



THE RETURN OF THE KING



PART 3 - A NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- Can you imagine a world without sin and evil? What do you think that would look like?
 - As we look at the new heaven and the new earth today, what are you personally looking forward to the most?
 - We've all heard "And they lived happily ever after." Why do we love to hear these words? Why do we long for happy endings?
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BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

In Part 2 of "The Return of the King," we discussed the actual return of Jesus at His Second Coming. The image of Jesus on a white horse is unlike any description of the Savior in the entire Bible. John tells us that He will have eyes like a flame of fire, a robe dipped in blood, and a sharp sword comes from His mouth. This description of who Jesus is, and subsequently how He conquers His enemies, shows us in a new way who this Messiah truly is. When Christ returns, He will appear with His full glory on display, and Satan will be easily dispatched. The Battle of Armageddon is the final nail in the coffin for human history, and the beginning of a new eternal age where God walks among His people (for more on this subject, read Part 2!).

For this third and final part of “The Return of the King,” we will look the new heaven and new earth that is ushered in by Jesus’ return. This is the end of the story; in fact, this is the end of *all* stories. Human history reaches its climax, and a world unlike any we’ve ever known is brought before us. The struggles of today will mean nothing when the King takes His eternal throne, and the evil of man is eliminated once and for all. The picture that John provides us cannot even begin to describe the absolute joy of living within His kingdom.

Revelation 21:1-8 (ESV)

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. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also, he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ 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 spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for 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.”

1. He Will Dwell Among Us

That God will dwell among us is the central proclamation of the text. Verse 3 says ‘the dwelling place of God is with men.’ The phrase ‘dwelling place’ in the Greek literally translates as ‘tabernacle.’ The tabernacle is essentially a tent set up by the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings where God’s presence directly resided. The Holy of Holies, the place within the tent where God’s presence specifically resided, could only be entered by the High Priest. The same was true of the temple that was later built by the Israelites once they entered the promised land.

When Jesus’ died on the Cross at His First Coming, the veil in the temple was torn. No longer do we require a High Priest to intercede for us; Jesus has given us direct access to the Father! In our current age, the dwelling place of God is no longer the temple, but the body of the believer. The Holy Spirit lives in you if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior. When Jesus returns at His Second Coming, God will live with us directly here on Earth. There shall no longer be any kind of distance between God and His people. You will be able to physically walk up to Jesus or God the Father and have a conversation!

God with us is the resolution of the problem mankind has faced since the beginning. Revelation 21 is the conclusion to the story begun in Genesis 3. Adam’s sin corrupted mankind and we were collectively cast out of God’s presence in the Garden. Since then, God has been acting within the pages of history to redeem mankind. The new creation, in many ways, is like a return to Eden. Revelation is filled with imagery that calls us back to the Garden. For instance,

Revelation 22:2 (NKJV)

²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits.

Remember that the tree of life was present in the Garden in the beginning. The message here is God intends to bring us back to that perfect world He had always envisioned from the start. Some might say the story ends right where it began!

2. He Will Make All Things New

As God dwells among us, he will begin a massive process of renewal. You've already heard the new heaven and earth spoken of, but what does it actually look like? John says, '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.' Evil and sin is completely eliminated from the world at the Second Coming and this is a natural result of God's direct presence. Everything that is wrong with the world is the result of the sin curse, but at the Second Coming it will no longer be tolerated. The curse on mankind will now be lifted, and the brokenness of the world will be replaced. The clock is turned all the way back to the Garden.

God says that 'the former things have passed away.' Although it is true that the new creation will resemble the present world to some degree, the new heaven and earth will be much different. For instance, Revelation 21 says that 'there was no more sea.' Could you imagine there no longer being an ocean in the world? As someone who likes the water, you may be relieved to hear that the sea may not actually be gone. Some believe 'the sea' is symbolic for the wickedness of the current created order. Evidence for this actually comes from the preceding passage:

Revelation 20:13

¹³The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them.

Perhaps 'the sea' is related in some way to Death and Hades and speaks not of the literal ocean. But the new creation gets even stranger. Revelation 22 says that there will no longer be any night nor the sun. Instead, God Himself will be the light which fills the world. There will be a river that proceeds from God's throne which is described as a 'river of life.' The Bible has several such passages that describe the new creation. To us living in this current age, it must seem so strange to imagine a world such as this. Rest assured; God will have no shortage of things for us to do for the rest of eternity in His kingdom. Not one day will pass where we are bored, but each and every day will leave us in awe of the new things we will see and experience.

3. He Will Complete Our Salvation

In our current age, a Christian is already a 'new creation' in a spiritual sense. If you have received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the benefits of citizenship in this new eternal kingdom spoken of in Revelation are partially available to you already. You have been given a new spirit from God that pushes you to do good and to serve others, but you are still in conflict with your flesh. The sin curse has yet to be fully lifted, but Jesus' death on the Cross has begun the process of restoration. The new heaven and earth will be the climax of a Christian's spiritual transformation. You will now be perfect in both body *and* spirit. As a fully new creation, you will no longer even be capable of sinning, which is a crazy thought!

As the story ends, God says, 'It is done!' This echoes the words of Jesus on the Cross who said, 'It is finished.' Jesus' First Coming brought us salvation. Jesus' Second Coming brings us glorification. The redemption of man is completed, and this is what is done when the new heaven and earth arrive. God says of the believer, 'He will be my Son.' In other words, we will be children of God. Our salvation is final because our Father did not leave us, but brought us home. In fact, He literally brings the home to us.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Those who do not know Christ will not live 'happily ever after.' How does knowing the end of the story affect how you live your life? How does it affect how you should look at reaching others for Christ?
- Does it feel like you already have citizenship in Jesus' new kingdom? Do you struggle to feel as though you already have some of the benefits of this new creation?