmination He already determined will be.

Just the setting of God's throne room is awesome according to what we read in Revelation chapter four. In that setting, God expressed all authority to bring human history to an end and redeem His creation. *Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (Revelation 5:1-2).*

The Creator who sits on His throne in all authority, and able to do what He proposes, promises a new creation. God on His throne said, *"Behold, I am making all things new" (v.5b).* The word "behold" means that we need to look, to pay attention. It is like saying, "Wow, this is important!" That the Creator will make everything brand new is pretty important news, right?

If the present creation reveals so much about God's glory and person (and it does), what will the new creation be like? We agree with David who concluded, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1).* Also, *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).* We can only wonder what the new and perfect creation will reveal about God.

Will it actually come about? Will God really do what He said? The Creator's words are trustworthy. God personally spoke to John, *Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" (v.5c).* When God speaks, the completion of His word is certain. We can believe God now and look forward to the blessing of living forever in His presence, or we can reject God's words now and look forward to living in eternal agony.

When God spoke, He revealed His plan. His plan has to work because He has the wisdom and authority to do as He chooses. *And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (v.6a).* God explained the title "Alpha and

Omega" as the beginning and the end. Everything exists and all activity takes place between the beginning and the end. Therefore, there is nothing in time or eternity that God does not control. He determines the plan and works out the plan according to His timing and His purposes. We submit to God's plan either willingly or by compulsion, but we will submit.

And why wouldn't a person with sense submit to God's plan if we know that His plan is peace? What does that peace look like? In a description of people who are redeemed through faith in Him Jesus taught, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).* Now we read God's promise regarding eternity. *"To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (v.6b).* That is the miracle, spiritual water that Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well. *"But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).* God offers eternal satisfaction to all who trust Him.

Furthermore, Jesus taught that Christians look like this: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).* Peacemakers are those who have conquered sin and Satan through faith in Jesus Christ. So we read, *"The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son" (v.7).* Peace is not found by appeasing sin. Peace is found by conquering sin which can only happen as we trust Jesus' victory in our behalf. We who conquer are God's children. And our future looks very bright for us because there will not be any chaos in God's presence.

No Chaos in God's Peace.

Where does the chaos of life come from? Sinful people cause chaos. Acceptable sins disrupt God's plan for creation. Therefore, those kinds of people will not be in the new earth and new Jerusalem. God said that they are *the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable (v.8a).* Most people are characterized by these sins from God's perspective. From the human perspective, these traits are considered normal. But these are people who never conquered sin because they

were afraid to be associated with the cross of Christ. They were ashamed of Jesus which makes them detestable in God's eyes.

Failure to trust God and embrace Jesus leads to gross sins that disrupt God's creation. *As for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars (v.8b)*, they will be left out. People who do not conquer through faith in Christ engage on some level in serious sin. Serious sin disrupts lives, causes pain, sorrow, and agony. This is the chaos of the world. It will not be found in God's new creation.

As a result of their choice to reject God's word, sinful people will have no peace for eternity. Instead they will experience actual suffering. As for those chaotic kind of people, *their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur (8c)*. Human wisdom either denies this picture or reinterprets it to mean something symbolic. But both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain multiple warnings about real and genuine suffering for those who reject God, His law, and the Savior.

God places descriptive statements like these words in our text and illustrations of this place and event in His Word many times to warn us that it is true and actual. Jesus warned about eternal judgment. *Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43). "It is the place 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'" (Mark 9:48). God will "throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42).*

Jesus pictured the lake of fire in the Lazarus and Rich Man story. He taught, *"The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame'" (Luke 16:22-24).*

God also warned through Paul that in the last days He will come *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God*

and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:8). God casting living souls into eternal judgment is mentioned multiple times as a last event before eternity. God will throw Antichrist and the false prophet alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur (Revelation 19:20). God will throw Death and Hades into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). God will throw anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Everyone who receives the mark of the Beast *also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (Revelation 14:10).*

Those people who God casts out into the lake of fire will experience eternal death. God calls it *the second death (v.8d)*. What do humans fear more than death? We naturally fear separation of the soul from the body, separation from the known as we are cast into the unknown. What we really fear is separation from God. He has placed eternity in our hearts. He has written His law on our consciences. We chafe and live in chaos and disruption and guilt because our sins separate us from our Creator. But because we have an abiding sense of the eternal, we fear being separated from God unto total chaos.

There are still just two choices: 1) Trust God's words and confess our sins against Him, putting faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ alone for salvation so that we can live in God's presence forever on the new earth, in the new Jerusalem. Or 2) Reject God's words and live according to our own desires, which will result in eternal punishment. Life's pathway and end is as simple as the Bible describes. It is as simple as past generations believed it. It is as plain as our grandparents and their old-timey preachers explained it to be. There are two choices. Which have you chosen – eternal peace or eternal chaos?