

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 28, Revelation 21--New Creation, Bride, New Jerusalem

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right, diving in again. Today, we're going to be talking about a topic that always seems to get people talking, you know, a new creation, and the New Jerusalem. Like, how's that all going to work, you know? Of course, we're talking about the book of Revelation.

Always a good time. And for this one, we're going to be using Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture notes on Revelation, specifically his insights from lecture 28. That's the one where he really digs into chapter 21.

Ah, yeah, that's a good one. It is. So yeah, get ready to explore this vision of where God's people end up, you know, all that rich symbolism.

And honestly, some of the possibilities are just mind-bending. Well, it's interesting. Revelation kind of changes gears in chapter 21, doesn't it? It's like the curtains coming down right after, you know, all the drama and judgment that's been happening.

Yeah, feels like we're entering a whole new act in the story. And Dr. Mathewson is quick to point out the connection to Isaiah 65.17. Remember that one? The prophecy about new heavens and a new earth. Right.

So right away, that raises a big question, doesn't it? Are we talking about God creating something completely brand new? Or is it more like a transformation of the world we already know? What do you think? Well, that's a debate that people have been having for ages. But Dr. Mathewson seems to lean towards the idea of renewal. He sees it as God stripping away the damage, you know, all the destructive effects of sin and evil, but not just abandoning the original creation altogether.

He compares it to restoring something precious that's been tarnished, bringing back that original beauty. I see. Yeah, I can see how that fits with the idea of God redeeming his creation, perfecting it instead of hitting the reset button, you know.

But Dr. Mathewson also brings up another point that kind of challenges how we usually think about things. He questions this common idea of heaven being the ultimate goal. Yeah.

He even uses that, you know, that classic picture of us all floating on clouds, you know, with harps and white robes and everything. He uses that to illustrate what he sees as a potential misunderstanding. Right.

It can be a bit cliché, can it? A little bit. And he argues that this idea of a purely spiritual existence- you know, we're just disembodied souls. It doesn't quite line up with what Revelation 21 is describing.

He really emphasizes the idea of a physical resurrection and this new earth that's also physical. It's a destination, not just some spiritual state of being. That's really interesting.

And it does tie back into the creation story in Genesis, right? Where God creates a physical world, a garden, not just a spiritual realm. Exactly. It suggests that our physical bodies are important somehow, part of God's plan.

And that changes how we might think about our ultimate destiny, wouldn't you say? It definitely does. There's also this interesting little detail in Revelation 21 that I found myself wondering about. It says that in this new creation, the sea is no more.

Like, what do you think that signifies? It's one of those details that people often skip over. But Dr. Matthewson suggests that the sea, in this context, isn't just a literal body of water. I see.

It's more of a symbol. Right. It represents chaos, evil, even death.

You know, think about the sea monster and the abyss. Those are all associated with forces that are opposed to God. That makes sense.

It makes me think of the Red Sea in the Exodus story, too. You know, how it was a barrier God had to part so his people could get to the Promised Land. Exactly.

And Dr. Matthewson believes that removing the sea in Revelation symbolizes removing all those barriers that keep us from fully experiencing God's presence. It's like ultimate liberation. I like that.

No more obstacles. Yeah. Okay.

So we have this new earth, a renewed creation, and then we get to the new Jerusalem descending from heaven. And it's described in Revelation 21.2 as being like a bride adorned for her husband. We saw similar imagery back in Revelation 19 with the wedding banquet, right? Right.

Lots of symbolism there. And Dr. Matthewson really goes deep into the Old Testament to explain this. He connects it to that covenant formula found in verse 3, where it emphasizes the fulfillment of God dwelling with his people, not like a distant deity, but in this close, permanent union.

It's a powerful echo of God's promise to be present with his people, a promise that reaches its ultimate expression in this new creation. Amazing. And here's where Dr. Matthewson introduces a pretty interesting interpretation.

He argues that the new Jerusalem might mainly symbolize the people of God themselves, perfected and united in this new creation. What are your thoughts on that? It is an intriguing way to look at it. If we consider that in the New Testament, God's people are often referred to as a temple, a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

Oh, right. Then it makes sense that the New Jerusalem, the ultimate dwelling place for God, could represent his people in their perfected state, glorified. I see.

So it's not just about a physical city, though. There might be a literal city too. It's about humanity itself being transformed into this dwelling place for God, isn't it? Exactly.

It's a pretty breathtaking idea. And this transformation is described in all these intricate architectural details. Dr. Matthewson analyzes all the symbolic meanings of everything.

And he draws a lot from Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48, where Ezekiel describes his own vision of this incredible new temple. I remember that. And one of the things that really stands out is how the new Jerusalem shines with the glory of God.

It's described as being made of jasper. And that links it back to the heavenly throne room we saw in Revelation 4, right? It does. And Dr. Matthewson points out that even the precious stones might represent the people of God themselves, like living stones being built into this spiritual dwelling.

Right. And that image echoes Ephesians 2 and 1 Peter 2, where believers are described as living stones being built into the spiritual house. Exactly.

It suggests that each individual, united with Christ, becomes part of something much greater: this radiant and holy temple. And this idea of unity is highlighted even more by the way the new Jerusalem brings together the people of Israel and the church. Dr. Matthewson talks about how the 12 gates have the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, while the foundations are associated with the 12 apostles, representing the foundation of the church.

Powerful imagery. It's all about reconciliation and unity, showing how both Jew and Gentile are part of God's kingdom. It goes beyond all the divisions and conflicts that have marked human history, pointing toward a future where God's people are one.

The attention to detail is amazing. Even the order of the city gates- east, north, southwest- mirrors the order in which Ezekiel measures the temple courts in Ezekiel 40. It's not just a random arrangement.

Dr. Matthewson believes it's a deliberate connection, an echo of those earlier prophetic visions, showing how the new Jerusalem is the peak of God's plan as revealed throughout Scripture. It all ties together. And then there's the significance of gold in the city's description.

Dr. Matthewson draws parallels to the lavish use of gold in Solomon's temple, emphasizing how the new Jerusalem is the ultimate dwelling place of God. Every little detail is loaded with symbolic weight. It is, but it's not meant to overwhelm us.

It's meant to draw us deeper into the mystery of God's plan for redemption. It's an invitation to contemplate this profound reality of God dwelling with his people in a way that surpasses anything we can even imagine. And speaking of sparking the imagination, let's talk about the city's shape.

It's described as four square. Now, what do you make of that? Ah, that's where it gets even more interesting. You know, Dr. Matthewson points out that Babylon, a city that's often linked with rebellion against God, was also described as four square by some historians.

Yeah, it creates a really interesting contrast. So the symbolic comparison, right, between the fallen city, represented by Rome or Babylon in Revelation, and the new redeemed city. Precisely.

And just to add another layer to it all, that square shape also echoes the description of the temple in Ezekiel 40, 48. It's like a multi-layered puzzle, revealing new insights with every connection we make. Dr. Matthewson then zeroes in on the specific language used to describe the city's dimensions in Revelation 21.1 scene, saying it's as wide and high as it was long.

What do you think that detail is trying to tell us? At first glance, it might seem like a minor detail, but Dr. Matthewson's scholarship really shines here. You see, that language is almost word for word what we find in the description of the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6.20. Oh, I see. So by connecting it to the Holy of Holies, it's emphasizing the sanctity and divine presence within the New Jerusalem.

It's solidifying its identity as the ultimate temple. You got it. It's not just any city; it's the ultimate sanctuary, the place where God's presence resides in its fullest.

But what I find even more fascinating is thinking about who gets to live in this incredible sanctuary. And that's something we'll explore more in the next part of our deep dive. So we've been looking at all the architectural details, right? The stones, the shape, the dimensions.

But a city, no matter how amazing it is, well, it needs people, right? That's true. To really make it come alive. So the big question is, who gets to live in this extraordinary city? Who are its citizens? Yeah, that's a good question.

And I'm really curious to see how Dr. Matthewson tackles this. You know, he always likes to draw on the Old Testament, especially the prophets, like Ezekiel, when he's interpreting Revelation. What kind of insights does he offer about the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem? He does.

And remember how Ezekiel's vision of the New Temple includes this river flowing from it, bringing life and healing wherever it goes. Well, Dr. Matthewson points out that John, the author of Revelation, picks up on this imagery in Revelation 22.1-2. But instead of just a temple, there's this river of the water of life. And it's flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb right through the middle of the city.

Oh, wow. So it's not just about, like, a static existence in this new creation. It sounds like there's this dynamic life-giving force that's constantly flowing through the city.

Yeah, exactly. Nourishing everyone. It makes me think about how Jesus talked about living water in the Gospels, offering spiritual refreshment and satisfaction.

It's a beautiful connection, isn't it? And talking about nourishment, there's another detail that John includes that's just packed with symbolic meaning. The tree of life. Ah, yeah.

That's on each side of the river, bearing 12 crops of fruit every month. The leaves are even said to be for the healing of the nations. It's like this picture of abundance, wholeness, everything that was lost because of sin restored, wouldn't you say? Absolutely.

It really does sound like paradise. No lack, no hunger, no pain. But I'm wondering, is it all about just physical well-being, or is there, like, a deeper spiritual aspect to all this abundance? Well, remember, the New Jerusalem isn't just a physical city, right? It's a symbol of God's people, perfected.

So this abundance, it points to a spiritual wholeness too, a complete restoration of our relationship with God. It's about experiencing the fullness of God's presence and love in a way that's beyond anything we can imagine here. Yeah.

It's like Dr. Matthewson is getting at something really profound here, going all the way back to Genesis and God's original intention for humanity, to live in harmony with him, with each other, and with all of creation. Exactly. And in the New Jerusalem, that harmony is finally restored completely.

No more curse, no more death, no more mourning or crying or pain. The first things have passed away, as John says in Revelation 21.4. Wow. It's almost too much to grasp, isn't it? It is.

It really is. But in the midst of all this talk about wholeness and restoration, Dr. Matthewson doesn't shy away from the more, well, difficult parts of Revelation. He brings up that stark contrast in Revelation 21.8, where it talks about those who reject God's grace.

They face a very different destiny. Right. Their place, John says, will be in the lake of fire, burning with sulfur, eternal separation from God.

It's a sobering thought, isn't it? It is. It's a reminder that the choice to accept or reject God's love has eternal consequences. It's not like everyone gets a free pass.

The New Jerusalem- it's not just a passive reward. It's earned through faithfulness, perseverance, choosing to align ourselves with God's word. It makes you really think about how we're living today, doesn't it? If our choices have that kind of impact, how should that shape our priorities, our relationships, our commitments? That's a question worth thinking about, for sure.

But let's shift gears a bit. Let's focus back on those who do inherit the New Jerusalem, the citizens of this glorious city. What's their life like? What do they actually do? Yeah, I'm curious about that too.

Are they just kicking back, enjoying the scenery, eating fruit from the tree of life all day, or is there more to it? Well, John describes them as serving God day and night in his temple. They see his face, his name is on their foreheads, and there's no more night because the Lord God himself is their light. And then there's maybe the most amazing statement: they will reign forever and ever.

So it's not about passive enjoyment. It's about active service, worship, even ruling. They get to see God face-to-face, something that's been impossible for humanity since the fall.

And they're given authority to reign, which sounds like a fulfillment of that original mandate God gave to humans, to rule and care for creation. Exactly. You're right on the money there.

It's not just about escaping this world. It's about being part of God's cosmic plan, sharing in his glory and purpose. It's about partnering with him to bring his will to bear on this new creation.

And remember how Dr. Mathewson connects this to the concept of the royal priesthood that we see in the New Testament? Oh, yeah. Like in 1 Peter 2.9, where it says believers are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. I never thought about how that connected to the New Jerusalem.

It's a strong link. Yeah. The New Jerusalem is the ultimate expression of that identity.

It's where we fully become who we're called to be as God's representatives in his kingdom. Wow. It's like we're both servants and kings, reflecting God's love and justice throughout the new creation.

What an incredible picture of the dignity and responsibility God gives to his people. It really is. And remember, none of this would be possible without the sacrifice of the Lamb.

He's right at the center of all this. Notice how the river of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The tree of life is only there because of the Lamb's victory over sin and death.

The New Jerusalem itself is the culmination of the Lamb's work of redemption. It's where his sacrifice brings about ultimate healing and restoration. Yeah.

And it all comes back to that imagery of the bride and the wedding banquet, right? It does. The New Jerusalem is the bride united with the Lamb forever. It's beautiful, this image of intimacy and union, the fulfillment of God's love for his people.

It's an image that words can't really capture, can they? And it's clear that Dr. Mathewson sees this whole vision as way more than just a literal description. He's peeling back layers of meaning, connecting it to the bigger story of scripture. He's encouraging us to engage with the text on a deeper level, right? Yeah.

To really wrestle with what this vision means. It's like we're uncovering a hidden treasure. Each new insight leads to another.

And the more we explore, the richer the experience becomes. So we've talked about a lot, haven't we? From the sea being gone to that tree of life, and even how the New Jerusalem represents God's redeemed people. But there's one more fascinating thing that Dr. Mathewson talks about that I want to dig into.

He points out these really specific measurements of the city. In Revelation 21.1c, John says, The New Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia in length, width, and height. That's like 1,500 miles in each direction.

What do you think about those dimensions? Yeah, it's a massive city, huge. And it's not just the size that's interesting. Dr. Matthewson points out that the number 12 pops up all over the Bible, and it usually represents completeness or perfection.

Right. Like the 12 tribes of Israel. Exactly.

The 12 apostles, even the 12 months of the year. So when the city is 12,000 stadia in each direction, it could be hinting at this idea of total perfection and wholeness. So it's like this perfect cube, just flawless, representing God's glory and presence.

But do you think Dr. Matthewson believes this is meant to be taken literally? Or is there a symbolic meaning to those measurements too? I think he's careful about interpreting it too literally. Remember, the New Jerusalem mainly symbolizes God's people, made perfect. So these massive measurements could also be symbolic, representing the vastness of the redeemed community.

All those people gathered from every corner of the world. That makes me think of that scene in Revelation 7, where John sees a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb. It's not about an exact number, right? It's about the overwhelming scope of God's grace.

Exactly. It's about the fullness of the redeemed community united in Christ. And the city being a perfect cube that just reinforces this idea of wholeness and perfection, both in each believer and the community as a whole.

It's a beautiful picture of what it means to be transformed into the image of Christ, reflecting His character and love. It's amazing to think about what that transformation would really look like. If we're becoming these living stones built into this holy city, then we're also sharing in its radiance, its glory.

It's not just about escaping to heaven. It's about becoming agents of change right here, right now, reflecting the light of Christ in the darkness of this world. Yeah, that's a powerful thought, isn't it? It's about living out those kingdom values, bringing hope and healing.

It's about living the reality of the New Jerusalem, even though we're not there yet. So as we wrap up our deep dive today, what would you say is the most important thing Dr. Mathewson leaves us with? Like, what's the takeaway from all of this? I think he's challenging us to really think about what it means to be a citizen of the New Jerusalem. You know, if this vision represents God's people in their final, perfect state, what does that tell us about how we should be living now? How can we reflect the qualities of this city in our lives today? It's wholeness, it's radiance, it's love, it's justice.

It's a call to action, isn't it? An invitation to become living stones in God's temple, even while we're surrounded by brokenness. And we're not alone in this. We're part of a community, a royal priesthood, united with Christ and each other.

We can lean on each other for strength and encouragement as we journey toward that incredible destination. And don't forget about the most important resource we have, the

book of Revelation itself. I know it can be tough- all that vivid imagery and symbolism- but it's also a book of hope.

It points us to a future where God's love and justice win in the end. That's a great reminder. So keep exploring, keep asking questions.

The journey is worth it. And if you need a guide, Dr. Mathewson's lectures are a great place to start. Until next time, keep diving deep.