

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 11: GLORIFICATION — THE COMPLETION OF SALVATION

The Completion of What God Began

Lesson 34

The New Heavens and the New Earth

The Eternal Home of the Redeemed

“Behold, I Am Making All Things New” — Revelation 21:5

Renovation, Not Annihilation — Redemption, Not Escape — Presence, Not Absence

Key Texts: Revelation 21:1–7; 22:1–5; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Isaiah 65:17–25; 1 Corinthians 2:9

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.””

Revelation 21:1–3, NASB 1995

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Introduction

The soteriology series approaches its penultimate lesson, and in doing so arrives at the broadest possible horizon of the salvation it has been tracing: the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal home of the redeemed, the eschatological destination not only of every individual believer but of the entire created order that the redemption has always been aimed at renewing. If Lesson 32 established glorification as the completion of the individual believer's saving journey and Lesson 33 traced the resurrection of the body as the specific, physical, Christologically-patterned expression of that completion, then Lesson 34 expands the eschatological horizon to its ultimate width: the new creation that the glorified community of the redeemed will inhabit for eternity, in the face-to-face, unmediated, permanently-present presence of the God who is all in all.

The governing declaration of this lesson is stated in the outline's title verse with the directness that only the God who speaks from the throne of the universe can achieve: "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5, NASB 1995). Not all new things, the replacement of what existed with entirely different entities. But all things new, the renewal, purification, and glorification of the very creation that God declared very good in Genesis 1:31, that the fall subjected to corruption and futility, and that the redemption has always been aimed at liberating. The eternal state is not the escape from creation into a purely spiritual existence; it is the redemption of creation itself, the new creation that the resurrection of the body and the new heavens and new earth together constitute as the permanent, eschatological, divinely-inhabited home of the redeemed.

The lesson will proceed through seven major sections: the nature of the new creation (renovation, not annihilation); Revelation 21–22's account of the eternal state; the liberation of creation in Romans 8:19–21; the presence of God as the defining feature of eternity; the absence of the curse; the eternal worship and service of God; and the pastoral power of the eschatological hope. Throughout, the governing theological conviction is the one the outline names: the doctrine of glorification makes every present suffering bearable and every present sacrifice worthwhile, because the glory that is to be revealed to us is not worthy to be compared with the sufferings of this present time.

I. Renovation, Not Annihilation

The Redemption of Creation Itself

A. The Two Interpretations and the Exegetical Evidence

The most fundamental theological question about the nature of the eternal state is the question of whether the “new” of the new heavens and the new earth represents the annihilation of the present creation and its replacement by an entirely different creation, or the renewal, purification, and transformation of the present creation into the eschatological fullness that the original creation was always designed to reach. The answer to this question shapes the entire character of the eschatological hope: an annihilation-and-replacement account produces a hope that is primarily about escape from the present order; a renovation-and-renewal account produces a hope that is primarily about the redemption of the present order, the fulfillment of what the creation was always intended to be under the unhindered governance of the God who made it very good.

The primary Greek word translated “new” in Revelation 21:1, *kainos*, as opposed to *neos*, is itself exegetically significant. The Greek language had two words for “new”: *neos*, which means new in the sense of recently produced, chronologically new, something that did not previously exist; and *kainos*, which means new in the sense of qualitatively renewed, freshly transformed, brought to a new level of quality and freshness. Revelation 21:1’s use of *kainos* rather than *neos* suggests the qualitative renewal of what existed rather than the creation of something that did not exist, the present heaven and earth made qualitatively new, renewed and purified and glorified, rather than replaced by an entirely different creation.

The broader canonical testimony supports the renovation interpretation. Romans 8:19–21 describes the creation’s destiny as liberation from its “slavery to corruption” (not its destruction and replacement) into “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Isaiah 65:17–25 and 66:22 describe the new heavens and earth as the setting for the redeemed community’s life in a way that implies the continuity of the created order’s natural features (wolves and lambs, people building houses and planting vineyards) transformed and renewed rather than replaced by an entirely different mode of existence. Second Peter 3:10–13 provides the most challenging text for the renovation interpretation: the description of the heavens being dissolved and the elements melting with intense heat before the new heavens and earth appears. But even here, the analogy Peter uses earlier in the passage (the flood of Noah, vv. 5–6) suggests the purifying transformation of the existing creation rather than its absolute annihilation: the flood did not destroy the creation but purified and renewed it.

B. The Theological Significance of Renovation

The theological significance of the renovation interpretation, the new creation as the renewal of the present creation rather than its replacement, extends across several dimensions of the Christian theological vision. First, it vindicates the original creation’s goodness: if the new creation is not the annihilation of the present order but its redemption and glorification, then the original goodness of Genesis 1:31 is not permanently lost but permanently restored and surpassed. The creation that God declared very good will be renewed to express what the original very good always had the potential to become. Second, it establishes the redemption as cosmic in scope: the salvation that the soteriology series has traced, from the individual’s regeneration through the

corporate glorification, is part of the larger, cosmic redemption that includes the liberation of the entire created order from the corruption that the fall introduced. Third, it grounds the present-age stewardship of the creation: if the new creation is the renewal of the present creation, then the present creation is not ultimately disposable but the object of God's redemptive purpose, and the faithful stewardship of it in the present age is a response to the God who made it, redeemed it, and will renew it.

II. Revelation 21–22 and the Eternal State

The Most Comprehensive Vision of the Eschatological Destination

A. Revelation 21:1–5 and the New Creation's Character

Revelation 21:1–5 provides the most comprehensive and the most theologically dense single passage on the character of the eternal state in the entire canon. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” (NASB 1995).

Three aspects of the passage deserve sustained attention. First, the absence of the sea: “there is no longer any sea.” In the symbolic universe of Revelation, heavily indebted to the Old Testament's use of the sea as the symbol of chaos, disorder, and the threatening forces that oppose the divine order, the absence of the sea is not the promise that the new creation will lack large bodies of water but the declaration that the chaotic, threatening, disorder-producing forces that have characterized the present age will be permanently absent from the eternal state. The sea represented the power of the nations, the forces of spiritual opposition, and the instability of the present age that the new creation will have permanently transcended.

Second, the new Jerusalem coming down: the eternal state is not located in a purely spiritual realm above the material creation but is specifically described as the holy city coming down from God to the renewed creation. The directionality is theologically significant: not the redeemed going up to God's dwelling in an ethereal spiritual dimension, but the divine dwelling coming down to the renewed creation, establishing the permanent, embodied, creation-inhabiting presence of the God who has always been moving toward His creation in redemptive love. Third, the divine declaration: “Behold, I am making all things new”, the present progressive tense (“am making”) establishing the new creation as the active, ongoing, divine work of the One who sits on the throne, the eschatological expression of the same creative power that spoke the original creation into existence.

B. Revelation 21:3–4 and the Covenant Fulfillment

Revelation 21:3's declaration, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them”, is the most explicit single statement of the eschatological covenant fulfillment in the entire canon. The language is the language of the Sinai covenant and its forward-looking promises (Leviticus 26:12: “I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My

people”), the language of the Davidic covenant’s dwelling promises (2 Samuel 7:13–16), and the language of the new covenant’s heart-transformation and presence promises (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–28). All of the covenant’s dwelling promises find their final, permanent, unmediated, full-scope fulfillment in the eternal state’s “God Himself will be among them.”

The specific significance of the tabernacle imagery is the continuity it establishes with the entire Old Testament’s account of the divine dwelling: the tabernacle was the specific, appointed, covenant-grounded location of the divine presence in the midst of the covenant community, the place where heaven and earth met, where the glory of God dwelt among His people, and where the relationship that the covenant established was regularly and sacrificially renewed. In the eternal state, this tabernacling presence, which the tabernacle, the temple, the incarnation, and the Spirit’s present indwelling have all been progressive, typological expressions of, reaches its final, permanent, face-to-face, unmediated, all-encompassing form. The temporary dwelling of the tabernacle and the temple, the condescension of the incarnation, and the spiritual indwelling of the present age are the anticipations; the eternal state’s unmediated presence is the permanent reality toward which they all pointed.

Revelation 21:4’s elimination of every form of the fall’s fruit, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away”, is the specific, forensically-accurate account of what the fall introduced into the creation and what its reversal in the new creation will permanently eliminate. Death is the specific, eschatological enemy that 1 Corinthians 15:26 names as the last enemy to be abolished. Mourning, crying, and pain are death’s companions and sin’s fruit, the specific, experiential consequences of the fall’s introduction of corruption, loss, and suffering into the very good creation. The wiping of every tear is not merely the cessation of crying; it is the specific, personal, divinely-administered answer to every individual tear that the fall’s consequences ever produced, the God who counts the hairs of the head will wipe the tears of the face with the same personal, individual, loving specificity.

C. Revelation 22:1–5 and the Life of the Eternal State

Revelation 22:1–5 extends the vision of the eternal state from the removal of the negative (no more death, mourning, crying, pain) to the positive description of the life that the new creation will provide: “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no night there; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever” (NASB 1995).

The river of the water of life and the tree of life are the Eden imagery of Genesis 2 brought to their eschatological fullness: the eternal state is not an unprecedented novelty but the fulfillment of the very creation that was very good, now renewed and glorified beyond the original. The twelve fruits of the tree and the leaves for the healing of the nations establish the abundant, overflowing, continuously-provided character of the eternal life’s sustenance, not a static, unchanging, featureless existence but a richly varied, continuously-renewed, abundantly-provided life in the presence of the God who is the source of all good. The absence of the curse (“there will no longer be any curse”) is the specific, comprehensive removal of everything the fall’s curse introduced: the thorns

and thistles, the painful toil, the suffering of childbirth, the conflict between man and creation, the ultimate return to dust, all permanently undone in the creation that the redemption has glorified.

III. Romans 8:19–21 and the Liberation of Creation

The Whole Created Order Awaiting Redemption

A. The Creation's Own Longing

Romans 8:19–21 provides the most explicit New Testament statement of the cosmic scope of the redemption and the creation's own eschatological longing: "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (NASB 1995). The passage establishes three specific and theologically significant claims about the creation's relationship to the eschatological hope.

First, the creation has its own longing for the eschatological disclosure. The personification of the creation's "anxious longing" (apokaradokia, the head-stretching-forward image of the one who is eagerly, expectantly watching for the arrival of something long-awaited) is not merely a rhetorical device; it is the theological statement that the non-human creation participates in the eschatological waiting that the Spirit-indwelt believer also experiences. The creation and the believer are groaning together (v. 22: "the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now") toward the same eschatological disclosure: the revealing of the sons of God at the day of Christ.

Second, the creation was subjected to futility not by its own choice but by the divine decision (the "Him who subjected it" is most naturally read as God rather than Adam) in hope. The futility is not the creation's natural state; it is the divinely-imposed consequence of the fall that the same God imposed in the confidence of the redemption that would reverse it. The creation's subjection to futility was always a temporary, redemptively-purposeful subjection rather than the permanent condition of the material order. Third, the destination of the liberation is the freedom of the glory of the children of God: the creation's liberation is specifically tied to and patterned on the glorification of the children of God. The new creation will be the creation that participates in the freedom and the glory that the children's glorification expresses, the renewed, glorified, Spirit-filled creation that is the appropriate home for the renewed, glorified, Spirit-filled people.

B. Isaiah 65:17–25 and the Old Testament Vision

Isaiah 65:17–25 provides the most detailed Old Testament vision of the new creation and its eschatological character, establishing the continuity between the Old Testament's eschatological hope and the New Testament's new heavens and new earth: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing and her people for gladness" (vv. 17–18, NASB 1995). The passage is remarkable for the specific, concrete, earthly character of the new creation it envisions: people building houses and living in them (v. 21), planting vineyards and eating their fruit (v. 21), the wolf and the lamb feeding together (v. 25), the lion eating straw like the ox (v. 25). The transformation of the natural world's predator-prey relationships is the specific,

created-order-involving, concretely-described expression of the new creation's character, the renewed creation in which the original harmony of the very good creation is restored and surpassed.

The New Testament's application of the Isaiah 65–66 vision to the specific, eschatological, eternal-state context (2 Peter 3:13: "but according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells"; Revelation 21:1's echo of Isaiah 65:17) establishes the canonical continuity of the eschatological hope: the new creation of Revelation 21 is the fulfillment of the new creation that Isaiah 65 promised, the same redemptive trajectory from the prophetic anticipation through the New Testament's eschatological disclosure to the eternal state's permanent realization.

IV. The Presence of God as the Defining Feature

They Will See His Face

A. Revelation 22:4 and the Beatific Vision in Its Fullest Expression

If the eternal state had only one defining feature, one characteristic that would distinguish it most fundamentally from every other form of existence that the creation has known, it would be the face-to-face, unmediated, permanent, all-comprehending presence of God. Revelation 22:4's declaration is among the most astonishing in the entire canon: "They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (NASB 1995). The seeing of the divine face, the beatific vision that 1 John 3:2 established as the mechanism of the final transformation ("we will see Him just as He is"), is here described not as the momentary experience of the transformation but as the permanent, ongoing, never-fading condition of the eternal life.

The significance of the face-to-face seeing of God's face becomes fully apparent against the background of the Old Testament's account of the divine face's hiddenness: Moses was not permitted to see the divine face (Exodus 33:20: "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live"), though he was shown the divine back as the divine glory passed by. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place only once a year, with the blood of atonement, in the presence of the divine glory that dwelt between the cherubim. The veil separated the worshipping community from the Most Holy Place throughout the tabernacle and temple eras. The incarnation was the divine condescension in which the eternal Son veiled His glory in flesh so that human beings could encounter Him without being consumed. The Spirit's present indwelling is the Spirit's presence within the believer but not yet the face-to-face encounter with the divine glory in its unveiled fullness. And then, in the eternal state, the veil is gone, the Most Holy Place is everywhere, the divine face is seen, and the seeing is permanent.

The specific theological significance of the face-to-face seeing in the eternal state is the final, permanent fulfillment of the Aaronic blessing's petition (Numbers 6:24–26): "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace." The priestly blessing asked for the divine face to shine on the covenant community, the specific, personal, light-giving, grace-expressing, peace-providing attention of the divine face. In the eternal state, the blessing is no longer a petition but a permanent reality: the divine face shines on the redeemed community permanently, without the veil, without the mediation, without the limitation that the present age interposes between the believer and the unfiltered divine glory. The peace (*shalom*) that the blessing asked for is the comprehensive, eternal, all-dimensions-of-flourishing peace of the eternal state's unmediated divine presence.

B. The Name on the Foreheads

Revelation 22:4's second declaration, "and His name will be on their foreheads", is the specific, identity-marking, belonging-declaring expression of the eternal state's character: the redeemed community bears the divine name permanently and visibly on their foreheads, marking them as permanently, irrevocably, publicly belonging to the God whose name they bear. The name on the forehead is the eschatological fulfillment of the adoption's identity-establishing declaration: the adopted children are permanently marked as the Father's own, bearing His name with the permanence of the eschatological sealing that the Spirit's present sealing (Ephesians 4:30: "sealed for the day of redemption") was always aimed at producing. The name on the forehead is the day of redemption's seal expressed in its final, permanent, publicly-visible, eschatological form.

V. The Absence of the Curse

Everything the Fall Destroyed Will Be Restored and Surpassed

A. The Comprehensive Reversal

Revelation 22:3's declaration, "There will no longer be any curse" (NASB 1995), is the most comprehensive single statement of the eternal state's character in relation to the fall: the eschatological reversal is complete. The curse that Genesis 3:14–19 pronounced over the serpent, the woman, the man, and the ground, the specific, fall-introduced, creation-distorting set of consequences that has characterized every moment of the human experience since the first disobedience, is permanently, completely, and without remainder removed from the new creation. There will no longer be any curse. Not a reduced curse, not a mitigated curse, not a curse that will diminish over time in the eternal state. No curse.

The specific dimensions of the curse's removal can be traced against the specific dimensions of the curse's introduction. The conflict between the serpent and the woman's seed (Genesis 3:15), resolved once and for all in the cross (Colossians 2:15) and finalized in the eternal state. The pain of childbirth and the distortion of the husband-wife relationship (Genesis 3:16), the specific, relational and physical suffering of the female experience of the present age, permanently reversed in the eternal state. The futile toil of the man who struggles against the thorns and thistles to produce the fruit of the ground (Genesis 3:17–19), permanently replaced by the abundant, effortless, tree-of-life-provided sustenance of the new creation. The return to dust, the ultimate expression of the body's subjection to mortality and decay, permanently reversed in the resurrection of the body and the imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual embodiment of the eternal state. No curse. Everything the fall introduced, permanently removed by the redemption completed.

B. The Specific Elimination of What Revelation 21:4 Names

Revelation 21:4's specific enumeration of what will no longer exist in the eternal state, death, mourning, crying, pain, is the specific, pastoral, personally-applicable account of what the eternal state's absence of the curse will mean for the redeemed community. Each item in the list is worth receiving as a specific, personally-addressed declaration of the God who will wipe the tear:

No more death: the last enemy, the one that 1 Corinthians 15:26 identifies as the specific, ultimate adversary that the resurrection will abolish, is permanently absent. The person who has lost the specific, beloved person whose absence the grief of the present age has produced will not lose that person again; the separation that death introduces will be permanently reversed. No more mourning: the specific, grief-shaped, loss-produced, anticipatory-bereavement that characterizes the present age, the mourning not only over those already lost but over the prospect of losing those not yet lost, permanently absent. The eternal state's community is not a community that lives in the shadow of mortality but a community that inhabits the permanent, death-free, loss-free life of the new creation. No more crying: the tears that the present age's specific suffering, loss, injustice, and pain have produced, wiped away by the hand of the God who collected them (Psalm 56:8) and who will answer each one with the specific, personal, tender attention of the Father who has never been indifferent to the tears of His children. No more pain: the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational pain that sin and its consequences have produced in every dimension of the human experience, permanently, completely, and without remainder absent from the new creation that the curse's removal has made possible.

VI. Eternal Worship and Service

Not Passive Rest but Active, Joyful Participation in the Kingdom

A. Revelation 22:3 and the Bond-Servants' Service

One of the most common misunderstandings about the eternal state, a misunderstanding that drains it of its pastoral attractiveness and reduces it to the kind of featureless, static, cloud-and-harp existence that has given heaven a reputation for boredom in the popular imagination, is the idea that the eternal life will be a passive, effortless, unchanging rest from all activity. But Revelation 22:3 declares specifically: "His bond-servants will serve Him" (NASB 1995). The eternal state is characterized by the specific, active, purposeful, King-directed service of the redeemed community, not the passive, featureless, activity-free existence of the popular imagination but the eternally-engaged, creatively-expressed, gloriously-productive service of those who have been freed from sin's hindrances and equipped with the imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual embodiment of the resurrection body to serve their King with a fullness and a joy that the present age's bondage and limitation could never provide.

The word "bond-servants" (*douloi*, the same word used for Paul, James, Peter, and Jude in their epistolary self-descriptions) is the specific, chosen, honored identity of those who serve the King, not the compelled service of those who have no choice but the freely-offered, covenant-shaped, identity-expressing service of those who have been redeemed to belong to the One they serve and who serve Him because He is worth serving and because the serving itself is the joy. The bond-servant's service in the eternal state is the service that is its own reward: the service of the King whose character makes the serving a privilege rather than a burden, whose face the bond-servants see as they serve, and whose name they bear on their foreheads as the permanent, identity-marking expression of the belonging that the service embodies.

B. Reigning Forever

Revelation 22:5's "they will reign forever and ever" is the eschatological fulfillment of the destiny that the image of God always implied, the co-regency with the Creator that Genesis 1:26–28's cultural mandate expressed and that the fall distorted but never permanently revoked. The redeemed community's reigning in the eternal state is the restoration and the eschatological glorification of the vice-regency that the creation always intended: the image-bearers governing the creation on behalf of the Creator, but now in the glorified, sin-free, non posse peccare condition that the eternal state provides, with the fullness of the Spirit's empowerment that the resurrection body enables, and in the face-to-face presence of the King whose governance of all things is the ultimate ground and the overarching context of the co-regency's exercise.

The reign forever and ever is not the static, repetitive, unchanging governance of a creation that has no further development; it is the active, engaged, creatively-expressive, eternally-unfolding participation in the governance of a creation that the eternal life of the new creation will provide in forms that the present age's constraints prevent us from fully imagining. First Corinthians 2:9's declaration provides the appropriate epistemic humility before the magnitude of the eternal state's positive content: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (NASB 1995). The specific, positive content of the eternal life, the activities, the relationships, the creative engagements, the worshipping expressions, the governing responsibilities of the glorified community in the new creation, exceeds the capacity of present-age imagination. But the direction is clear: active, joyful, purposeful, King-centered, creation-encompassing, eternally-unfolding service and reign.

C. Worship as the Heartbeat of the Eternal State

The worship that the redeemed community offers to God in the eternal state is not the corporate gathering of the present age's Lord's Day, however important and however formative; it is the permanent, all-encompassing, face-to-face, presence-saturated, everything-is-worship character of the eternal life that the unmediated divine presence produces. In the eternal state, the entire life of the glorified community is worship, not merely the specifically designated acts of praise and prayer but the whole, integrated, Spirit-filled, redeemed-and-glorified existence of those who live in the perpetual awareness of the divine glory, serve in the perpetual service of the divine King, see in the perpetual vision of the divine face, and bear in their permanent identity the divine name. The distinction between sacred and secular, the distinction that the present age maintains because the present age's sin-mediated, Spirit-enabled-but-limited relationship with God prevents the whole life from being the whole worship, is permanently transcended in the eternal state's unmediated, all-encompassing, face-to-face divine presence.

VII. The Pastoral Power of the Eschatological Hope

The Present Sufferings Made Bearable and Every Sacrifice Made Worthwhile

A. Romans 8:18 and the Proportionality That Sustains

Romans 8:18's declaration, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (NASB 1995), is the specific, proportionality-establishing, suffering-contextualizing word that the doctrine of glorification provides for every dimension of the present-age Christian

life. The “not worthy to be compared” is Paul’s considered judgment (logizmai, the deliberate, rational, weighing-of-evidence verb) based on the specific, eschatological content of the glory that is to be revealed. He has weighed the sufferings against the glory, and the conclusion is not merely that the glory is greater than the sufferings but that the comparison itself is inadequate, the two are not in the same category.

The pastoral force of the Romans 8:18 proportionality is not the dismissal of the present suffering’s reality (the verse names the sufferings before contextualizing them), nor the implication that the present suffering should be endured without complaint (the same passage allows the creation and the believers and the Spirit to groan). It is the specific, eschatologically-grounded, perspective-providing word that places the specific, real, personally-experienced suffering of the present age within the horizon of the eschatological glory that the suffering is moving toward. The suffering is real; the glory is incomparably more real; and the specific, individual, personally-experienced suffering of the present age is the seed from which the specific, individual, personally-received glory of the eternal state will be raised. Every suffering endured in faith is a seed sown toward the harvest of the glory that is to be revealed.

B. The Amillennial Perspective on the Consummation

The lesson’s outline notes the amillennial perspective on the eschatological consummation: Christ’s return brings the consummation of all things, not a millennial earthly reign intervening between the present age and the eternal state, but the immediate and permanent inauguration of the eternal state at the day of Christ’s appearing. The amillennial reading understands the millennium of Revelation 20 as the present, spiritual reign of Christ with His saints (those who have died and are reigning with Him in the intermediate state) during the period between His first and second advents, the “thousand years” being the symbolic expression of the complete, divinely-governed period between the advents rather than a literal future thousand-year earthly reign.

The specific, eschatological outcome is the same for every evangelical eschatological view: the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the eternal state of the new heavens and the new earth. The amillennial perspective simply affirms that these final events occur in sequence at the day of Christ’s appearing, without an intervening earthly millennium: the resurrection, the judgment, and the eternal state follow immediately upon the second advent. The pastoral import of this perspective is the directness of the present-age Christian life’s orientation toward the eternal state: the believer’s hope is not primarily for an improved earthly existence in a future millennium but for the immediate, permanent, eternal-state expression of the new creation that the second advent will inaugurate.

C. The Doctrine of Glorification and the Present-Age Life

The cumulative pastoral power of Unit 11’s doctrine of glorification, the glorification of the individual believer, the resurrection of the body, and the new heavens and new earth, is the specific, eschatologically-grounded transformation of the entire character of the present-age Christian life. The believer who genuinely inhabits the eschatological hope that these lessons have described is the believer whose present-age experience of the Christian life is fundamentally different from the believer whose eschatological horizon is thin, vague, or non-existent. The sufferings are bearable because they are not the final word. The sacrifices are worthwhile because the God who will wipe every tear has seen every sacrifice and will honor every one of them in the glory that is to be revealed. The progressive sanctification’s slow pace is sustainable because the glorification that will complete

it in an eschatological instant is as certain as the character of the God who has already glorified every foreknown person in the past tense of the divine purpose.

Revelation 21:5's "Behold, I am making all things new" is the present progressive declaration of the God who sits on the throne, the One whose creative power is not exhausted by the first creation and whose redemptive purpose is not exhausted by the partial, progressive, present-age renewal of the sanctification. He is making all things new. Not some things, not the spiritual things while leaving the material things permanently unredeemed. All things. The body that will be raised. The creation that will be renewed. The relationships that death has interrupted. The tears that the present age has produced. The suffering that the fall introduced into the very good creation. Every curse, every death, every mourning, every cry of pain. All things new. And the present-age believer who lives in the specific, biblically-grounded, eschatologically-calibrated assurance of this declaration is the believer whose present-age sufferings are borne in the specific, patient, Spirit-sustained, eschatologically-hopeful posture that the Romans 8:18 proportionality and the 2 Corinthians 4:17 "eternal weight of glory" together establish: this present-age "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (NASB 1995).

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3–4, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

New Heavens and New Earth	The eschatological renewal and glorification of the entire created order that God’s redemptive purpose has always been aimed at, described in Isaiah 65:17–25; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21–22. Distinguished from: annihilation-and-replacement (the creation is not destroyed and replaced but renewed and glorified) and from a purely spiritual eternal existence (the new creation is genuinely physical, the glorified community is embodied, and the divine dwelling is in the midst of the renewed creation). The new heavens and new earth are the creation made qualitatively new (<i>kainos</i> , not <i>neos</i>), the fulfillment of the original very good creation’s eschatological potential under the unhindered governance of the God who created it, the Son who redeemed it, and the Spirit who renews it.
Kainos vs. Neos	Two Greek words for “new,” carrying different nuances. <i>Neos</i> : new in the sense of recently produced, chronologically new, something that did not previously exist. <i>Kainos</i> : new in the sense of qualitatively renewed, freshly transformed, brought to a new level of quality and freshness. Revelation 21:1’s use of <i>kainos</i> (“a new heaven and a new earth”) rather than <i>neos</i> suggests the qualitative renewal and transformation of what existed rather than the creation of something entirely different, the present heaven and earth made qualitatively new, renewed and purified and glorified, consistent with the renovation interpretation of the eternal state. The same <i>kainos</i> is used for the new covenant (Luke 22:20), the new commandment (John 13:34), the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2).
Tabernacling Presence	The eschatological expression of the divine dwelling in the midst of the covenant community, described in Revelation 21:3 (“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them”). The tabernacling presence traces the canonical progression of the divine dwelling: the Eden garden-sanctuary, the Mosaic tabernacle and its Most Holy Place, the Solomonic temple, the divine glory’s temporary departure (Ezekiel 10–11), the eschatological return (Ezekiel 43), the incarnation as the supreme tabernacling (“The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us”, John 1:14), the Spirit’s present indwelling of the believing community (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19–20), and the eternal state’s unmediated, permanent, face-to-face dwelling of the triune God in the midst of the new creation.
Beatific Vision in Eternity	The permanent, ongoing, face-to-face seeing of the divine glory that Revelation 22:4 describes as the defining condition of the eternal state: “They will see His face.” The beatific vision in eternity is the permanent condition that 1 John 3:2’s “we will see Him just as He is” describes as the content and mechanism of the final transformation. Distinct from the present age’s mediated, Spirit-enabled, partial apprehension of the divine glory (2 Corinthians 3:18’s “beholding as in a mirror”) and even from the transformation-producing beatific vision of the parousia (1 John 3:2): in the eternal state, the seeing is permanent, ongoing, unmediated, and the source of the eternal life’s continuous joy and worship. The God whom Moses was not permitted to see face to face is the God whose face the redeemed community will see permanently in the eternal state.
Absence of the Curse	The permanent, complete removal of every consequence of the fall in the new creation, declared in Revelation 22:3 (“There will no longer be any curse”). The curse of Genesis 3:14–19 introduced specific, creation-distorting consequences: the enmity between the serpent and the woman’s seed, the pain of childbirth, the distortion of the husband-wife relationship, the futile toil against the ground’s resistance, and the ultimate return of the body to the dust. The absence of the curse is the comprehensive reversal of all of these: no more thorns and thistles, no more painful toil, no more mortality, no more enmity, no more distorted relationships, the whole-creation, whole-person, permanently-comprehensive removal of everything the fall introduced. The new creation is not merely the current creation with its

	sufferings mitigated; it is the current creation with its fall-consequences permanently and without remainder removed.
Eternal Service and Reign	The specific, active, purposeful, King-centered activities of the glorified community in the eternal state, described in Revelation 22:3–5: “His bond-servants will serve Him... they will reign forever and ever.” The eternal state is not the passive, featureless, static rest of popular imagination but the active, joyful, creatively-expressed, eternally-unfolding service and co-regency of the glorified community in the new creation. The bond-servant’s service is the freely-offered, identity-expressing, King-directed service of those who have been redeemed to belong to the One they serve. The reigning forever and ever is the eschatological fulfillment of the image of God’s vice-regency, the restoration and glorification of the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26–28) in the permanent, sin-free, Spirit-empowered, face-to-face-presence-of-the-King condition of the eternal state.
Amillennialism	The eschatological view that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is not a literal future earthly reign of Christ but the symbolic expression of the complete, divinely-governed period between Christ’s first and second advents, during which Christ reigns at the Father’s right hand and those who have died in Christ reign with Him in the intermediate state. The amillennial view holds that Christ’s return brings the immediate and permanent inauguration of the eternal state: the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth follow immediately upon the second advent without an intervening earthly millennium. The term was coined by critics (meaning “no millennium”) but is better understood as inaugurated millennialism: the millennium has already begun at the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Held by Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster Confession tradition.
Romans 8:18 Proportionality	Paul’s considered judgment in Romans 8:18 (“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us”) that the present-age sufferings and the eschatological glory are not in the same category of comparison. The logizomai (“I consider”) is the deliberate, rational, evidence-weighting verb of Paul’s theological conclusion: having weighed the sufferings against the glory, the conclusion is that the comparison itself is inadequate. The glory is not merely greater than the sufferings; it is in a different category. The pastoral force: not the dismissal of the present suffering’s reality but the specific, eschatologically-grounded, perspective-providing word that places the real sufferings within the horizon of the incomparably greater glory that is to be revealed.
All Things New	The divine declaration in Revelation 21:5 (“Behold, I am making all things new”) that the eternal state is the comprehensive, not the partial, renewal of the creation. The present progressive tense (“am making”) establishes the new creation as the active, ongoing, divine work of the One who sits on the throne. The scope (“all things”) is comprehensive: not some things (not merely the spiritual dimension of the creation while the material is left permanently unredeemed), not new things (the replacement of what existed with entirely different entities), but all things new (the comprehensive, qualitative renewal of the entire creation). The declaration is the eschatological expression of the same creative power and the same redemptive intention that spoke the original creation into existence, sustained it through the fall, redeemed it through the cross, and will complete the redemption at the day of Christ’s appearing.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the eternal state is specifically, irreducibly, and joyfully material, not the soul's escape from the creation into a purely spiritual existence but the redemption and renewal of the creation itself, the new heavens and new earth in which the glorified, embodied, redeemed community inhabits the permanent presence of the God who made the creation very good and who will make it all things new. The popular but theologically deficient picture of the eternal state as disembodied souls floating in a featureless spiritual cloud is not the Christian hope; the Christian hope is the new creation of Revelation 21–22, Isaiah 65–66, and Romans 8:19–21, the renewed, glorified, curse-free, God-inhabited, face-to-face-presence-filled, eternally-active, joyfully-worshipping, creatively-serving eternal home of the redeemed in the renewed creation.

We must believe that the Romans 8:18 proportionality is a genuine theological claim about the specific relationship between the present sufferings and the eschatological glory, not a pious wish or a religious comfort formula but the apostolically-grounded, eschatologically-calibrated, evidence-based conclusion that the glory that is to be revealed to us is not in the same category of comparison as the sufferings of the present time. This means that every present suffering, however severe and however prolonged, is the seed from which the eschatological glory will be raised; that the eternal weight of glory that 2 Corinthians 4:17 describes is genuinely the product of the “momentary, light affliction” that is producing it; and that the present-age suffering, endured in faith, is not wasted but is the specific, divinely-purposed, glory-producing context of the eschatological destiny.

We must believe that the eternal state is genuinely characterized by active, purposeful, eternally-unfolding service and reign rather than by passive, static, featureless existence. The “bond-servants will serve Him... they will reign forever and ever” of Revelation 22:3, 5 is the specific, positive, activity-describing declaration of the eternal life's character. The God who created human beings with the specific, creative, purposeful, governing capacities of the image of God has not designed the eternal state to be the permanent suppression of those capacities but their eschatological liberation and glorification, the fullest, freest, most joyful expression of the serving, reigning, worshipping, creating, governing identity that the image of God always expressed and that sin's bondage always constrained.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Desire the specific, forward-looking, creation-valuing, tear-counting, personally-addressed quality of the Revelation 21:4 hope that God Himself will wipe every tear. Not the generic, impersonal, abstractly-theological version of the eschatological hope but the specific, individually-directed, personally-received version: the God who counts every tear, who sees every suffering, who numbers every hair of the head, will wipe every tear with the same specific, personal, tender, loving attention that the specific, individual, personally-experienced suffering of the specific, individual, personally-known person deserves and will receive. The hope is not merely that the eternal state will be generally better than the present age; it is that the specific, named, personally-experienced suffering of the specific, named, personally-known believer will be specifically, named, personally-addressed by the God who will wipe the tear.

Desire the pastoral capacity to communicate the eschatological hope with the specific, tear-wiping, all-things-new, face-to-face-seeing character that Revelation 21–22 actually describes, not the vague, spiritualized, cloud-

and-harp version that the popular culture has produced and that fails to engage the specific, bodily, relational, creation-encompassing character of the Christian hope. The person who is suffering the most acutely, grieving the most deeply, enduring the most prolonged darkness, and groaning the most earnestly for the redemption of the body needs the specific, personal, detailed, Revelation-21-grounded hope that answers each specific suffering with the specific, eschatological declaration: the tabernacle of God is coming among men; He will dwell among them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death, any mourning, any crying, or any pain.

Desire for yourself and for your congregation the specific, Romans-8:18-calibrated, eschatologically-proportioned perspective on the present-age suffering that sustains the perseverance of the saints through the specific, prolonged, sometimes severe sufferings of the Christian life. The believer whose eschatological horizon is thin, vague, or non-existent bears the present sufferings without the specific, proportionality-establishing, perspective-providing word that Paul's I-have-weighed-the-evidence conclusion provides. The believer whose eschatological horizon is richly, specifically, concretely populated with the new heavens and the new earth, the face-to-face seeing of the divine face, the no-more-death-no-more-mourning-no-more-crying-no-more-pain of the eternal state, and the all-things-new of the divine declaration bears the same sufferings with the specific, endurance-enabling, sacrifice-making-worthwhile posture of 2 Corinthians 4:17: this momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Revelation 21:1–22:5 as a continuous vision of the eternal state, attending to both the negative dimensions (what will no longer exist: the sea of chaos, death, mourning, crying, pain, night, the curse) and the positive dimensions (what will characterize the eternal life: the new Jerusalem descending, the divine dwelling, the river of life, the tree of life, the face of God, the divine name on the foreheads, the bond-servants' service, the reigning forever). For each negative elimination: what specific present-age reality does it address, and what specific suffering of the present-age Christian life will be permanently resolved? For each positive provision: what specific dimension of the eternal life does it describe, and what specific present-age longing does it address and fulfill? And how does the cumulative vision of Revelation 21–22 together answer the specific question "Is the eternal state worth the present-age suffering?" with the specific, detailed, eschatologically-concrete "yes"?
- Read Romans 8:19–25 as Paul's account of the cosmic, creation-encompassing scope of the eschatological hope. Note the three groanings: creation's anxious longing for the revealing of the sons of God (vv. 19–22), the believers' groaning for the adoption's bodily completion (v. 23), and the Spirit's interceding groaning on behalf of the believers' specific weaknesses (vv. 26–27). For each groaning: what is the specific content of what is awaited, and what is the specific hope that qualifies and sustains the waiting? Ask: how does Paul's account of the creation's own groaning and longing expand the scope of the eschatological hope from the individual believer's personal glorification to the cosmic, all-creation-encompassing renewal that the new heavens and new earth represents? And what specific implications does the creation's own participation in the eschatological waiting have for the present-age stewardship of the creation?
- Read Isaiah 65:17–25 and 2 Peter 3:10–13 as the Old Testament and New Testament accounts of the new creation that Revelation 21–22 fulfills. For Isaiah 65: what specific, earthly, concrete details characterize the new creation (houses built and inhabited, vineyards planted and eaten, no more infant mortality, the wolf and lamb feeding together, the lion eating straw)? What does the concrete, earthly, creation-involving character of Isaiah's new creation vision suggest about the specifically material and physical character of

the eternal state? For 2 Peter 3: what is the specific process Peter describes (the present heavens and earth kept for fire, the elements destroyed, the new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells), and how does the purifying-fire image support the renovation interpretation rather than the annihilation-and-replacement interpretation?

- Meditate specifically on Revelation 22:4's declaration: "They will see His face." Trace the biblical progression of the divine face's hiddenness and progressive disclosure: Moses' request to see the divine glory (Exodus 33:18–23) and the divine answer ("You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live"); the high priest's once-a-year entrance behind the veil; the incarnation as the divine condescension in which the glory was veiled in flesh; the Spirit's present indwelling as the Spirit's presence within rather than the face-to-face encounter; and the eternal state's permanent, unmediated, face-to-face seeing. Ask: what does the progressive disclosure of the divine face across the canon suggest about the directionality of the entire redemptive history? And what specific difference would it make in your present-age relationship with God, your prayer, your worship, your daily walk, if the specific, permanent, face-to-face divine presence of Revelation 22:4 were more vividly operative in your consciousness as the destination toward which the whole journey is moving?
- Write a brief, personally-grounded reflection (one to two pages) on the specific dimension of the new heavens and new earth that most directly addresses the specific suffering or longing of your current season of Christian life. The reflection should be: (1) theologically grounded (connected to specific texts from this lesson's key texts), (2) personally honest (naming the specific suffering or longing rather than speaking in abstractions), (3) eschatologically specific (connecting the specific present-age suffering to the specific eschatological provision that addresses it), and (4) doxological (ending in the specific praise of the God who is making all things new and whose promise is as certain as His character). Share the reflection with your study group as the pastoral distillation of the eschatological hope for your own current season.

Key Texts: Revelation 21:1–7; 22:1–5; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Isaiah 65:17–25; 66:22; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Genesis 3:14–19; Numbers 6:24–26

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging this lesson's content, what is your most vivid and specific picture of the eternal state? Is it primarily negative (the absence of what the present age produces: no more death, pain, sin) or primarily positive (the presence of what the eternal life provides: the divine face, the new creation, the active service and reign)? And which of the specific features of the new creation described in this lesson, the tabernacling presence, the face-to-face vision, the absence of the curse, the active service and reign, the all-things-new renewal of the creation, do you find most unexpected, most hope-producing, or most directly relevant to the specific sufferings and longings of your current Christian life?

Observation Questions (*What Do the Texts Say?*)

- Read Revelation 21:1–27. In verse 1, what are the three features of the new creation (new heaven, new earth, no sea)? In verse 2, what descends from heaven, and how is it described? In verse 3, what is the specific, covenant-fulfillment declaration about the divine dwelling? In verse 4, what four realities of the present age are permanently eliminated? In verse 5, what does the One on the throne declare, and how does He establish the trustworthiness of the declaration (v. 5b)? In verse 6, what does the throne-voice call Himself (“I am the Alpha and the Omega...”) and what does He promise to give freely (“I will give to the one who thirsts...”) In verse 7, what is the inheritance-promise (“he who overcomes will inherit these things”) and what is the covenant-relationship declaration (“I will be his God and he will be My son”)?
- Read Revelation 22:1–5. In verses 1–2, what specific features of the new creation's life are described (river of the water of life, tree of life, fruit, leaves), and what is the purpose of the leaves (“for the healing of the nations”)? In verse 3, what is absent (“there will no longer be any curse”) and what characterizes the bond-servants' activity (“will serve Him”)? In verse 4, what are the two marks of the eternal state's identification with God (“they will see His face... His name will be on their foreheads”)? In verse 5, what is absent (“there will be no night there”), what replaces the absent light source (“the Lord God will illumine them”), and what is the duration of the reigning (“they will reign forever and ever”)? And how do the Eden-imagery elements of Revelation 22 (river, tree of life) establish the new creation as the fulfillment of the original creation's eschatological potential?
- Read Romans 8:18–25. In verse 18, what are the two realities Paul is comparing (the sufferings of this present time vs. the glory that is to be revealed) and what is his verdict about the comparison? In verses 19–21, what is the creation's current condition (subjection to futility, slavery to corruption), what is it eagerly waiting for (the revealing of the sons of God), and what is its destiny (set free into the freedom of the glory of the children of God)? In verses 22–23, what and who are groaning, and what is the specific content of the believers' groaning (“waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body”)? In verses 24–25, how does Paul describe the character of the hope (“hope that is seen is not hope...”), and what does he commend as the appropriate present-age posture (“with perseverance we wait eagerly...”)?
- Read 2 Peter 3:3–13. In verses 5–6, what historical precedent does Peter cite for the present heavens and earth's transformation? In verses 7–10, what is the specific process Peter describes for the present creation's transformation? In verse 11, what present-age implication does Peter draw from the eschatological expectation (“what sort of people ought you to be”)? In verses 12–13, what are the two actions Peter calls the readers to (hastening and looking for the day of God), and what is the content of the

hope (“new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells”)? How does the purifying-fire image of 2 Peter 3:10–12 support the renovation interpretation (the creation is purified and renewed) rather than the annihilation-and-replacement interpretation?

- Read Isaiah 65:17–25. What specific, concrete, earthly features characterize the new creation that Isaiah describes? Note the references to people building houses and living in them, planting vineyards and eating their fruit, the changed relationships between predator and prey animals (wolf and lamb, lion and straw), and the absence of harm. How do these specific, earthly, creation-involving details support the renovation interpretation of the new creation? And how does the specific reference to “my holy mountain” (v. 25) establish the new creation as the fulfillment of the Zion-temple tradition’s expectation of the divine dwelling in the midst of the renewed creation?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents the renovation interpretation (the new creation is the qualitative renewal of the present creation rather than its annihilation and replacement) as the preferred reading, grounding it in the use of *kainos* rather than *neos* in Revelation 21:1 and the broader canonical testimony. Evaluate the adequacy of the renovation interpretation for the most challenging text on the other side: 2 Peter 3:10–12’s description of the heavens being dissolved with intense heat and the elements melting. Does the purifying-fire analogy with the flood (vv. 5–6) adequately support the renovation interpretation, or does the language of dissolution and melting require the annihilation interpretation? And what theological and pastoral difference does the choice between the two interpretations make for the character of the eschatological hope?
- The lesson presents Revelation 21:3’s “the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them” as the eschatological fulfillment of the entire covenant history’s dwelling promises. Evaluate the adequacy of this covenant-fulfillment account. How does the tabernacle-to-temple-to-incarnation-to-Spirit’s-indwelling-to-eternal-state progression establish the eschatological dwelling as the climax and fulfillment of the covenant’s entire dwelling-promise trajectory? And what does the specific, embodied, creation-inhabiting character of the eternal state’s divine dwelling (the tabernacle comes among men; God dwells with His people in the new creation) suggest about the relationship between the divine presence and the created order in the eternal state, is the new creation the divine dwelling’s permanent home, or is the divine dwelling an intrusion into an essentially spiritual existence?
- The lesson presents the eternal state as characterized by active, purposeful service and reign rather than passive, static existence. Evaluate the theological adequacy of this account. Does the “bond-servants will serve Him” of Revelation 22:3 establish a specific, identifiable character for the eternal life’s activity, or is it deliberately general, simply affirming that the eternal life involves active engagement without specifying what form that engagement takes? And how does the “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard” of 1 Corinthians 2:9 establish the appropriate epistemic humility about the eternal state’s specific, positive content while still affirming the active, joyful, purposeful character of the eternal life that Revelation 22 describes?
- The lesson includes the amillennial perspective on the eschatological consummation. Evaluate the amillennial reading of Revelation 20’s millennium as the symbolic expression of the current, spiritual reign of Christ during the inter-advent period, with the second advent bringing the immediate and permanent inauguration of the eternal state. What are the strongest exegetical arguments for the amillennial reading? What are the strongest objections (from premillennial or other perspectives)? And regardless of the specific

millennial position, what is the irreducible common ground of all evangelical eschatological views with respect to the eternal state, what do all evangelical views affirm about the ultimate destination of the redeemed that is not in dispute across the millennial debate?

- The lesson presents Romans 8:18's "not worthy to be compared" as the apostolically-grounded, evidence-based, proportionality-establishing verdict on the relationship between the present-age sufferings and the eschatological glory. Evaluate the pastoral adequacy of this proportionality for the most acute forms of present-age suffering. Does the promise of the eschatological glory make present suffering bearable in a way that is pastorally honest (not dismissing the suffering's reality) rather than pastorally hollow (using the eschatological promise to bypass the genuine engagement with the present suffering)? And how does the groaning of Romans 8:23, Paul's acknowledgment that the present-age suffering produces genuine groaning even in those who possess the Spirit's first fruits, prevent the Romans 8:18 proportionality from becoming a form of spiritual bypass that fails to honor the genuine pain of the present-age experience?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the believer whose eschatological horizon is richly, specifically, concretely populated with the new heavens and the new earth bears the present-age sufferings differently from the believer whose eschatological horizon is thin, vague, or non-existent. Evaluate the current quality of your congregation's eschatological horizon: how specifically, how concretely, and how regularly does your preaching, teaching, and pastoral care engage the positive, detailed, creation-encompassing, face-to-face-presence-featuring character of the new creation? What specific changes in your preaching calendar, your pastoral counseling, or your congregation's devotional life would most effectively deepen and enrich the eschatological horizon that the teaching of Revelation 21–22, Romans 8:18–25, and Isaiah 65–66 together provide?
- The lesson presents the wiping of every tear as the specific, personal, individually-addressed divine answer to every tear that the fall's consequences have produced. Think of the person in your pastoral care who is currently shedding the most tears, whose specific, named, personally-experienced suffering is most acute. What specific, named, personally-experienced tear does Revelation 21:4's "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes" address for this specific person? How would you communicate the specific, personal, individually-addressed character of the eschatological promise, not the generic "there will be no more pain" but the specific, named, tear-addressing declaration of the God who will wipe that tear, to this specific person in a way that is both theologically accurate and pastorally warm?
- The lesson notes the amillennial perspective's implication that the present-age Christian life is oriented directly toward the eternal state rather than toward an intervening earthly millennium. Evaluate the motivational and pastoral implications of this orientation. Does the direct orientation toward the eternal state, without the expectation of an improved but still-imperfect earthly age before the final state, produce a different quality of present-age hope and perseverance than the premillennial orientation? And what specific pastoral advantage does the amillennial perspective's direct, eternal-state-oriented eschatology provide for those whose suffering is most acute and whose patience with the present age's unredeemed character is most tested?
- The lesson presents the eternal service and reign of Revelation 22:3, 5 as the eschatological fulfillment of the image of God's creative, purposeful, governing capacities. Evaluate the present-age implications of the eternal-state's active character. If the eternal state is characterized by active service, creative engagement, and the unfolding governance of the new creation, then the present-age development and stewardship of

the God-given capacities, the cultivation of wisdom, the exercise of creativity, the responsible governance of the creation entrusted to us, is preparation for and anticipation of the eschatological service and reign. How does this account of the eternal state's active character motivate the present-age development of the capacities that the image of God expresses? And what specific present-age stewardship of the capacities you have been given most directly expresses the conviction that the eternal life will be the liberation and glorification of those same capacities in the service of the King?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time by reading Revelation 21:1–5 slowly, as the most comprehensive single vision of the eternal destination of the redeemed community and the renewed creation. Let each element of the vision land as a specific, personally-addressed declaration of the God who sits on the throne: the new heaven and the new earth (the creation you inhabit, renewed and glorified beyond imagination), the new Jerusalem coming down (the divine dwelling moving toward you, not you escaping to a purely spiritual realm), the tabernacle of God among men (God coming to dwell in the midst of the renewed creation, permanently, without mediation, without veil), the wiping of every tear (specific, personal, named, individually-addressed), the elimination of death and mourning and crying and pain (the specific, fall-introduced, personally-experienced consequences permanently removed), and the “Behold, I am making all things new” (the present progressive declaration of the God whose creative power has not been exhausted and whose redemptive purpose is not finished).

Pray the specific, eschatological hope over the specific, present-age suffering of each member of your congregation by name. For the person who is most burdened by physical illness: “Father, You are making all things new. This body will be raised imperishable. The suffering that this specific illness is producing will be permanently answered by the resurrection body’s imperishable power.” For the person who is most burdened by grief: “Father, the tear that [name] is shedding today is not unnoticed. You will wipe it. Every one. With the specific, personal, loving-Father attention of the One who has counted every hair of the head and numbered every tear in Your bottle.” For the person who is most burdened by the apparent futility of the present-age toil: “Father, the creation itself is groaning for the revealing of the sons of God. The work that [name] is doing in Your name is not futile; it is the service that the eternal-state bond-servant is rehearsing in the present age toward the eternal reign that You have appointed.

Pray Romans 8:18’s proportionality as the corporate, eschatologically-calibrated declaration of the congregation’s shared faith: “Father, we consider, we have weighed the evidence, we have looked at the sufferings of the present time and at the glory that is to be revealed, and our conclusion is Paul’s: the sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory. Not because the sufferings are not real, not because the pain is not acute, not because the grief is not genuine and deep and personally devastating. But because the glory is in a different category. Because the all-things-new of Your declaration exceeds the capacity of our present-age imagination. Because the face we will see is the face that no present-age suffering can permanently obscure. And because the God who is making all things new has already, in the past tense of the divine certainty, glorified every one whom He has foreknown, called, and justified. We are on our way. The destination is certain. And the glory that awaits is not worthy to be compared with the sufferings of this present time.”

Pray specifically for the congregation’s eschatological orientation, for the specific, richly-detailed, concretely-populated eschatological horizon that the teaching of this lesson has been aimed at providing. Ask the Spirit to move the congregation from the thin, vague, cloud-and-harp eschatology of the popular imagination to the specific, material, creation-renewing, face-seeing, curse-reversing, tear-wiping, all-things-new eschatology of Revelation 21–22. Ask for the specific pastoral courage to preach the new creation’s positive content with the specificity and the joy that the text actually warrants, not the apologetic, hedged, “we don’t really know what the eternal state will be like” that fails the congregation’s need for the specific hope, but the bold, text-grounded,

doxologically-expressed, “this is what the God who sits on the throne has declared” proclamation of the eternal home.

Close with Revelation 22:4–5 as the congregation’s shared, doxological, forward-looking declaration of the destination toward which the entire journey has been moving: “They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads... they will reign forever and ever.” Let the “they will see His face” be received as the specific, personally-addressed, face-to-face-promised, veil-permanently-removed declaration of the eternal home’s defining feature. The God whom Moses was not permitted to see face to face is the God whose face the redeemed community will see permanently, without mediation, without veil, without the limitations that the present age interposes between the creature and the divine glory. This is what you are groaning toward. This is what the Spirit’s first fruits are pledging. This is the harvest that the first fruits guarantee. This is the all-things-new toward which every present-age suffering and every present-age seed is moving. He will wipe every tear. His face will be seen. His name will be on the foreheads. And the redeemed will reign with Him forever and ever. Come, Lord Jesus.

“And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.””

Revelation 21:5, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Revelation 21:1–7; 22:1–5; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Isaiah 65:17–25; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Numbers 6:24–26

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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