

21, one through eight. Is it on? Okay. Thank you. 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. 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. He who was seated on the throne said I am making everything new. Then he said, Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true. 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. 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 sulphur. This is the second death. Revelation 22, one through Five 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 nation. 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 forever and ever.

The word of the Lord.

Please stand for the reading of the Gospel, a reading from the Gospel of John whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father. And I too will love them and show myself to them. Then Judas not Judas, ascariat said but Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world? Jesus replied Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own. They belong to the Father who sent me all this. I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you I do not give to you. As the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, I am going away and I am coming back to you.

If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father. For the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe.

Come on up here, young people. Yeah. All right. How are you guys doing today? Good. I'm so glad to see all of you. So what we read one of the passages. It said that coming out of heaven is going to be a city. The New Jerusalem is going to come down. How big is a city? Yeah, cities are pretty big. But does anybody know how far it is from the west coast of the United States to the east coast? Anybody out there know? What's that? Joe, how far? About how far? 3000 miles. 3200 miles. Do you know that the city of Jerusalem is coming down? It's about twelve or 1400 miles long. 1400 miles wide. And the Bible says it's 1400 miles high. That's a huge city. Like if you started it in North Carolina, it would go through to next state to Tennessee, it would go through to maybe Kansas and even beyond. Might even get started to get close to California. It's so big. Why do you think the city of God is so big? Because it's for all of us. That's right. Everyone who believes in God is welcome into that city.

And he wants there to be lots and lots of room for all of us to be together because he loves us. So today you're going to go learn about God's love and kids alive. So let me say a prayer for you as you go. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for everybody here. We pray that you would bless them and guide their teachers in Jesus name. Amen. All right. God bless you. All right. Would you all pray with me? So Father, I do give you thanks for everyone that's here today. I pray that you would open up our hearts, our spirits to your word. You would teach us your truths and our lives would be shaped and

changed by that in Jesus name. Amen. Have you ever refurbished a piece of furniture? Anybody out there ever refurbished a piece of furniture? Is that like not one of the most satisfying things you could ever do? I was walking along just a few months ago, before we had moved and walking through this one community, and Susan called me up and she had told me, when you come by this one street, there's a piece of furniture out there.

Take a look at it. And so I did. And it was a little kind of living room table, the kind you put in front of your couch. And it wasn't much to look at, but we thought, Let's get it, we'll get it for our daughter Becca. I did. Ended up painting the legs and sanding the top and totally refinishing it and putting a varnish on it. It looks so good. I didn't want to give it to her. I was like, this is so beautiful. Anyway, she was thrilled to have it. It is so satisfying to take something that is old or something that's destined for the garbage heap and to refurbish it. That is a way, that is a way to interpret the Bible. That is a way to understand God's heart for the Gospel. When we read in Revelation, we come to the last two chapters in chapter 21, god says something or Jesus says something. He says, Behold, look, take this in. I am making all things new. Look, I'm in a restoration process with you people. I'm taking everything that's been broken, everything that is old, everything that people say is no longer worth anything, and I'm making it new.

That is a great way to read the Book of Revelation. And it's a great way to read the Scriptures, to read them with eyes. For what is God doing? What's his heart? And his heart is always, always to make new. When we hear of God's judgment, when we hear of his discipline, it is always about winning a people back. That judgment is in many ways, it's the same as taking the sandpaper to that old piece of furniture and just making it new. So we come to Revelation 21 here, and we come to a promise. And so the Book of Revelation really delivers on its promise. It says, Happy are those who read this word aloud, happier those who hear it. But even more happy are those who take it to heart, are those who literally practice what this book is all about. And what is this book all about? It's about worship. It's about letting God reveal Himself to you. Do you know that our God is a revealing God? That more than anything, he wants his heart to be known to you. He wants you to know how much he loves you, that he would literally die for you.

That's why Jesus came to give the very heart of God to his people, that he is a creative God, a renewing God. He's a God who reveals himself. And so Revelation delivers on its promise to be a book of happiness, a book of blessedness. And if we really take it to heart, we're given resource in this life. You may struggle with depression, you may struggle with pains and sorrows. You may have had a lot of junk happen to you in life. You may need medication, and medication is okay. It's a gift from God, right? But underneath it all is a promise that we have a God who heals and restores and wants you alive in every possible way. So it's good to take to heart these words. And when we come to the end of 21 and 22, it tells us what the end? If it is the end, maybe it's the beginning, what it's actually like. So if you want to turn to Revelation 21 and let's take a look. John writes, 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.

The sea being that symbol in the Old Testament of danger, that symbol of death, of chaos. In the beginning, when God creates the world, there's this formless sea, and it's described as to who Waboo this crazy chaos that only God could tame. And so God tells us that now with the new heavens and the new earth, there is no sea, nothing to be afraid of, nothing to fear anymore for the old heavens and the old earth. When the Bible says heavens, it means the skies, but it also means heaven. It's a word that does double duty. And in some ways that's really good. Like if our word sky did the same double duty, we might walk around with a sense of the holy. We might walk around with a sense that heaven is not so far away, but it literally envelops us, is all around us, and it's ready to break in the revealing. God is ready to make himself known. But the old heavens and the old earth had passed away. And a lot of times when we read of the judgment of God, the anger of God, when we read two Peter that says the elements will melt away, that since all the earth will be destroyed like this, what kind of lives ought we to live then?

It's really very easy to get caught up in the judgment and the destruction. And you've heard probably somebody say when they're looking at the troubles of this world, or when they think about how we

might care for the world around us, they say, well, it's all going to burn anyway. But that's not the intent here. For what God created, the heavens and the earth, he declared good. The only problem was sin entered the world and the heavens and the earth are now impacted. All the earth, Paul writes, is groaning, longing for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed, longing for the day of consummation, longing for what we would think is that destruction, but really is a cleansing fire. There renews all of creation. That's the promise. And then he writes, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. Now we know who the bride of Christ is, don't we? It's the Church. And the Church here is seen as this lovely new city Jerusalem. That the two are synonymous in some strange way, I don't even quite understand it.

But she's beautifully dressed. Adorned by who? By our God. A lot of times people are down on the church. They criticize the Church. And as the church, we ought to receive criticism when it's due, when we fall short, we ought to take it in. But never to the point of saying the Church is bad. The Church is beautiful in God's eyes, just as you and I are beautiful in God's eyes. We're creatures of his own making, sinners of his own redeeming. Behold, I'm making all things new. It applies to you and to me and to his Church. And she's beautiful. 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'll wipe away every tear from their eyes. There'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. So here's what happens when the new Jerusalem comes. God, who is with us now, he is the with us God. We feel them in the breeze.

The Holy Spirit is blowing through this place. We know the Lord is here, and yet our perception is so off, right? Because of sin, because of our brokenness, because of our doubts, because of condemnation that comes from within, or condemnation that comes from without, that so often we don't know he's with us, but he's with us. And all of that will be stripped away when the old order of things passes away. When no longer will there be injustice, no longer will there be brokenness or hatred or illness or old age. Amen. Praise God. I'm looking forward to that. I'm looking forward to that. He was seated on the throne, said, I am making everything new. Really, I don't know why the NIV dropped the word behold. Or they could have at least put C in there. It's in there. It's in the grape. Look. God is he's constantly telling us that people look. Open your eyes. I am all around you. I am making all things new. The wrong way to read this is I will make all things new. That's so often how we read these last two chapters. Oh, I can't wait for the day when God makes everything new.

No, he says, Behold, I am making all things new. The restoration process has already begun. If anyone is in Christ, he she is a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come. God is making you new. Every time the word of God is opened, every time the Holy Spirit speaks to you, every time you gather together with other believers, god's redeeming work is taking place, god's renewal. And though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day. Then he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. And I don't know if he's saying the words I just spoke, probably because they got written down, or if he's referring to the words that are coming, but if the words that are just spoke, he's saying, bear them in mind, don't let them go. But they may also refer to the words he's about to speak. He said to me, It is done. I love being a pastor, a preacher, because you have to study the word and in order to know what it means. And when I saw It is done, I'm like, AHA, I recognize that phrase, right?

Jesus cried it from the cross, right? He said, It is finished. He was describing his triumph over sin, his ultimate triumph over death when he would be resurrected. But upon the cross, he's saying, the redeeming work, the forgiveness that's offered to all people in my name who come to me in faith, it's done. My blood has been poured out. It is finished. So that's what I thought this meant. I thought this was connected to that. But I delved in. And the Greek word that was used was not the same word. And I was disappointed at first, I was like, Darn, it's such a cool point. But then as I looked at the word and it is the root word for Gynomai, which is to begin, it is a new beginning. When he says, It is done, it's like the new beginning has started. That's the proclamation here. This is a new genesis, a new creation that God is telling us is happening. It is done. It's begun. I am the alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give water without cost, free of charge 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. Oh, you might hear that and worry, am I going to be victorious? What will it take for me to be victorious? You know, what it takes tells us in Revelation that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, by Jesus blood shed for you and your simple confession that he's my Lord, he's my God. That's what it takes to overcome in this life, to overcome the evil one with all his plans that I believe in Jesus Christ, who shed his blood for me. 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. It's pretty horrible. I can't even quite grasp what all that means. But that's what's infecting the world today. That's what we were once a part of before coming to faith. And that's why it's so vital for us to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people.

Because God desires that no one would perish, that no one would be thrown into that burning lake, but that all would have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. So it says in chapter 22 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. I love that. I wasn't aware how often the tree of life appears in the Bible, but it does. It pops up. And the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, it says. And the one who wins souls is wise. It pops up in various places but here it is at the end, the tree of Life, spanning both sides of the river 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. So here we are in a time of inflation, baby formula runs out, things like that. And God's promises, I've got fruit that will never run out.

Every month a new crop, every month a new yield. Life abundant coming from it. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nations that have been broken, nations that have been oppressed. 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'll 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 forever and ever. How awesome is that? That's a picture of the new Jerusalem of that city. And you know when you read the dimensions of that new city, 12,000 stadium which is 1400 miles long, 1400 miles wide, 1400 miles high, some believe that's literal and maybe it is. If it is it's going to be awesome. Like you never seen a skyscraper that high, right? You just look up at these walls that seem to have no end. You look up at the walls that just go on and on and on.

But then you notice that the gates are open and that all who believe can come through those gates but nothing vile will ever enter through those gates. And you realize that this is telling you either symbolically or literally god's love is so vast, so wide, so deep, so high, so long, so healing, so renewing. You don't ever want to miss out. And that's why you and I, at our base, are to be the most joyous of people. Not simply because of the future that awaits us, but because of the future that is invading us even now, that's renewing us day by day. I want to close with this story to give you just one more picture to take with you. This story first appeared in Home Life magazine in 1974. As she stood in front of her fifth grade class on the very first day of school, Mrs. Thompson realizes she had told the children an untruth. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same, every one of them. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Little boy that was smelly, a little boy that could be unpleasant. And it got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take a little pleasure in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big F at the top of his papers. So at the school where she taught, she was required to review each child's past records, and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy's first grade teacher wrote teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners. He's a joy to be around. His second grade teacher wrote, teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he's troubled because his mother has a terminal illness, and life at home must be a struggle. His third grade teacher wrote, his mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father

doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken. Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote teddy is withdrawn, doesn't show much interest in school, he doesn't have many friends, and he sometimes sleeps in class.

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem, and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper. Except for Teddy's, his present was clumsily, wrapped in the heavy brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my mom used to. After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy, and as she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged them, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class, and despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, teddy became one of her teacher's pets.

A year later, she found a note under her door from Teddy telling her that she was the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by, and she got another note from Teddy. He wrote he had finished high school third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he had ever had. Four years after that, she got another letter saying that while things had been tough, he stayed in school, stuck it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson she was still his best and favorite teacher. Then four more years passed, and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. And the letter explained she was still the best in favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer. The letter was signed Theodore F. Stoddard, MD. And out of reunion, they hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear thank you, Mrs. Thompson, for believing me in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference.

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you. I love that story. I told her once before, about eleven years ago, and as I was researching this, I came across and said, I got to tell that again. And then I looked up on the Internet to see who wrote the story, and I found out it's not a true story, but don't you wish it was? Right, but it was a fiction wrote by Elizabeth Ballard in 1974 for Home Life magazine, and it became their most requested story for reprint. Because everybody wishes it was true, because everybody recognizes the truth in it. That you and I are put here for a purpose, for the renewal of all things by the way that we live our life, by taking what's old along with God and making it new. By speaking his life and his love to our children, to our neighbors, to the people around us. That's the Gospel. That's what Jesus has done for us, and that's what's coming folks.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah.

All right. We'll be yelling a lot louder than that even one day. Let's pray. Well, Heavenly Father, we are grateful. Thank you for this amazing book, your Bible and the Book of Revelation. Thank you. But the story isn't done. But the story, even now, is taking place. And one day a new beginning is coming. Lord, we look forward to that day, and we say, Come, Lord Jesus, but even now, would you lead your people into the renewal of all things? We offer ourselves to you in Jesus name. Amen. Please stand.