

THE KINGDOM OF GOD – PART FOUR

The Refiner's Fire, and the New Humanity

- A. This is the final talk in our four-part mini-series on the Kingdom of God. In our last talk, we discussed the renewal of all things. In doing this, we saw two things.
- a. First, God is not going to annihilate this World, and destroy all of our bodies, and then transport our souls to Heaven. This view devalues the goodness of the physical creation and the goodness of our bodies.
 - i. Instead, the Bible insists that the human body matters. It is good and beautiful, and is a fitting home for the human soul.
 - ii. The Bible also insists that the created world matters. It is also good and beautiful, and is a fitting home for the human person.
 - b. Second, we looked at another popular, and somewhat related, error. God is not going to annihilate this World, and then make a New World.
 - i. Instead, the New World will be our own World, this World, thoroughly renovated and rendered incorruptible.
 - c. Now, before moving on, it is important that we stop at this point and address where these popular misunderstandings about the future of our world come from.
 - i. Basically, they come from an uncareful and inaccurate reading of the New Testament.
 - ii. For instance, not appreciating that the book of *Revelation* is a very specific type of literature, Jewish apocalyptic literature, and needs to be approached as such. Not appreciating that it is chock full of highly stylized language and Old Testament allusions in the form of multilayered symbolism. And so instead mistakenly reading it as one long, simplistic, literalistic tale of bizarre and confusing, and sometimes contradictory, events.
 - iii. To get a better sense of how this works, let's take *2 Peter 3:10* as a common example of this type of misreading.
 1. *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.*
 - iv. At first glance, passages like this do seem to describe God destroying this world entirely, by burning it up with fire.
 - v. But folks who have been following along carefully with the curriculum might be aware that there is something deeper going on here. Remember what we discussed earlier, when we discussed the fire that occurred at Pentecost and the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life? We discussed that **fire**, in Scripture, very often communicates a process of purification. In those examples, just like in this case, it has nothing to do with obliteration.
 1. In fact, the Old Testament prophets quite frequently used the image of fire as a way of describing the cleansing of the righteous, and the destruction of evil.
 - a. *But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. Malachi 3:2.*

- b. Notice the similar function of fire to soap there. They purify things, is the idea.
 - c. And in passages such as the one we just read from *2 Peter 3*, the New Testament is reiterating those Old Testament hopes of a future, complete, and final purification of our world.
- 1. In fact, read that entire *2 Peter 3* passage carefully, and look at the surrounding context. You will notice that the overall point being made there is that the future “*destruction*” of the world is not unprecedented, because a *destruction* of the world at the hand of God has occurred once already in the past, back in the days of the flood of Noah. Now, let me ask you, was the world annihilated in the flood of Noah? No. It was purified.
- 2. You will find that very same fire as purification framework in place in *1 Corinthians 3* when it discusses the relationship of the present world with the world that is to come.
 - a. *Their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15*
- 3. When you refine gold in the fire, the junk melts away. And you end up preserving and distilling the good stuff. That is what is going to happen to this World. The bad stuff is going to be destroyed, eliminated. But the good stuff that you fought so hard to do, and the good parts of what you, as a person, have become will all carry forward into the New Creation. And this will result in a radical transformation of our world.
 - a. So, we can see that sadly, these Scriptures which use the metaphor of fire as the destiny of the current creation are often understood in exactly the opposite way that the original authors would have intended!
- d. And this matters very much because our view on this issue will determine what exactly the good news is, that we are going around and telling people.
 - i. Is the good news that this world is headed for the dumpster but you can go off to Heaven when you die if you believe in Jesus? Or, that God is, as we speak, setting everything right?
 - 1. Are we spreading the gospel that God had a wonderful plan that His gorgeous and complex and marvelous physical creation would be ruled by physical human beings but it all simply didn’t work out, so He gave up and moved on?
 - 2. Or are we telling them that everything and everyone God made matters to God? That He loves it all. That on the cross, the rescue of everything began? That He is in the process of winning it back. Piece

- by piece. That we are called to be co-laborers with Him in that process of bringing about New Creation from within this Old Creation.
- ii. You see, the problem with the gospel of obliteration is that, if it is true, so many good things are going to be destroyed, and lost forever.
 1. And the loss of good things is always a tragedy. We need to understand that not all goodness has to do with morality ...with someone doing the right or wrong thing. Instead, things themselves are good. People are good. Joy, pleasure, relationships, and every other positive, uplifting thing are good.
 - a. Actually, the brilliant insight of Augustine was that anything and everything, if you could completely remove the sin and corruption from it, is good. Everything therefore, has value. This means that each and every one of our existences itself is a good thing. Life is good. To be is good. The world would be a poorer place without you. That is why God made you. The world would not be what it is without each and every human and each and every tree and stone and star and bit of laughter and love that it has in it. That was the verdict of *Genesis 1*. *God made everything, and it was good*. Didn't stay so good, but it was made good.
 - b. *Genesis 1* insists that every bit of this world matters. The whole world is sacred. It is all an expression of the goodness of God and a loving manifestation of that goodness for us, His beloved children, to enjoy.
 - c. Which means that not just the churchy and religious stuff but every good thing, every beautiful thing, is worthy of our time and energy. The creation and preservation of any good thing is an act of defiance and a small victory against the destructive and chaotic ruler of this world. It is, all of it, worth fighting for. That's what God did. Came down here and fought for it. At great cost to Himself, saved His whole beautiful physical universe and every good thing in it.
 - iii. How is this for some good news that Christians can go around telling folks...by the providence and power and wisdom of God, no good thing, in the end, is lost? Actually, the Christian good news is even better than that. All those good things, that you so rightly love, are not only being preserved. Even more, they will be, and are being, transformed into something better than they are now. All the yuk is being removed, and the best part of it, the beautiful bright core of what it was really meant to be all along, will be a permanent fixture of the universe. And the same is true for each person who desires for that to be their story.
 - iv. Those two different gospels are two entirely different ways of seeing the meaning of the world and human history. And which of those gospels that you hold to be true, will determine how you will act. How could it not? Because it has to do with a question of what has value. What is worth investing in. What matters.

1. The gospel of obliteration undermines the significance of our lives. If God is going to take a giant eraser, and rub out the entire white board of our world, and start over from scratch, does it really matter, ultimately, in the long run, what we write on that white board?
 2. When we communicate that God is going to erase everything and start over, we communicate that Christianity is inherently escapist, pie-in-the-sky, pessimistic. It makes this world and our lives almost entirely meaningless. The only ultimately important thing would be to get stamped with the barcode, so that when you are scanned you are will be admitted to Creation 2.0. Really, we are all just basically killing time in the meantime. Passive. Waiting around looking up at the sky. For the day that He will destroy the entire universe and hit the cosmic reset button. One of the reasons that our Christian message is so unappealing to society at large is that this unbiblical, unrelenting negativism is often, in subtle but real ways, what is communicated to them.
- v. Here is an application of that principal. A Biblical, wholistic, life-affirming perspective helps us to answer the question “What about environmental concerns?” from a Christian viewpoint.
1. Recall our exploration of the early chapters of Genesis. God’s good creation was put in our care. And it remains our responsibility today.
 2. In exploring this, N.T. Wright gives the following analogy. Say that your artist friend gave you a lovely painting to hang in your home. Even if you knew that she could, and would, come back and fix it all up, it still would be missing the point to use it as a dart board or a serving tray, wouldn’t it?
 - a. We are to be God’s representatives in this World, promoting its flourishing, and stewarding the Earth for future generations.
 - b. And we definitely must concern ourselves with the poor and with people in third world countries, as they are often most affected by our lack of care for the Earth.
 - c. Now, environmental concerns do need to be balanced against all the other concerns of humanity. The decisions are very complicated, with many factors to be considered. So, there is wisdom in all of this that is required. But the beauty and goodness of the plants, animals, and the rest of the natural world are important and worth preserving.
- e. The larger point, though, is that the Bible is very, very insistent that each human life matters, that what we do matters, and that human history matters, in the long run.
- i. Think about it like this: we all know that Jesus’s Kingdom work that He did during His life on Earth mattered. And that it will continue to matter, to be an impactful part of human history, for all eternity.
 - ii. But what is not often appreciated is that He did not accomplish that work all on His own. What those faithful Old Testament saints did during their earthly life were a part of it. Take Moses, or any of the rest of them. Their work was

a critical and necessary part of the Jewish people's history and experience. The Jewish people and their history were not a waste of time. They were a key part of God's plan, and necessary for the success of the Messiah. Take John the Baptist. Without Him, the Jews would not have been adequately prepared to receive the Kingdom.

- iii. So, all that work of Moses and every other faithful Jew carried through to Jesus, and all that Jesus work carries through to us. And all our efforts carry through to others as we introduce them to the Kingdom. As we bring about New Creation in their lives and in this world.
 - 1. As an example, think about the important Kingdom work that the thinkers who we have been exploring in this series did in hashing out and communicating all these ideas. Bringing about New Creation isn't it, in you and I?
- iv. *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15: 58.*
- v. Your labor is not in vain because God's plan for humanity is a grand plan spanning all of Old Creation and all of New Creation, linking them together.
- vi. And, by the way, the types of efforts that will carry forward from the Old Creation into the New Creation are not just religious types of efforts. After all, religious accomplishments are not the only good type of accomplishment. The Biblical idea is that every good thing will carry forward.
 - 1. For instance, if not for the efforts of his musical predecessors and mentors, Johann Sebastian Bach could not have made the gorgeous music that he did. Which means that who Bach is, is tied up in who his predecessors are, in what they did. And who Bach is, and what he did, is going to carry forward into the New Creation. I am quite sure, if there is one thing Bach is going to be up to in the New World, it is making more music of his own. Learning from and influencing other musicians. It is all a part of that magnificent musical journey he is on, and that humanity is on. None of the musical heritage that informed his life, or that he created, will be lost or fall through the cracks.
 - 2. Same thing with any athlete and their achievements. With any ways that have advanced or transformed their sport. Or the discoveries of mathematicians. Or pick any other field. The good stuff has all carried through so far in this Creation, and will all continue to carry through into the New Creation.
- vii. And it is not just the good big things, like a Bach symphony, the first slam dunk, or the quadratic formula that will carry forward into the new World. But the good small things as well.
 - 1. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches that it is often, but not always, small and insignificant people who are the most important and helpful in human history and in the work of the Kingdom of God.
 - 2. *Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish*

things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are. 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.

3. Your efforts might seem small and simple now, things like working hard at your job and taking care of your family, patiently enduring the difficulties of life, looking after those sick and lonely people who are our neighbors, these small church and outreach ministries we are involved with. Currently, those things appear not to be so significant compared to the feats of great political leaders, scholars, and artists. But they will not look that way when we see their impact in eternity. They will look quite different. We will see them for what they really were all along. Feats of unending significance and worth.
- viii. In explaining this, NT Wright uses the analogy of the construction of cathedrals, which often took hundreds of hundreds of years. Many skilled laborers, such as stone masons, would be employed. They were often given specific tasks to do, such as cut a stone with such and such dimensions. They really didn't understand why exactly they were doing these very specific tasks. And they certainly didn't know how or where it was going to fit into the actual structure of the cathedral. But they just followed orders and did it. It was the architects and designers who understood the overall design.
 1. God is like the architects. And we are like the stone masons.
 2. If those stone masons when the cathedral was all finished up hundreds of years after they had died could stroll through the cathedral and take a look, they could find that little corner where their individual stones had been fitted in. Worked into the grand plan, the larger whole. They could see how their tiny contribution was a necessary part of the completion of the entire project.
 3. That is what the significance of our earthly lives and the actions we take here will look like from the perspective of eternity. The Bible insists that we are all in this together, building a grand cathedral together.
- B. Now, let's move on from that topic. Let's take some time and explore in detail what the New Humanity will be doing and experiencing in this grand cathedral that we are helping to build, the New Creation.
 - a. I am afraid that often we give people the very frightening and terrible idea that our experience in the afterlife will be a non-stop church service. Or the equally frightening idea that we will be sitting there on clouds doing nothing in particular. Bored out of our gourds.
 - b. We will not be bored. Because we will not be passive. Quite the opposite.
 - c. Consider first, the grand vision of the New Testament is that the entire creation will eventually be entirely set right, healed and restored through the leadership and work of Christ.
 - i. *[God's] plan in the fullness of the time, is to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the Earth. Ephesians 1:10*

- ii. And it is for Christ to do this incredible work of bringing everything together because of His unique role in God's plan. *[God has appointed his Son] through whom also he made the universe, heir of all things, Hebrews 1:2*, Christ made the universe for God, and is Himself is the heir of all of it.
- d. But what is not often appreciated is that, because we are the adopted children of God, we will share in Christ's inheritance. His inheritance of everything is our inheritance. Simply astounding.
 - i. *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ Romans 8:17*
 - ii. *All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23*
 - iii. *"He who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. Revelation 21:7*
- e. Now, inheriting all things means we will have a big job to do indeed. Namely, taking care of all things! The entire New Creation will be under the care and rule of humanity.
 - i. As Paul puts it, *"If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will **judge the World**? And if you are to judge the World, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?" 1 Corinthians 6*
 - ii. *"If we endure, we will also **reign** with him." 2 Timothy 2:12*
 - iii. As was God's original grand intention for humanity way back in the early chapters of Genesis, we will at last be righteously reigning and ruling over God's good Creation.
 - iv. And so, in the book of *Revelation*, the concluding statement when describing the people of God in New World is this: *And they will **reign** for ever and ever. Revelation 22:5*
 - 1. The fact that we will share in Christ's rule and in the process of ordering the entire creation is an absolutely staggering thought. The vastness of the physical universe is beyond all human comprehension. There are 700 quintillion planets, according to recent estimates.
 - 2. "Our destiny is to join a tremendously creative team effort, under unimaginably splendid leadership, on an inconceivably vast plane of activity, with ever more comprehensive cycles of productivity and enjoyment." Dallas Willard
 - v. This magnificent ruling and reigning means that we will each have specific work to do, a domain of influence and control. Each person will creatively shape a part of the New World, and make it their own.
 - 1. And it is important to note that the degree of responsibility and domain of the rule of human beings in the New Creation will not be the same as we currently have in the Old Creation. Instead, it will be absolutely massive in scope.
 - a. Here is the conclusion of Jesus's parable of the talents. *"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'*

“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ Luke 19:17

- b. Do the math. The amount of money initially entrusted to the faithful servant was around three months of a worker’s wages. But the new amount entrusted to the faithful servant was ten cities!
 - i. The idea in this parable is that once you have become the kind of person who is able to handle power and influence you will be given it in spades. In the New Creation, we will have the character to be able to wield a massive amount power, and to do so responsibly. The authority and influence you exert for the good of the new creation and for each other will be astonishing, and will be many orders of magnitude out of proportion to your current roles and responsibilities.
- c. “Reigning...means to be free and powerful in the creation and governance of what is good. In the life...we are training for, we reign in harmonious union with the infinite power of God.”– Dallas Willard

(END OF AUDIO SEGMENT ONE)

(START OF AUDIO SEGMENT TWO)

- C. But what, more specifically, might life in the New Creation actually be like for us? And what kinds of things will we actually be spending our time doing?
 - a. Let’s begin to explore this by first thinking about beauty.
 - i. We should first note that when God made His World, He made it beautiful. He could have made it ugly. Or just sort of so-so. But He made it staggeringly, fiercely, wildly, extravagantly beautiful. The cities and buildings we have made are often ugly, but God is not into ugly. Each snowflake, each leaf expresses amazing symmetry, detail, finesse, delicacy. Each of them is part of a larger whole. Producing majestic snowcapped mountains. Epic forests. Each ray of light building into countless gorgeous sunsets and sunrises, one after another without end. Flowers strewn about the wild places of our world in numbers beyond measure.
 - ii. Our lives are absolutely bathed in beauty. So much so, that in the same that way a fish is accustomed to the water, and takes no notice of it... we hardly notice the beauty all around us. And what’s more, increasingly shut up in our houses and various other drab buildings in our modern existence, we grow more and more alienated from the beauty of the natural world with each passing year.
 - iii. But consider anew for a moment, for example, the surpassing splendor of stars in the sky at night. “If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown!” Said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

- iv. Because God made His World in such a lovely way, we can know that He values creativity and beauty. That it is good. Remember, as we just went through, not all goodness has to do with morality. In fact, as Dallas Willard put it, “beauty is goodness made manifest to our senses.”
- v. The creation and appreciation of beauty are not side issues for humanity. Beautiful things are not things that we do or look at or listen to for a bit to lift our spirits or entertain ourselves here and there.
 - 1. Instead, beauty is a gift given by God to inspire us. It uplifts us. Takes us outside of ourselves. It feeds our souls.
 - a. God very much values our music, art, dance, poetry, architecture. And so should we. Things like great music, great movies, great paintings or sculptures, and great works of fiction are essential to human flourishing.
 - b. Christians need to make beautiful things because doing that is part of what we were put here to do. And it is therefore a part of the ongoing renovation of this world that God is bringing about.
 - 2. And also, beauty is important because beauty is theology. Beauty teaches us about who God is. Beauty involves order. Creativity. Intelligence. And we can see the order, creativity, and intelligence of God on display in the natural world. As has been said, “nature is God’s art.”
- vi. And so, when we read about the New Creation in the Bible, understandably, we find both natural beauty (created by God) and creaturely beauty (created by humans) featured front and center. It uses elaborate language of precious metals and gems, illuminated by the light of God himself. It creates poetic imagery with trees and water in discussing the physical beauty of the City of God.
 - 1. Consider the exquisite beauty of our own natural world, distorted and broken as it is...How much more beautiful will it be after its redemption and healing? What dazzling splendors will we behold in our hiking and our stargazing, somehow familiar and yet all so new, so perfect and complete?
 - 2. And by the way, who is going to be designing, crafting, building, and decorating all the beautiful stuff in the New Creation? We will be contributing to all of that. And so, we see the redeemed saints in the letter of Revelation singing and making music.
 - 3. The feats of human creativity and imagination in the New World will be breathtaking. How good would someone be at gardening after millennia of experience? How amazing of a garden could they create? How brilliant of a cook? I would love to try some of that food! How astonishing of a piano player! What exquisite and breathtaking music would they be able to make after 100,000 years of playing the instrument? The new creation will be bursting at the seams with ever increasing depths and abundances of beauty brought about by the people of God.

- b. Let's move on from beauty now, and consider some other aspects of the New Creation. We will next discuss rest. Earlier in our curriculum, we discussed the Sabbath, and the 7th day of Creation. And we discussed that to rest is a part of what it means to be human, just as resting is a part of what it means to be God. Rest is therefore, a part of what we will be doing as well in the New Creation. Deep, refreshing, restorative, soothing, rest.
 - i. In fact, rest will come quite naturally to us there. Because evil, disorder, and temptation will not be present in the New Creation. We will not be in a state of constant struggle against them, as we are today. We will be free. And safe. Able to let our guards down.
 1. And, by the way, what kinds of things do people tend to do when they let their guards down? Well, to answer that you could take a look at someone who always has their guard down. Children. At least, the ones who are really allowed to be children, the ones in healthy circumstances. They don't need to be looking over their shoulders, looking out for themselves. Someone else is doing that for them. They are free, happy, spontaneous, confident, authentic. That is part of the radiance of children.
 2. Here is the prophet Isaiah discussing the type of thing we should expect to see in the New World:
 - a. *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; Isaiah 11:8-9*
 - ii. There is a sense of total freedom and security in these verses, causing an uninhibited and playful approach to life to naturally emerge. There will be no one with their guard up. No point in having your guard up. Nothing to guard against.
 - iii. And also, earlier in our curriculum, we discussed that play is related to rest.
 1. Play is not about accomplishing anything. It is an end in itself. It is related to spontaneity, enjoyment, exuberance, fun, joking, gladness, and laughter.
 2. In the New Creation, we will not all be over-serious, solemn, kill-joy, workaholics. We will play, rejoice and make merry. For we will have much to be merry about. The hills will ring with singing, laughing, dancing, amusement, sporting activities, running, swimming, music, storytelling, and if you ask me people just whooping and shouting for joy! The Biblical picture is that the New Creation will be a Kingdom of joy, of freedom and of life.
 3. Here is the prophet Jeremiah discussing the restoration of Israel:
 - a. *Again, I will build you, and you shall be built. Again, you shall adorn yourself with tambourines, and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. (Jeremiah 31:4)*
- c. Moving on, another prominent aspect of the New Creation will be community and relationship. What did Jesus say to His disciples at their last meal together? *I tell*

you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Matthew 26:29

- i. There are two things that we can take away from this teaching of Jesus. First, is one of the greatest anticipations of Christianity. We will be reunited and enjoy life together with those we love forever. And the strains, tensions and difficulties that so often taint our full union with others will be no more.
- d. But secondly, we can notice that there is a note of celebration in the reunion that Jesus is mentioning here. He is going to be drinking wine with them, on the other side, He tells them.
 - i. Celebration is a consistent New Creation theme throughout the Bible. Revelation picks up this theme with the picture of a feast that will be the glorious celebration of all who are in the new family under Christ. *"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb"* (Revelation 19:9). Abundance! Festivity! A party!
 - ii. The New World, and the celebrations we have there, will not be drab. They will be, joyful, joy-producing expressions of gladness. And when the time calls for it, they will be exciting and enthusiastic. This is not to say it will all be a sort of nonstop riotous gathering. I am sure there will be gatherings of every good sort and flavor, including intimate cups of tea with those closest to us.
- e. Let's move on to the subject of pleasure in the New Creation. In our discussion of the spiritual practices, we discussed that God made pleasure. Things like delicious food, hot bath, a nap, sitting by the fire, going for a walk, and a good laugh are all things that God values. That is why He made them in the Old Creation, and why they, or something like them, will be in the New Creation. They will survive the refining fire, and come out the other side purified...with the difficult and unpleasant bits removed so that they are even more delightful and pleasurable for us.
 - i. In fact, we will be bursting at the seams with pleasure in ways that we would find quite shocking if we were to see them right now. C.S. Lewis offers sex as an example. A child could not possibly understand how pleasing and pleasurable it is. In the same way, the pleasures we will encounter in the New Creation will be of magnitudes and natures beyond our current ability to experience, to understand, or even to imagine.
 - ii. If that seems strange to you it is likely because, while we wouldn't admit it out loud, Christians, on the whole, tend to have a very glum and severe picture of God.
 1. The reason we often think this way is that, subconsciously, we tend to take all the difficult and sad things we come across in this world as a reflection of God's personality. But remember that any evil that God is allowing to occur, He has a good reason to. And this always temporarily, so as to facilitate a greater good in the long run. And also, remember that God, being a good God, didn't make anything that was evil in the first place.

2. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, Augustine pointed out that bad things are just good things that have gone wrong. Test it out, think about it. Everywhere we find something evil, you will see it is simply a defilement, a distortion of some good thing. For example, lying is simply a defilement of telling the truth. Death is the loss of life. And so on. Evil things are never actually things in and of themselves.
3. This all means that evil and sorrow are only derivative, temporary. Parasites. They are a passing shadow, as J.R.R. Tolkien observed. Bliss, goodness, and life are primary. They are eternal. They undergird everything. The Christian story begins and ends in joy, Tolkien pointed out.
- iii. The three People composing God are overflowing with mirth and gladness. Dallas Willard described God as the happiest Being in the universe. He is not a taciturn, severe old man with a beard.
 1. *The God of hope*, is what Paul called Him (*Romans 15:13*).
 - a. The prophet Zephaniah predicted *He will take great delight in you. [He] will rejoice over you with singing.* *Zephaniah 3:17.*
 - i. That is Who awaits us.
 2. And a God like that is most pleased when His children are fully alive. Happy. Creative. Free. Bubbling up with pleasure. Surrounded by beauty, warmth and affection.
- f. But to fully enjoy such splendors outside of ourselves, much would also have to be set right within ourselves. And that is why another particularly important theme in the New Creation is healing. Let's turn to this theme.
 - i. At the end of the Lord of the Rings, his adventures are finished, and the hero, Frodo, is almost done with the journey back home. And things in that world have been set right, but one issue remains.

'Are you in pain, Frodo?' said Gandalf quietly as he rode by Frodo's side. 'Well, yes I am,' said Frodo. 'It is my shoulder. The wound aches, and the memory of darkness is heavy on me. It was a year ago today.'

'Alas! There are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured,' said Gandalf. 'I fear it may be so with mine,' said Frodo. 'There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?'

Gandalf did not answer."
 - ii. Sadly, we all have wounds like that. A fundamental pain. A profound brokenness. Wounds that are too deep for complete healing in this World. The bottom of them beyond the reach of even the most skilled and compassionate pastors and therapists and loved ones.
 1. And there is some wisdom in acknowledging and understanding that. Some wisdom in taking that type of help as far as it can take you, but understanding that it will leave off at some point. Letting it go there. Accepting that some imperfection, pain, and loss will always remain. Music and art at times will stir and touch the very deepest parts of those wounds in us. And that can bring some comfort to them, but it is

the kind of comfort of the distant echo of a far of song from another world. A taste of something to be found somewhere else, experienced later on. And in time, it will be. No wound is too deep for total healing in the new World.

- a. Revelation, echoing the prophecy of Isaiah, says *God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*” Revelation 21:3-4
- b. God Himself will wipe the tears. He will Himself do that deep work, that subtle work, that final work in the depths of our fundamental brokenness and pain. The neuroses, insecurities, blockages, trauma and scars will all be expertly and completely removed by the perfect surgeon. You will finally be, on the inside, entirely whole and complete. Who you were born to be. Free of the shadow. Your true self.
 - i. *I will also give [the one who is victorious] a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. Revelation 2:17*
 - ii. George MacDonald said of this passage, that in it “I think we find the essence of religion”
 - iii. “The giving of the white stone with the new name is the communication of what God thinks about the man to the man. It is the divine judgment, the solemn holy doom of the righteous man, the ‘Come, thou blessed,’ spoken to the individualThe true name is one which expresses the character, the nature, the being, the meaning of the person who bears it. It is the man's own symbol,--his soul's picture, in a word,--the sign which belongs to him and to no one else. Who can give a man this, his own name? God alone. For no one but God sees what the man is.
 To whom is this name given? To him that overcometh. When is it given? When he has overcome. It is only when the man has become his name that God gives him the stone with the name upon it... It is the blossom, the perfection, the completion, that determines the name.... Such a name cannot be given until the man is the name.... God’s name for a man must be the expression of His own idea of the man, that being whom He had in His thought when he began to make the child, and whom He kept in His thought through the long process of creation that went to realize the idea. To tell the name is to seal the success—to say ‘In thee also I am well pleased’.... ‘God has cared to make me for

Himself,' says the victor with the white stone, 'And has called me that which I like best.'"

- g. Moving on from healing,...let me ask you, what would be a good word to describe a fully healed and restored, creative, free, blissful, noble, virtuous, and greatly empowered human being ruling over creation on God's behalf? Glorious! Glory is another New Creation theme when considering the New Humanity in the Bible.
- i. By the way, what is **glory**? The Hebrew word for glory has to do with two different things. First, with weight, substance, importance. As in "what a weighty lecture." Secondly, the Hebrew word for glory has to do with something you can see, a radiance, a magnificence. As in "what a glorious sunset!"
 - ii. The glory of God is beyond all description. There is an all-surpassing and unmitigated glory and worth that only God has, simply because of who He is. A magnificence and importance of unending degree. And so, we revere and respect Him as such.
 1. But to a smaller scale, some of that weight, some of that magnificence, He doesn't just hold on to Himself. Instead, He delights to pass it unto His human creation, dignifying and ennobling them. The shocking reality is that God created you to share His glory!
 - iii. After all, remember, the temple was where the glory of God dwelt.
 1. And we are the New Temple of God! *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? 1 Corinthians 6:19*
 2. Given that we are the New Temple of God, we are where the glory of God dwells!
 - iv. Do you remember what happened when Moses met God on Mount Sinai? He came down and his face was glowing with God's glory. They had to put a veil over his face in order to comfortably talk to him. His face was too magnificent, too weighty, too radiant for them.
 1. That is the kind of thing that happens as we draw near to God. He rubs off on us.
 2. *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transfigured into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18*
 - v. You see, the glory of God in man is how it was to be in the beginning, at our inception, before the ruin came.
 1. *Psalm 8 says God crowned human beings with glory and honor.*
 2. *Man is the image and glory of God 1 Corinthians 11:7*
 - vi. And the glory of God in man is how it will be at the end. God's purposes for humankind will at last reach full fruition.
 1. *We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:17)*
 2. *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Isaiah 60:1-3*

3. As Dallas Willard pointed out, you were made for exaltation. But not self-exaltation. Self-exaltation is always crass, selfish, and demeaning. Instead, God will exalt you. Your destiny is one of profound magnificence and fierce splendor.
- h. To sum up, beauty, rest, play, pleasure, celebration, happiness, community, relationship, healing, victory, and glory are some of the more prominent Biblical themes in considering the New Creation. Now, I am sure I have left many out. In fact, we can be quite sure there will be many other joys and marvels beyond our current anticipations. I am sure that there will be many surprises. God seems to very much like surprises. He especially seems to like something closely related to surprise...wonder. Here is the dictionary definition of wonder. "A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable."
 - i. And the topic of wonder brings us to what will be the greatest and central good that will come to us in the New Creation. The experience of God Himself. Christians have historically called this **the Beatific Vision**. Beatific means blissful, happy. The highest bliss in the new creation will be the ultimate, direct self-communication of God to the individual person.
 - ii. You will partake of, not merely specific instances of the things that you love, specific instances of the things that make you happy, or specific instances of goodness, truth and beauty. Instead, in a direct and unmitigated fashion, you will partake of the Source of all truth, goodness and beauty ...of the essence of bliss.
 1. As Paul puts it, *For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12*
 - iii. And what do you think your response would be to unmitigated union with God Himself?
 1. I can tell you what we see all throughout the book of Revelation. We see people just welling up with and exploding with praise and with the worship of God in the New Creation. Breaking out into song. Falling down before God. Casting their crowns before His throne. These are all profound expression of worship.
 2. Actually, the word worship is from the Old English for "worth ship". **Worth-ship** is ascribing worth to someone or something. And if you, for example, eat a fabulous slice of pizza, you will find yourself wanting to verbally express some worth-ship of that slice to whoever is in ear shot. Worth-ship just rises up in you, doesn't it?
 3. And pizza worth-ship is a good thing, because it's always a good thing to be grateful. And also, because, if we are thinking rightly, we will express that pizza worth-ship, right on up the line, and offer up some worth-ship to *the giver of every good gift, as James calls God (James 1:17)*
 4. **Worship** is a natural, spontaneous response elicited in us by encountering something good. And God is very, very good. In fact, God is the wisest, most noble, most powerful Person that is or could

ever be. My all-time favorite definition of God is Anslem's. "God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived." This means that as a person comes to know God more and more, they will come admire Him more and more.

5. In our progressive experience of coming to know God, or in doing things like taking time to dwell on the character and attributes of God, we will find more and more profound feelings of gratitude, adoration, admiration, awe, wonder, reverence, affection and delight spontaneously welling up in us.
 - a. Don't feel that way about God? Then you probably don't know Him too well...just means you have a ways to go yet.
6. But you will get there. And in the next World, when we know Him completely, our worship will rise to the ultimate level.
 - a. Our New Creation worship will be an indescribably poignant, whole-person response. An ecstatic upward movement of the will, intellect, the emotions and all the rest of us.
 - b. Our worship and praise there will be our total and true response to who God is, from the total and true perspective of who we are and what He has done for us. And each of us, from our own unique personality and viewpoint and personal history, will have our own special, particular experience and knowledge of God to delight in and proclaim to Him and to others.
 - c. "There is a chamber in God Himself, into which none can enter but the one, the individual, the peculiar man—out of which chamber that man has to bring revelation and strength for his brethren. This is that for which he was made—to reveal the secret things of the Father" - George McDonald
7. In summary, the immediate experience of the reality of God Himself will bring about the most rapturous, pleasurable, supreme, overwhelming, and powerful experience possible for a person.
 - a. In 1747, Charles Wesley described the Beatific Vision as such:
Spirit of Holiness, let all thy saints adore
thy sacred energy, and bless thine heart-renewing power.
No angel tongues can tell thy love's ecstatic height,
the glorious joy unspeakable, the beatific sight
 - b. This is what we were made for. It is the greatest bliss, and the greatest satisfaction possible for a human to experience. This is why nothing else, ultimately, satisfies us. No other key can fit that lock.
 - c. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever," says the Westminster Catechism. Turns out, they are one and the same experience.

D. And so, we have seen the New World now for what it will be. And we have learned that God's glorious community of redeemed saints will forever be, along with the angelic host,

the crown of His Creation. And the New Humanity will forever serve as an astonishing testament to the unfathomable wisdom, power, and love of God.

- a. But we must not forget that this was all, at one point, not to be. It was all lost, lost forever. Lost to unending progressive misery and ruin. Beyond our reach to call it back, beyond any effort of the will.
 - i. And we must never, ever forget that into the deepest heart of that pain and that loss journeyed a 1st century Jewish man. Viciously tortured, spit on His face, hanging naked upon a tree, our sin upon Him. Behold, God Himself. We must never forget that this was the day that the revolution began. The setting right of everything. His defeat of the grave three days later, the start of New Creation. A New Creation which Jesus Christ alone had the wisdom, the power, the goodness, and the God-given right to see through to completion.
 - b. And so, we can appropriately end our long sketch of humanity from the perspective of the Kingdom of God with, and they lived happily ever after, the end.
- E. As we conclude our four-part Kingdom of God mini-series, we can see that we have sketched, from the beginning to the end, the history of humanity and of the World, and of God's dealings with both. God created it all, and us all, out of the abundance of His own bottomless joy and goodness, as a gift and as an act of celebration. And He created us to be, like Himself, creatures of freedom, bottomless joy, and majesty. And, by His grace, for anyone who wants that for themselves, that is how it will all end up.
- a. The project of sketching this history was a very similar undertaking as Paul's book of Romans was. Paul tailored that material to the misunderstandings of the Roman Christians of his day. I have tried to do so for the Christians of our day. I have tried to correct some of the popular confusions that, often subconsciously, discourage and demotivate people.
 - b. Along these lines, as Paul concluded his magnum opus, he did so with a reflection on the value of getting this story right. He wrote: *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures **might have hope**. Romans 15:4.* That's why we have been told all these things. Let in on the grand plan. So that we might have hope.
 - c. Of the *three that remain*, love is the greatest. And faith is foundational, it is the gateway. But hope takes us beyond the gateway, to the destination. And real hope, deep hope, no-matter-what hope, is in very short supply in this World. Once we have come to truly understand and to believe in God's plan, we will, despite whatever temporary difficulties or suffering we are going through, always have available to us a hope that can sing in our hearts. A hope that can burn deep and bright in our chests.
 - d. Hold on to that hope. Tend to it. Kindle the flame. Let it work deep inside you. In fact, I suggest that you take some time as often as you need to and meditate on what your life is becoming, where it is going to end up. Consider spending a few minutes each day on it. Can you just imagine what this would do to your view of life? Eventually, you will come to the belief that: *This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison 2 Corinthians 4:17*
 - e. And then, you will have become a person of hope.
- F. Let's summarize this talk.
- a. First. God is not in the business of annihilating good things. Instead, He preserves and repairs them. That is what is going to happen to this world, and to each and every

last good thing in it. The good things that, often at great cost, have been done, have been created, and have been protected, will all undergo purification by fire and carry forward into the New Creation.

- b. Second. The New Humanity are joint heirs with Christ. Which means that we will inherit everything. We will spend eternity ruling and reigning over Creation, as was God's initial intention for humanity. And our domain of influence will be many, many orders of magnitude greater than it currently is.
- c. Third. Beauty is terribly important. In this life, and in the next.
- d. Fourth. Rest, play, pleasure, celebration, happiness, community, relationship, healing, victory, and glory are also prominent Biblical themes in considering the New Creation.
- e. Fifth. The Beatific Vision, the direct and unmitigated experience of God, will be a central fact in the New World, and the summation and pinnacle of our lives. In this exultant state, worship and bliss will blend into one magnificent experience, beyond all articulation.

Father, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank You and we praise You. We are yours. And You are ours. Now and forever.

- Amen