

AHEAD TO A WORLD RESTORED

Thomas Robinson, *He Goes Ahead of Us 4*, May 18, 2014

ROMANS 8:18-25

¹⁸ For I consider that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worth comparing with the **glory** that is to be revealed for us.

¹⁹ For the the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

²⁰ For the **creation** was subjected to **futility**, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in **hope** ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its **bondage** to corruption and obtain the **freedom** of the **glory** of the **children of God**. ²² For we know that the **whole creation** has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

²³ And not only the creation, but **we ourselves**, who have the **firstfruits of the Spirit**, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for **adoption as sons**, the **redemption of our bodies**.

²⁴ For in this **hope** we were **saved**. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly await it with endurance.

REVELATION 21:1-5, 16, 23-26; 22:1-2

¹ Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, **the dwelling place of God is with people**. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ **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." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." ...

¹⁶ **The city lies foursquare**, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia (about 1400 miles). Its length and width and height are equal. ...

²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for **the glory of God gives it light**, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will **the nations walk**, and the **kings of the earth will bring their glory** into it, ²⁵ and its **gates will never be shut by day** – and there will be **no night** there. ²⁶ They will **bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations**. ...

^{22:1} Then the angel showed me the **river of the water of life**, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, **the tree of life** with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The **leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations**.

GENESIS 1:1-4, 26-27

¹ **In the beginning, God created** the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ And **God said**, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And **God saw that the light was good**.

²⁶ Then God said, "**Let us make humans in our image**, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created the human in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

ISAIAH 65:17-18

¹⁷ "For behold, **I create new heavens and a new earth**, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and **rejoice forever in that which I create**; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.

Jesus' Resurrection and the Two Great Narratives of Scripture

One of the most basic ways we understand who we are is by coming to know the story or history that we're part of: individual, family, people, nation, world, universe. A powerful story created in the 18th cent. is embodied in the terms dark ages, middle ages, renaissance, enlightenment, modern: The 18th cent was the great turn in human history.

The Christian story recognizes the relative importance of such periods, but centers on a radically different event: obscure, human, divine, cosmic: Jesus' life, death, resurrection.

Two great biblical narratives turn on Jesus' resurrection. The first takes up most of scripture: the story of Abraham, Israel, Covenant, Kings, Temple, Prophets, and Exile, that flows through the OT and into the time of Jesus. Many were seeking the story's fulfillment.

The second is the story of creation and God as creator of a good and beautiful world, concerned with the creation on every level, concerned with all peoples, all creatures.

Both are crucial for understanding. The meaning of Jesus' life and death flow from both.

Jesus fulfills/climaxes Israel's story and opens it to all people. Jesus' resurrection is more. It points to God's resolution for the whole creation of the problems of death, suffering, meaninglessness, brokenness, decline seen in everything from alzheimers to entropy. The astonishing claim is that here we see God's end, renewal, the gift of created wholeness.

Envisioning the End and the Beginning

In Rom 8, Paul is meditating on our life with God's Spirit that flows out of Jesus' resurrection.

The language is poetic and powerful. God (Father, Son, Spirit) is creator, redeemer, renewer. We share in God's life with the "*firstfruits of the Spirit.*" But that doesn't separate us from the physical world; it unites us. We live in a world beautiful but also suffering predation, disease, disaster, death. We too suffer. Often we hurt each other.

But Jesus' resurrection and the gift of the Spirit are the sure signs of the future, of hope. The creation waits expectantly. Groaning with us, like bringing a new world to birth. What God is doing for humans, he is also in a corresponding way doing for the whole world.

We don't know how it will be. Surprise. Pictures come in visions. Rev 21-22 portrays a great city of humanity, also a garden, open, enlightened, bringing in everything good, healing. God's close presence, water of life, tree of life, renewing the human task of creation.

Creation is set free into the freedom of the glory of the children of God! An amazing vision.

The Depth and Complexity of How It all Works

Since the 17th cent we've seen the development of new ways of perceiving and analyzing the world. Telescopes, microscopes, and all the rest change what we see of the world and challenge us to incorporate the new perceptions. People already felt tiny in a vast world.

There are 400 billion stars in our galaxy, but 100,000,000 times that many atoms in a grain of sand. We are tiny; we are gigantic. With every new level of perception, new questions.

Vibrating strings of energy. Dark energy pushing the galaxies apart. An astonishing world.

The Resurrection says that this all has meaning. It is going somewhere, not simply to nothing.

Living in Vibrant Hope

Paul says that hope is the solid and deep power in which we know who we are. You matter, ultimately and to God. We live in a quandary of suffering and hope. But the hope that has become solid in Jesus' Resurrection tells us that the suffering is not despair but childbirth.