

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

“I am making everything new!” This joyful declaration comes from the one who is seated on the throne. He identifies himself as the Alpha and Omega. In other words, this is Jesus speaking.

The Evangelist John has seen visions of conflict on a vast scale. He has seen a vision of the judgment of all people. But in this vision, which follows the final judgment, he sees something on an even grander scale.

He sees **“a new heaven and a new earth.”** Everything old has passed away. The heavens above plus the earth below, that equals everything. He sees everything new.

He doesn’t describe it further, other than to say that there was no longer any sea. In chapter 13, the beast with 10 horns and 10 crowns had come out of the sea to wage war against the saints.

This grand make-over has been prepared to receive another new thing, a new thing that is entirely of Christ’s making. John **saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**

An angel will shortly carry John away to a high mountain, so that he can take in the beauty of this city. It is, after all, 12,000 stadia [1,400 miles] wide and long and high. A perfect cube like the Most Holy Place in the temple. The glory of the New Jerusalem is described. It has walls of jasper that are 144 cubits thick and the city is made of gold that is pure as glass, 12 foundations and 12 gates.

But we dare not skip past what the angel said to explain this part of the vision to John. **The angel said, “come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And John says, “He showed me the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.**

Should it surprise us that what is most important to Jesus is not buildings or territory, but people? The city is people. These numbers—12,000, 144, 12—are all numbers of the church. The number 12 multiplied by itself, 144 or multiplied by 10, the number of completeness, and multiplied by itself twice more. This city is complete. Not one of Christ’s chosen people is missing.

How does this city come to be a bride beautifully dressed? The Apostle Paul tells us when he says, **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.** Her beauty is a gracious gift of Christ. His blood cleansed her. Baptism washed her clean. Christ has claimed his bride.

Next, John tells us, **I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.** A loud voice calls attention to this new thing: Christ will dwell with his bride. She is his, forever his, to live with him forever.

Everything new! Everything made new! Tell yourself, “This everything new includes me!”

As Paul told the Romans, God subjected this world to frustration. Since then it waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. It waits to be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We will be completely freed from the consequences of sin, from everything that leads to tears. Note, this is personal, intimate: **He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

More than that, we will be freed from sin itself. No longer will thoughts and acts that produce guilt and shame be able to interrupt our love for our Savior. We will serve him day and night. You don’t have to be old to appreciate the worth of that promise. A mom once told me that her son—a 4th or 5th grader at the time—had told her he wanted to die, so that he could stop sinning. Surprising, but not that much different from Paul saying, **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?** ²⁵ **Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Christ will give us water to drink, without cost, from the spring of the water of life. He will fully hydrate our stiff, hard, dry souls.

Everything new, including you! Thoroughly new, yet you will still be you. The walls of the city are not built with boring bricks, but with beautiful, precious stones.

People have expressed fear of losing their identity in heaven, of their friends losing the traits that make them special. They’re afraid that perfection and obedience and robes of white will lead to a boring monotony of sameness. And forget, perhaps, that no one has ever seen a man more fully alive than Christ.

You might find it helpful to take a look at a list of 34 personality strengths identified by the StrengthFinders program. I found a list of those strengths in which they added the descriptors balcony and basement. For example, one with the theme of discipline can be seen as a productive, efficient planner. But that can also be seen as overbearing and rigid. There isn’t a strength on the list that doesn’t need to be sanctified. There isn’t a gift from God that can’t be misused by us.

I’ll use this example because I’m familiar with the territory, but you can substitute one you can identify with: If I’m an introvert now, will I get to be an extrovert in heaven? Once I would have simply assumed that.

When parents apologize for their child being quiet or friends wonder why you aren’t having a good time at a party, but just quietly watching and listening, you’ve heard the message that there is something wrong with you. And you may fight and fight to change something that isn’t something wrong.

Introverts access their gifts in solitude. They think in order to speak. They find making small talk in a crowd draining, but that doesn’t mean they are anti-social. For them fellowship is found in conversation that gets beyond small talk. Yes, sometimes silence is an expression of selfishness, just as at times constantly talking is an expression of selfishness. Both need to be sanctified.

If you know your strengths, that’s a good thing, but be careful about judging someone who does things differently because of their strengths.

If you envy the strengths of others, be careful not to overlook your strengths.

Don’t lose sight of the joy of having a Savior who will make everything new! He will dwell with us, his people made new, in a world that is gloriously new. His glory is his love, the love that led him to redeem us and claim us as his own forever.