

Matt Henry
Rev. 21:1-8
19 May 2019

“The One Who Conquers”

God’s grace and peace to you...

I hope you like that song (“Is He Worthy?” by Andrew Peterson). When I heard it, it immediately stood out to me. It’s deep and true. It’s honest worship. And a confession of faith. It acknowledges the current broken state of things as well as the promise. All creation is longing for restoration, but it’s not here yet. In fact, this song came up in conversation with a group of people from church yesterday. We were at the Scentsy Commons for the NF Walk. Dottie was all excited about that song. “We should sing it, Pastor Matt!” And it was all I could do to not say, “We’re singing it tomorrow in church!” There were about 12 of us from the congregation there to support Savannah Schweigert who has NF. We walked for Savannah. Here’s a picture. You know that Savannah likes cats, so we were her Super Kitty Cats! We all wore this! (Cat ears!)

It is the hope and desire of every person who has walked for NF, or any disease such as cancer, Parkinsons or MS, that one day a cure may be found for all these things. And I hope science can find a cure and soon. That’s why we walk, to bring that day that much closer. And we want Savannah to not only be the fighter she is, but for her to be a conqueror. We want that with all our hearts.

But there is another dimension—the spiritual dimension—that says there will be a cure to all these diseases and more. Because the great promise of God, as found in Revelation 21, is that there will be no more suffering, pain, sorrow or death when Jesus comes back. The final outcome for the Christian is one of victory and dwelling with God. That's a fitting finale. That's what we're destined for. God would not have told us this promise if He didn't know we needed to hear it and believe it and hold on to it. He knows we need it when we are keeping vigil in a hospital. He knows we need it when we make trips to the cemetery to say whatever needs to be said. One day everything will be made right. That's what we hold on to.

Could you imagine going through life without knowing God and without having the hope of heaven? If there were nothing to look forward to, no God who awaited you, it would all seem rather meaningless, wouldn't it? And wouldn't this world in some respect seem cold and cruel as it is filled to the brim with suffering? There is so much we have endure—some more than others. The pain we feel, the tears we shed and the death we grieve are all unavoidable signs of a broken and worn Creation. We are overcome in that regard. That's true. But it's not the end. God is making all things new—including a place for us to dwell with Him.

We call this the New Jerusalem. We see the vision of the New Jerusalem descending from the new heaven from God, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (v. 2). The new Jerusalem is the holy city. It’s the place for God to dwell with His people. Later on in Revelation 21, John describes the new Jerusalem as “the wife of the Lamb” (21:9) that had “the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (21:11). The city was “pure gold, clear as glass” (21:18). So it’s Jerusalem the Golden. This is what awaits us. Its images like this that intrigue us, so we can hold on to this hope. Shouldn’t we all long for this?

Then why did a leading theologian say this? “I’m not against heaven, but it’s not the end of the world!” That man was NT Wright and he’s an expert on the New Testament and not just because his initials are NT! You might not know the name, but trust me, in theological circles, his opinion matters. He was objecting to how people view heaven. As if, we die and go to heaven and that’s it. Heaven’s not the end! Maybe you thought it was, but it’s not! As Dr. Jeff Gibbs said, “Christ did not rise from the dead so that when we die, our souls could go to be in heaven. No. Christ died and rose, ascended and will come again, in order to renew the creation...God’s full plan of salvation in Christ means eternal life *now*, and on the last day, there will be the resurrection” of the body. And in that

moment, body and soul will be reunited—as they should be. Death is not natural. It's unnatural! What's unnatural is for body and soul to be separated. That's against the created order. That's why death is so wrong; it separates soul and body. So we can Heaven is a place where our souls are with the Lord. It's paradise. But it's not the end! There's more still to come! As we confess in the Nicene Creed: "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." That means that "on the Last Day Christ will raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. *This* is most certainly true."...

And if that's not enough, if you don't believe NT Wright or Dr. Gibbs, at least listen to Jesus himself who says heaven is not the end. In Matthew 24:35, he alludes to a moment where everything will change. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Matt. 24:35). So going to heaven is not the end. There's more that has yet to happen.

This passage in Revelation 21, comes right after the resurrection and the judgment. In Revelation 21, there's "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). As the New Jerusalem descends, there's the voice, "Behold the dwelling place (or tabernacle) 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). This is the fulfillment of the promise for God to dwell with mankind. It’s what He’s always wanted. God with us and us with God!

Then comes the beautiful promise, “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, for the former things have passed away” (v. 4). It’s a future promise. But the question is this: Is this future promise enough for you today? Is it enough? Life can be hard and it is deeply unfair. But there’s still the promise.

My wife has lost the ability to cry with her Sjogrens. And here I was thinking I was a better husband. It turns out that is not necessarily the cause of her lack of tears. I think the Rev. 21 promise for her is that she can cry all she wants in heaven just to get it out of her system, but then the promise to wipe every tear away will apply even to her. Because there’ll be no reason to grieve. So we even though we cry now, our tears are very real, but they are also temporary.

Jesus is the one who is making all things new. The newness began with the resurrection of Christ. In the midst of the broken creation, the newness has begun. That’s why the resurrection is so significant—it is a sign the former has passed away in Christ; the new has come in Christ.

There are big statements in Revelation 21 and they all connect back to the person and work of Jesus who does the conquering for us.

God says, "It is done." Jesus said, "It is finished."

God invites us to drink from the water of life. Jesus is living water.

God says, "I will be his God and he will be my son." Obviously, Jesus checks that box. But it's through Jesus that we have the same God and Father as He does. He has overcome all things and He not only reigns, He deigns to dwell with us. He gives us the victory. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Rom. 8:37).

"To him who conquers"

Each of the seven churches has this phrase (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). It's repeated again and again and is really the marquis phrase. Jesus has conquered death and all things, but this phrase is not in reference to Him—it's in reference to us, as people who have faith in Jesus. The heritage comes by being in relationship with Jesus. The one who fails is the one who doesn't have faith in Jesus. There's no relationship there.

Because a lot of people believe in heaven. But not so many people believe in hell. It's a lot easier to think about heaven than hell—even though there are both as real. In fact, a 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center found that if you

were to take 100 Americans at random, 55 of them believe in heaven and hell. 17 people believe in heaven only. 3 people believe in hell only. And 25 don't believe in heaven or hell at all. It's an interesting religious landscape we are in.

We don't do ourselves any favors when we just hear the heaven part. Did you know the lectionary left out v. 8? Not only for this reading this week. But next week, they start at verse 9. But if we want to know the full story, here's v. 8. "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for the murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Now is this Law or Gospel? Well, it depends! The wicked are punished. God's going to dish out justice. That's good news. We don't want people to suffer unnecessarily, but at the same time, it's something to hold onto as we see the wicked prosper now. Their day is coming because our day is coming.

In Christ, you are the one who conquers. So while we have every reason to cry and lament over what is broken, we know it won't always be this way. God is still worthy of our praise. What's in store for us with the New Jerusalem is even better than heaven. One day, He'll bring it about.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Head (What?):

Why is heaven not the end? In other words, what still has to happen?
But why does God make a new heaven since the old heaven is perfect?
What was God's goal when he created man?
What is significance of God being the Alpha and Omega?

Heart (So what?):

What new things has God made in you?
How does it make you feel to know all God wants is you?
No more tears, pain, suffering, death...is a future promise enough for you now?
Why can we drink from the spring of life without payment?

Hands (Now what?):

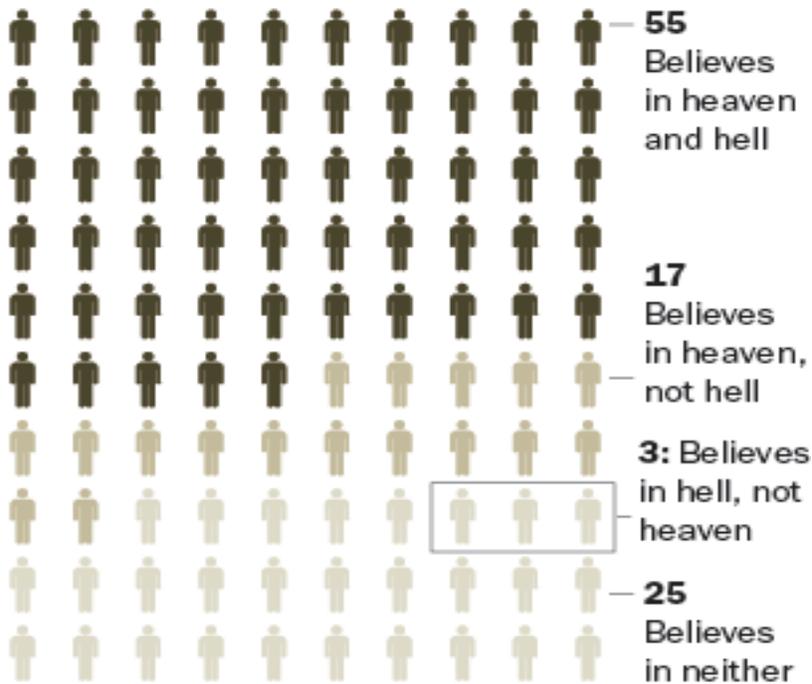
What needs to be done in order to be a conqueror?
How can you encourage others who are suffering?
How do the two eternal outcomes motivate you?

DECEMBER 1, 2016

IF THE U.S. HAD 100 PEOPLE: CHARTING AMERICANS'
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The U.S. as 100 people: 17 believe in heaven but not hell

The U.S. as 100 people: 17 believe in heaven but not hell



Notes: Estimates of U.S. adults. Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding. The "believes in neither" category includes other/don't know responses.

Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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