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The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 64

The New Creation

Behold, I make all things new. Rev. 21:5.

1. What a strange scene is here opened to our view! How remote from all our natural apprehensions! Not a glimpse of what is here revealed was ever seen in the heathen world. Not only the modern, barbarous, uncivilized Heathens have not the least conception of it; but it was equally unknown to the refined, polished Heathens of ancient Greece and Rome. And it is almost as little thought of or understood by the generality of Christians: I mean, not barely those that are nominally such, that have the form of godliness without the power; but even those that in a measure fear God, and study to work righteousness.
2. It must be allowed that after all the researches we can make, still our knowledge of the great truth which is delivered to us in these words is exceedingly short and imperfect. As this is a point of mere revelation, beyond the reach of all our natural faculties, we cannot penetrate far into it, nor form any adequate conception of it. But it may be an encouragement to those who have in any degree tasted of the powers of the world to come to go as far as we can go, interpreting Scripture by Scripture, according to the analogy of faith.
3. The Apostle, caught up in the visions of God, tells us in the first verse of the chapter, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth;" and adds, (Rev. 21:5,) "He that sat upon the throne said," (I believe the only words which he is said to utter throughout the whole book,) "Behold, I make all things new."
4. Very many commentators entertain a strange opinion that this relates only to the present state of things, and gravely tell us that the words are to be referred to the flourishing state of the Church, which commenced after the heathen persecutions. Nay, some of them have discovered that all which the Apostle speaks concerning the "new heaven and the new earth" was fulfilled when Constantine the Great poured in riches and honours upon the Christians. What a miserable way is this of making void the whole counsel of God, with regard to all that grand chain of events, in reference to his Church, yea, and to all mankind, from the time that John was in Patmos unto the end of the world! Nay, the line of this prophecy reaches farther still: It does not end with the present world, but shows us the things that will come to pass when this world is no more. For,
5. Thus saith the Creator and Governor of the universe: "Behold, I make all things new;" -- all which are included in that expression of the Apostle, "A new heaven and a new earth." A new heaven: the original word in Genesis (Gen. 1) is in the plural number. And indeed this is the constant language of Scripture -- not heaven, but heavens. Accordingly, the ancient Jewish writers are accustomed to reckon three heavens; in conformity to which, the Apostle Paul speaks of his being "caught up into the third heaven." It is this, the third heaven, which is usually supposed to be the more immediate residence of God; so far as any residence can be ascribed to his omnipresent Spirit, who pervades and fills the whole universe. It is here (if we speak after the manner of men) that the Lord sitteth upon his throne, surrounded by angels and archangels, and by all his flaming ministers.
6. We cannot think that this heaven will undergo any change, any more than its Great Inhabitant. Surely this palace of the Most High was the same from eternity, and will be, world without end. Only the inferior heavens are liable to change; the highest of which we usually call the starry heaven. This, St. Peter informs us, "is reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly

men." In that day, "being on fire," it shall, first, shrivel as a parchment scroll;" then it shall "be dissolved, and shall pass away with a great noise;" lastly, it shall "flee from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and there shall be found no place for it."

7. At the same time "the stars shall fall from heaven;" the secret chain being broken which had retained them in their several orbits from the foundation of the world. In the meanwhile the lower or sublunary heaven, with the elements (or principles that compose it,) "shall melt with fervent heat;" while "the earth with the works that are therein, shall be burned up." This is the introduction to a far nobler state of things, such as it has not yet entered into the heart of men to conceive, -- the universal restoration, which is to succeed the universal destruction. For "we look," says the Apostle, "for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Pet. 3:7, &c.)

8. One considerable difference there will undoubtedly be in the starry heaven, when it is created anew: There will be no blazing stars, no comets there. Whether those horrid, eccentric orbs are half-formed planets, in a chaotic state (I speak on the supposition of a plurality of worlds;) or such as have undergone their general conflagration, they will certainly have no place in the new heaven, where all will be exact order and harmony. There may be many other differences between the heaven that now is and that which will be after the renovation: But they are above our apprehension: We must leave eternity to explain them.

9. We may more easily conceive the changes which will be wrought in the lower heaven, in the region of the air. It will be no more torn by hurricanes, or agitated by furious storms, or destructive tempests. Pernicious or terrifying meteors will have no more place therein. We shall have no more occasion to say,

There like a trumpet, loud and strong, Thy thunder shakes our coast; While the red lightnings wave along,
The banners of thy host!

No: All will be then light, fair, serene; a lively picture of the eternal day.

10. All the elements (taking that word in the common sense, for the principles of which all natural beings are compounded) will be new indeed; entirely changed as to their qualities, although not as to their nature. Fire is at present the general destroyer of all things under the sun; dissolving all things that come within the sphere of its action, and reducing them to their primitive atoms. But no sooner will it have performed its last great office of destroying the heavens and the earth; (whether you mean thereby one system only, or the whole fabric of the universe; the difference between one and millions of worlds being nothing before the great Creator;) when, I say, it has done this, the destructions wrought by fire will come to a perpetual end. It will destroy no more: it will consume no more: it will forget its power to burn, -- which it possesses only during the present state of things, -- and be as harmless in the new heavens and earth as it is now in the bodies of men and other animals, and the substance of trees and flowers; in all which (as late experiments show) large quantities of ethereal fire are lodged; if it be not rather an essential component part of every material being under the sun. But it will probably retain its vivifying power, though divested of its power to destroy.

11. It has been already observed that the calm, placid air will be no more disturbed by storms and tempests. There will be no more meteors, with their horrid glare, affrighting the poor children of men. May we not add, (though at first it may sound like a paradox,) that there will be no more rain. It is observable that there was none in Paradise; a circumstance which Moses particularly mentions: (Gen.

2:5, 6:) "The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. -- But there went up a mist from the earth," which then covered up the abyss of waters, "and watered the whole face of the ground," with moisture sufficient for all the purposes of vegetation. We have all reason to believe that the case will be the same when paradise is restored. Consequently there will be no more clouds or fogs; but one bright, refulgent day. Much less will there be any poisonous damps, or pestilential blasts. There will be no Sirocco in Italy; no parching or suffocating winds in Arabia; no keen north-east winds in our own country,

Shattering the graceful locks of yon fair trees;

but only pleasing, healthful breezes,

Fanning the earth with odoriferous wings.

12. But what change will the element of water undergo when all things are made new! It will be, in every part of the world, clear and limpid; pure from all unpleasing or unhealthful mixtures; rising here and there in crystal fountains, to refresh and adorn the earth "with liquid lapse of murmuring stream." For, undoubtedly, as there were in Paradise, there will be various rivers gently gliding along, for the use and pleasure of both man and beast. But the inspired writer has expressly declared, "there will be no more sea." (Rev. 21:1.) We have every reason to believe, that at the beginning of the world, when God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear," (Gen. 1:9,) the dry land spread over the face of the water, and covered it on every side. And so it seems to have done, till, in order to the general deluge which God had determined to bring upon the earth at once, "the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep broken up." But the sea will then retire within its primitive bounds, and appear on the surface of the earth no more. For either, indeed, will there be any more need of the sea. For either as the ancient Poet supposes,

Omnis feret omnia tellus,

-- every part of the earth will naturally produce whatever its inhabitants want, -- or all mankind will procure what the whole earth affords by a much easier and readier conveyance. For all the inhabitants of the earth, our Lord informs us, will then be isaggeloi, -- equal to angels; on a level with them in swiftness, as well as strength; so that they can quick as thought, transport themselves, or whatever they want, from one side of the globe to the other.

13. But it seems, a greater change will be wrought in the earth, than even in the air and water. Not that I can believe that wonderful discovery of Jacob Behmen, which many so eagerly contend for; that the earth itself with all its furniture and inhabitants, will then be transparent as glass. There does not seem to be the least foundation for this, either in Scripture or reason. Surely not in Scripture: I know not one text in the Old or New Testament which affirms any such thing. Certainly it cannot be inferred from that text in the Revelation: (Rev. 4:6:), "And before the throne there was a sea of glass, like unto crystal." And yet, if I mistake not, this is the chief, if not the only Scripture which has been urged in favour of this opinion! Neither can I conceive that it has any foundation in reason. It has indeed been warmly alleged, that all things would be far more beautiful if they were quite transparent. But I cannot apprehend this: Yea, I apprehend quite the contrary. Suppose every part of a human body were made transparent as crystal, would it appear more beautiful than it does now Nay, rather it would shock us above measure. The surface of the body, and in particular "the human face divine," is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful objects that can be found under heaven; but could you look through the rosy

cheek, the smooth, fair forehead, or the rising bosom, and distinctly see all that lies within, you would turn away from it with loathing and horror!

14. Let us next take a view of those changes which we may reasonably suppose will then take place in the earth. It will no more be bound up with intense cold, nor parched up with extreme heat; but will have such a temperature as will be most conducive to its fruitfulness. If, in order to punish its inhabitants, God did of old

Bid his angels turn askance This oblique lobe,

thereby occasioning violent cold on one part, and violent heat on the other; he will, undoubtedly, then order them to restore it to its original position: So that there will be a final end, on the one hand, of the burning heat which makes some parts of it scarce habitable; and, on the other of

The rage of Arctos and eternal frost.

15. And it will then contain no jarring or destructive principles within its own bosom. It will no more have any of those violent convulsions in its own bowels. It will no more be shaken or torn asunder by the impetuous force of earthquakes; and will, therefore need neither Vesuvius nor Etna, nor any burning mountains to prevent them. There will be no more horrid rocks or frightful precipices; no wild deserts, or barren sands; no impassable morasses, or unfruitful bogs, to swallow up the unwary traveller. There will, doubtless, be inequalities on the surface of the earth, which are not blemishes, but beauties. For though I will not affirm, that

Earth hath this variety from heaven, Of pleasure situate in hill and dale;

yet I cannot think gently-rising hills will be any defect, but an ornament, of the new-made earth. And doubtless we shall then likewise have occasion to say, --

Lo, there his wondrous skill arrays The fields in cheerful green! thousand herbs his hand displays,
A thousand flower between!

16. And what will the general produce of the earth be Not thorns, briars, or thistles; not any useless or fetid weed; not any poisonous, hurtful, or unpleasant plant; but every one that can be conducive, in anywise, either to our use or pleasure. How far beyond all that the most lively imagination is now able to conceive! We shall no more regret the loss of the terrestrial Paradise, or sigh at that well-devised description of our great Poet: --

Then shall this mount Of Paradise, by might of waves, be moved Out of his place, push'd by the
horned flood, With all its verdure spoil'd and trees adrift, Down the great river to the opening gulf,
And there take root, an island salt and bare!

For all the earth shall then be a more beautiful Paradise than Adam ever saw.

17. Such will be the state of the new earth with regard to the meaner, the inanimate, parts of it. But great as this change will be, it is little, it is nothing, in comparison of that which will then take place throughout all animated nature. In the living part of the creation were seen the most deplorable effects of Adam's apostasy. The whole animated creation, whatever has life, from leviathan to the smallest

mite, was thereby made subject to such vanity, as the inanimate creatures could not be. They were subject to that fell monster, DEATH, the conqueror of all that breathe. They were made subject to its fore-runner, pain, in its ten thousand forms; although "God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the death of any living." How many millions of creatures in the sea, in the air, and on every part of the earth, can now no otherwise preserve their own lives, than by taking away the lives of others; by tearing in pieces and devouring their poor, innocent, unresisting fellow-creatures! Miserable lot of such innumerable multitudes, who, insignificant as they seem, are the offspring of one common Father; the creatures of the same God of love! It is probable not only two-thirds of the animal creation, but ninety-nine parts of a hundred, are under a necessity of destroying others in order to preserve their own life! But it shall not always be so. He that sitteth upon the throne will soon change the face of all things, and give a demonstrative proof to all his creatures that "his mercy is over all his works." The horrid state of things which at present obtains, will soon be at an end. On the new earth, no creature will kill, or hurt, or give pain to any other. The scorpion will have no poisonous sting; the adder, no venomous teeth. The lion will have no claws to tear the lamb; no teeth to grind his flesh and bones. Nay, no creature, no beast, bird, or fish, will have any inclination to hurt any other; for cruelty will be far away, and savageness and fierceness be forgotten. So that violence shall be heard no more, neither wasting or destruction seen on the face of the earth. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb," (the words may be literally as well as figuratively understood,) "and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: They shall not hurt or destroy," from the rising up of the sun, to the going down of the same.

18. But the most glorious of all will be the change which then will take place on the poor, sinful, miserable children of men. These had fallen in many respects, as from a greater height, so into a lower depth, than any other part of the creation. But they shall "hear a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men: And he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be their God." (Rev. 21:3, 4.) Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise. In how beautiful a manner is this described by the Apostle: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: For the former things are done away!" As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!

Edited by Jennette Descalzo with corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

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