

## Study 7: All Things New

Have you ever read a book or watched a movie where you just had to know the ending? Maybe the hero of the story is in an impossible circumstance without hope. Or maybe you want to fast-forward to the end because the intensity is just too much. When it comes to the injustice we see today and the state of our world, perhaps we resonate with the desire to skip to the ending.

We have been tracing the theme of justice through the sacred text of the Bible. We have seen how justice is central to God's heart and actions in the world. We have seen that God responds to injustice; God entered our mess in the person of Jesus and involves us in his work of restoring shalom. Today's text is about how the story ends, when things are as they should be. Shalom connotes a sense of wholeness, completion, and holistic peace.

We live in a lot of tensions right now: the aftermath of a pandemic, racial violence and hostility that is only increasing, the uncertainty of the future and so on. Our discussion will still beg the question: how does knowing the end impact how we live in the tension today?

### Discuss

- In Western culture, we are not so comfortable with enduring hard things. Our tendency is to try to escape or minimize the pain and focus our energy on pursuing our "happily ever after." What helps you experience peace in the midst of tension?

**i** John receives a vision from God that reveals the spiritual realities of the audience's present context. John pens a subversive letter to seven churches, sharing and interpreting these visions. He calls them to stand firm and stay faithful to Jesus alone and not succumb to the allure and power of empire. Serving the interests of the empire of Babylon—which represents Rome—is contrasted with God's righteous and just reign, symbolized in the "new Jerusalem." The restoration of God's intentions for creation, the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham of people, place, and presence, and the plan from the beginning of time to rescue all creation from sin, evil, and injustice come together here at the end of the story, where God wins.

## Revelation 21:1-8,22-27

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> ‘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.” <sup>5</sup> 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.” <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will

be their God and they will be my children. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” ... <sup>22</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

## Discuss

- Where do you see justice and shalom in this city? What emotions does it evoke in you?
- How might this letter encourage or challenge the churches to stand firm and stay faithful in light of their context?
- What value does our culture (or campus culture) tend to prioritize or value? How are those interests supported or in conflict with the values depicted in this passage?
- Reflecting on the Justice Bible Study series and knowing the end of the story, what impact does this have on your view of God and how you live now?
- Additional questions (optional):
  - What parallels do you see between this text and Genesis 1? (O)
  - In light of the arc of the study, what is the significance of God dwelling with the people once again? (I)
  - What thoughts or feelings arise in response to the reality that not all will experience this restoration of all things? Reflect individually on the list in verse 8. Where do you see this in the world around you? Where do you see these tendencies in yourself? (A)
    - Pause and pray a prayer of repentance. Commit these things to God and receive God's abundant forgiveness and grace.
  - What names are given to God in this passage? What do they say about Him? Which one resonates with you and why? (O/I/A)
  - What is something from your culture or community that you would bring before Jesus in this new city? What significance does it have for you or your people? How does imagining God joyfully receiving and affirming the beauty of your culture in this context impact you? (A)

## Summary + Reflection

God's intention was for all of creation to flourish. The interconnected relationships in creation were meant to be honored and stewarded so that all could thrive. The pervasiveness of life and goodness turned to the pervasiveness of evil and violence when humanity chose power and self-interest over God's desire and design. Our actions grieve the heart of God, but God is not a passive bystander to injustice. God sees, hears, and responds to the brokenness in our world. The reality is that without God, we as human beings will *always* gravitate towards centering ourselves over God and others, hatred over forgiveness, and overconsumption and exploitation over stewardship and cultivation. God came down in the person of Jesus to bring life and liberation for *all*. The consequences of our sin and evil across time and space were crushed through Christ's broken body. But Jesus overcame. Jesus comes back to life and is a threat to evil: we can be reconciled to God and one another. In Jesus we are raised to new life, into a new humanity where we can live as Jesus calls us to live through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our embodied witness through our pursuit of justice testifies to who God is and subverts the visible and invisible powers of our world. When we love our enemies, die to ourselves, care for the oppressed and marginalized, tear down unjust systems, and invite others to new life in Jesus, it is an act of resistance against evil, sin, and injustice. As we have seen across scripture, God is at work and invites us to participate in that work of seeking shalom for our broken world. We join the Holy Spirit in restoring our broken world because new life in Jesus is about more than just eternal, disembodied implications, but it changes the here and now. As we work for shalom on personal, communal, and systemic levels, we hold this vision of the new heavens and new earth in our hearts. We rest our hope in the just and righteous King Jesus who will restore all things.

- Take a minute to pause and listen; how might God be speaking to you?

## Apply

### Spiritual Practice: Worship

Worship is directing our adoration and affection to God. Worship grounds us in the unchanging truth of God's character. It ministers to our souls. As a community, take some time to respond together in worship through music and prayer.

End with a time of prayer, expressing praise and gratitude to the God of justice. If someone in the group is musical, invite them to lead or share a song of praise or adoration. You could also choose one of the options below and share screen/sound to worship together. Voice any longings or places of tension that you still carry. Pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Song ideas:

- [Alpha & Omega](#) - Israel & New Breed
- [Do it Again / Alpha and Omega](#) - Indiana & Illinois Revive Virtual Choir
- [In Christ Alone](#) - Lauren Daigle Cover
- [King of Kings](#) - Hillsong
- [Weep No More \(Spanish/English\)](#) - Urbana Worship - IV Live
- [We Shall Overcome Medley](#) - Urbana Worship - IV Live
- [When You Walk into the Room](#) - William McDowell

### Reflect + Share

Journal your responses to these questions, then share them with your group.

- How is God speaking to you? How will you respond?

## Closing Prayer & Announcements

Participant Survey - please fill out this survey (<https://bit.ly/jbspot>) so we best serve future participants.