The Big Picture

GOD IN THE CENTER FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

New Creation: His Glory Forever

Over the past several weeks, we have been taking a closer look at the four major movements of the biblical story: **Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation.**

In **Creation: Created for Him**, we saw a world created by God, through God, and for God, a Creation that displays His glory and points to its Creator.

Then came the Fall.

In **Glory Exchanged**, we watched humanity refuse to honor God as God. Instead of worshiping the Creator, humanity exchanged His glory and worshiped the creature.

But God did not abandon His purpose.

In **Redemption: To the Praise of His Glory**, we turned to Ephesians 1 and saw God acting according to His purpose through Jesus Christ. Redemption begins with God, is accomplished through Christ, and leads again and again to one great refrain: "to the praise of his glory."

Creation. Fall. Redemption. But redemption is not the end of the story.

There is still death. There is still suffering. Creation still bears the effects of the Fall. God's people still wait for the day when He will bring what He has promised to completion.

And that brings us to the final movement of the biblical story: **New Creation.**

For this movement, we are going to the final chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21-22.

And as we do, we are going to discover that the ending of the Bible has much more in common with its beginning than we might expect. Some of the things we encountered in the opening chapters of Genesis will appear again. Some things that were lost will be restored. And promises and purposes that have unfolded throughout Scripture will finally reach fulfillment.

We are going to approach these chapters the same way we have approached the rest of *The Big Picture*. Rather than beginning with everything the New Creation means for us, we are going to look first at God.

What is He doing?

What is He bringing to completion?

And above all: **What does the New Creation reveal about Him?**

Let's begin where John does.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Read Revelation 21:1-8.

The book of Revelation records the revelation Jesus Christ gave to John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. John repeatedly sees visions of things far beyond what he could see with ordinary human eyes. He sees the throne room of heaven, God's unfolding judgments, Satan's defeat, and finally the great white throne, where the dead stand before God in judgment.

Then, after all of that, John looks again.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1).

Imagine the scope of what John has been shown. He has watched the judgment of evil and the final defeat of death and Hades. Now the scene changes completely. John sees a new heaven and a new earth.

And with those words, Scripture takes us all the way back to its beginning. Genesis opened with God creating "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Now, near the end of Revelation, John sees "a new heaven and a new earth."

The language invites us to place the beginning and the end of the biblical story side by side. Much happens between them, but the God who created the heavens and the earth in the beginning remains at the center of the story as He brings His purposes to completion at the end.

John then sees the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband (v. 2).

Notice the direction. New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. We often speak of our eternal hope simply as going to heaven, and Scripture does teach that believers who die are with Christ. But that is not the final scene of the biblical story. John looks beyond death to the final state after the resurrection and judgment, and what he sees is not God's people leaving Creation behind.

He sees New Jerusalem coming down from God into the New Creation. The Bible began with God dwelling with humanity in the Creation He made, and now, as the story approaches its end, God will once again dwell with His people in the new Creation He has made.

And that is what John hears next as a loud voice announces: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (v. 3).

This is where John's description begins to reveal just how completely God will make all things new. He will dwell with His people. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no more mourning, crying, or pain, “for the former things have passed away” (v. 4).

Then the One seated on the throne speaks: “Behold, I am making all things new” (v. 5).

The words are “trustworthy and true” because of the One who speaks them. He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (v. 6). The God who was there in the beginning is the God who brings the story to its completion.

As the vision continues, John is shown the New Jerusalem in greater detail. There, the theme we have followed throughout *The Big Picture* comes into full view.

The glory of God.

Filled with His Glory

Read Revelation 21:9-27; Exodus 25:8-9; 40:34-38; and 1 Kings 8:6-13.

Here, John is carried away in the Spirit and shown the holy city, New Jerusalem, in greater detail. And almost immediately, he draws our attention to its glory:

“having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:11).

The city has the glory of God.

That should sound familiar.

God's glory and His dwelling presence have been connected throughout the biblical story. When God instructed Israel to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, He explained its purpose:

“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25:8).

The tabernacle was not simply a place for Israel to worship. It was the place God chose to dwell among His people. And when the work was finished, God's presence was unmistakable:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34).

The same pattern appeared again when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. The priests brought the ark of the covenant into the Most Holy Place, and when they came out, the house was filled with a cloud.

“And the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:11).

The glory of God filled the tabernacle.

The glory of God filled the temple.

Both pointed to the same remarkable reality: the holy God had chosen to dwell among His people.

God Dwelling with His People

Read John 1:14; 14:16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; and Revelation 21:22-23.

But God's dwelling presence among His people did not end with the tabernacle or the temple. Centuries later, John would use language that takes us directly back to that same theme when he wrote about Jesus Christ:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The word John uses for “dwelt” carries the idea of pitching a tent or tabernacling among us. The God who had revealed His presence among Israel in the tabernacle had now come near in an even more remarkable way. The eternal Word became flesh and lived among us, and John immediately connects His dwelling with glory: “we have seen his glory.”

Once again, dwelling and glory appear together. But now God's glory is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The Son did not merely point people toward God's presence. In Him, God had come to dwell among us.

And even after Jesus returned to the Father, God's dwelling presence with His people did not disappear. Before His crucifixion, Jesus promised His disciples that the Father would give them another Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would be with them and “in” them (John 14:16-17).

Paul later describes what this means for God's people. In Ephesians 2, he pictures believers being joined together into a holy temple in the Lord:

“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

Paul's language brings the temple theme forward in an important way. God's people themselves are now being built together as His dwelling place through the Spirit. The presence of God that had been associated with the tabernacle and temple is no longer confined to a particular sanctuary.

Yet John's final vision takes us beyond every earthly sanctuary and brings this theme to its culmination. New Jerusalem is the dwelling place of God with humanity, filled with His glory. But when John describes the city itself, he tells us something remarkable:

“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Revelation 21:22).

The significance is not merely that the New Jerusalem has no temple. It is that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. What the tabernacle and temple anticipated has reached its fulfillment: God dwelling with His people in the fullness of His presence.

And then John looks at the city itself and notices something else: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Revelation 21:23).

John does not say that the sun and moon no longer exist. He says that the city has no need of them to shine on it. Why? Because the glory of God gives it light.

This takes us back once more to the beginning. In Genesis 1, God created the lights in the heavens to give light upon the earth (Genesis 1:14-18). But here, in the New Creation, the city does not depend upon those created lights for its illumination. The glory belongs to the Creator, and His glory gives the city its light.

And notice that John does not separate the Father from the Son in this glorious scene. The glory of God gives the city light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The Lamb through whom God accomplished our redemption stands at the very center of the New Creation.

This is where the glory thread we have been following through these four movements reaches its climax.

In Creation, **God's glory was revealed.**

In the Fall, **God's glory was exchanged.**

In Redemption, everything God accomplished through Christ was **“to the praise of his glory.”**

And now, in the New Creation, **the glory of God gives it light.**

Humanity's rejection of God's glory did not diminish it. The glory Creation declared has never ceased to belong to its Creator, and the redemption God accomplished through Christ has been moving the story toward this moment. God remains glorious, worthy of worship, and the Creator to whom all things belong.

In the New Creation there is no exchange, no rival, and no created thing receiving the worship that belongs to the Creator. God is there in all His glory, and the Lamb is its lamp.

From Eden to Eternity

Read Genesis 2:8-10; 3:22-24; and Revelation 22:1-5.

As John's vision continues into Scripture's final chapter, the connections to the beginning of the Bible become even more evident. John sees “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1).

And there, on either side of the river, is something we have not seen since the opening chapters of Genesis: the tree of life.

The tree of life stood in Eden (Genesis 2:9). But after humanity sinned, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden, and God guarded the way to the tree “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22).

Now, in the final chapter of the Bible, the tree appears again. But this time, the way is no longer barred. The river of life flows from the throne, the tree of life stands beside it bearing its fruit, and John tells us, “No longer will there be anything accursed” (Revelation 22:3).

Those words take us directly back to the curse that followed humanity's rebellion in Genesis. Death is gone. The separation that began when humanity was driven from Eden is gone. What sin brought into God's Creation will not have the final word. God will.

And at the center of it all is “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (v. 3). His servants worship Him, and then John gives us one of the most extraordinary statements in the entire vision:

“They will see his face” (v. 4).

Here the story reaches its consummation. God's people are with Him, worshiping Him and seeing His face. And John gives us one final picture of the glory that fills the New Creation:

“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (v. 5).

There is no darkness, no curse, no death, and no separation from God. There is only the God who sits upon the throne, the Lamb, His redeemed people, and the light of His glorious presence.

And that brings us back to where *The Big Picture* began.

Living in Light of His Glory

If this is where the biblical story is going, it should change how we live within that story now.

Revelation gives us a glimpse of the day when there will be no rival for our worship, no curse, no death, and no separation from God's presence. His servants will worship Him. They will see His face. The Lord God will be their light.

We are not there yet. We still live in a world where people exchange the glory of the Creator for created things, where those created things compete for our attention and affection, and where suffering and death are still painfully real.

But we know where the story is going. And because we do, we can begin living now with our hearts directed toward the One who will be at the center then.

That means learning to see created things as gifts rather than gods. It means refusing to give anything God has made the worship that belongs to Him alone. It means trusting Him when we cannot yet see the completion of what He has promised. And it means worshiping Him now as the God we will worship forever.

The New Creation gives us hope, but even our hope ultimately points beyond what God will give us to God Himself.

The greatest promise at the end of the Bible is not simply that suffering will end, death will disappear, or paradise will be restored.

It is this: “They will see his face.”

The God who is at the center of the biblical story will be at the center of eternity.

And if He will be at the center, then He should be at the center of our lives now.

The Big Picture

We began this closer look at the biblical story with Creation. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Before anything else existed, there was God. Creation came from Him, exists through Him, and was created for Him. The heavens declared His glory, and everything He made pointed beyond itself to its Creator.

Then humanity exchanged that glory.

Rather than honoring God as God, humanity turned from the Creator to the creature. Sin distorted what God had made, brought death into the world, and alienated humanity from the God for whom we were created. But the Creator did not abandon His purpose. God acted.

Through Jesus Christ, He accomplished redemption according to the purpose of His will. In Christ we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of our trespasses. And throughout Ephesians 1, we heard the purpose of God echoed again and again: “to the praise of his glory.”

And now we have reached the end.

The curse is gone.

Death is gone.

The tree of life is there.

God dwells with His people.

They see His face.

And the glory humanity once exchanged now fills the New Creation with light.

From the first words of Genesis to the final vision of Revelation, God has remained at the center.

He is the Creator in the beginning.

He is the holy God against whom humanity rebelled.

He is the God who acted to redeem through Jesus Christ.

He is the One seated on the throne who declares, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

And when the story reaches its glorious consummation, His people will dwell with Him, worship Him, see His face, and live forever in the light of His glory.

The Bible is one unified story.

And it is not ultimately our story.

It is His.

That is why we began *The Big Picture* with one question that has guided us from the beginning: **What does this reveal about God?**

Creation revealed His power, wisdom, goodness, and glory.

The Fall revealed the seriousness of rejecting the Creator and giving His glory to what He made.

Redemption revealed the God who acts according to His purpose and grace to redeem through His Son.

And New Creation reveals the God who is faithful to bring His purposes to completion, who makes all things new, who dwells forever with His people, and whose glory gives the New Creation its light.

The Bible begins: **"In the beginning, God..."**

And when we reach the end, He is still there.

Still at the center.

Still on the throne.

Still glorious.

And forever worthy of all worship and praise.

This is His story.

This is His glory.

This is The Big Picture.