

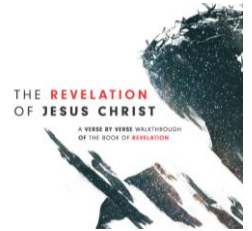
Title: Revelation, Part 28: Courage, NOT Cowardice

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 21.1-8

Big Idea: John's vision of the new heaven and earth reminds us of 5 attributes of courage.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 21.4 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.



Up to this point in our study of Revelation (we've been studying it for about 6 months), it's been all about the end times judgement. We've seen John write about these visions of the end times and they are pretty bad. And, as I've said many times things will get more topsy turvey in our world, but in the end, Jesus wins. After the final judgment He restores his universe into its intended pristine state. Well, we are finally getting to the phase after the judgment and it's really good. Next week we will look at in detail what this new heaven and earth will be like.

In today's passage, a short one, he writes about this new heaven and earth after the final judgement period, but he also backtracks a bit to describe those who will experience this incredible blessing of eternity in this perfect place, and, he describes those who refuse it and have a completely different experience.

That's my focus today. This passage actually contrasts these two qualities in people: **courage and cowardice**. At first glance everybody wants to be known as a courageous person and not as a coward. I sum up the application of what we will learn from this passage today with this big idea.

Big Idea
John's vision of the
new heaven and earth reminds
us of **5 attributes of courage**.

So, let's tee up today's message with the Bible Project guys.

Video. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/revelation-12-22/> **Start 9.47-end**

So, here's the passage we will look at today, Rev. 21.1-8.

Let's stand as you follow along in your bibles or your bible app.

Rev. 21:1 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, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live 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 him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The theme in these last two chapters, when God remakes everything to bring it back to his intended order mirrors events in Genesis.

- **Genesis** tells us that God created the heavens and the earth.
 - **Revelation** tells us that about a new heaven and earth.
- **Genesis** tells us that God created the sun, moon, and stars for light.
 - In **Revelation** we learn that we don't need those lights because the glory of God and the Lamb will be the light source.
- **Genesis** describes a paradise lost.
 - **Revelation** describes a paradise restored.
- **Genesis** tells of the cunning and power of the devil.
 - **Revelation** tells us that the devil has been bound and hurled into this a lake of fire.
- **Genesis** pictures humanity fleeing from God as Adam and Eve became self-conscious due to their sin.
 - **Revelation** shows a wonderful, perfect communion with God where sin is no more.
- **Genesis** tells us of the tree of life with an angel guarding that kept Adam and Eve out of the garden after they sinned.
 - **Revelation** tells us that of the access to this tree in the new heaven and earth.

Remember the theme of Revelation, God is in charge and Jesus wins.

The Jewish people dreamed of a new heaven and earth and Isaiah prophesied about it.

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, will they come to mind. (Isaiah 65.17)

Rev. 21:1 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.

It's important to realize that human vocabulary is insufficient to describe how incredible and awesome the new heaven and earth will be like.

The first heaven and earth refer to the whole of life in the world (not heaven up there as we usually think of it). This world is tainted by sin, death, suffering, and idolatry and is not permanent.

In the new heaven and new earth, the two are finally completely united. There will never again be an earth “down here” and a heaven “up there.”¹

The Greek word for “new” (*kaine*) means new in quality, fresh, rather than recent or new in time (*neos*). The heaven and earth are new because of the presence of a new community of people who are loyal to God and the Lamb in contrast to the former earth in which a community of idolaters lived. (Expositors). This implies that God will renovate the told heaven and earth by stripping it of everything that is sinful or destructive or causing sorrow or pain. It will be a place like the garden of Eden.

The sea, as we now know it, is no more. The sea, as used in Revelation, represents the origin of evil and rebellions nations, the place of the dead, and the main arena where idolatry takes place.

¹ Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 339). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

So, when the sea is no more, it means that there will be no longer any threat from satan or tribulation, evil or death, not necessarily mean that large bodies of water like the oceans disappear.

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.

This new heaven and earth, he describes as a city, an actual place and calls to mind concepts like permanent residency, many inhabitants, safety, security, fellowship.

Jesus is preparing that place for us, and he told his disciples that... *I am going there to prepare a place for you. (John 14.2)*

The image of a bride captures the awe of the moment and the anticipation when we see the groom first see his wife in a wedding.

After the new Jerusalem descends there appears to be no difference between heaven and earth.² They have been amalgamated into one.

In the verses that follow he writes that in the end, God will uniquely dwell with us in these ways.

1. He will be with us.
2. He will remove every tear of sadness or grieving.
3. He will abolish death
4. He will remove all pain, physical, mental and social pain.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

This is both now and in the future. God dwells with us through his spirit. In the future we will perfectly experience Him without the distractions and the sullyng effect of sin, heartache, and sorrow.

In daily life our conscious awareness and focus on God wanes, it comes and goes. But in heaven, it won't. God's dwelling with us will be perpetually felt and experienced. We will perpetually and permanently be aware of His presence.

There are two words totally different in meaning but similar in sound which in early Christian thought became closely connected. *Skēnē* is one, the word dwelling or tent here, and the Hebrew *Shechinah*, *the glory of God*, is the other. *SKĒNĒ—SHECHINAH*—hear the connection in sound? Well this similar sound made it so that hearing one made you think of the other. As a result, to say that the *skēnē* of God is to be with us humans immediately brought the thought that the *shechinah* of God is to be with us humans as well.³

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!”

God melds heaven and earth into one pristine place where we will spend eternity.

It's not like earth will be a shell of itself floating in space like the Star Wars destroyed Death Star.

Isaiah prophesied this when he said, *“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.” (Isaiah 65.17)*



² Morris, L. (1987). *Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 20, p. 233). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Barclay, W. (2004). *Revelation of John* (Vol. 2, p. 228). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

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

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the language the NT was first written in. The word for beginning means not only first in point of time but first in the sense that God is the source of all things. End not only means end in point of time but the goal as well, a sense of completion or purpose.

These names emphasize God’s absolute control over the world, its history, and its creation. He was before anything else came to be. In the ancient languages using the first and last letters to describe something implied the totality of it, like we use it in a similar way. “Yep, it’s covered from a to z or zed.”

John is saying that all life begins in God and ends in God. He originates and completes all things. God’s actions are based on His unchanging character. God has been in control since before time began and these names for God remind us of that. So, we can be assured that in this topsy turvey world now that He is in control.

And he will fully, completely, once for all quench our inner thirsts once and for all. The thirsty ones are those who have been faithful to Jesus and persevered and be courageous.

Remember the two words I began with? [courage and cowardice](#).

John now interrupts this vision by contrasting these two kinds of people: the courageous conqueror and the cowardly compromiser.

7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Remember the 7 churches Revelation was originally written to? John has a message for each of them. What’s interesting is that he ends every section on the seven cities using this same word, overcome, be courageous. So, this is not one isolated word.

This is not salvation by works. But rather a life that overcomes is courageous in the face of the temptation to compromise, deny the faith, turn away from God.

As we overcome, remain faithful, this new heaven and earth and all its blessings will one day be ours forever. We inherit all these blessings.

These blessings contrast the sorrow, regret, and pain of an eternity apart from God for those who reject Christ that he describes next.

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

This list is a summary of typical sins which John encouraged the church to avoid.

But the first word in this list, cowardly, and the last, liars, relate to each other. The cowardly are those who buckle under pressure, compromise their so-called faith when the heat is on, and deny their faith in those circumstances. He is saying that they aren’t true believers.

The liars refer to fake Christians who claimed to be followers of Jesus, but when persecution came, they compromised which revealed their lack of sincere faith. They chose self and safety rather than Christ.

So, cowards and liars are fake Christians and are put into this list of sins that reveal their true heart, cowardly pretenders, falsely claiming to follow Christ but in reality, are only fakes, maybe even fooling themselves.

Such people claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live. Titus 1:16

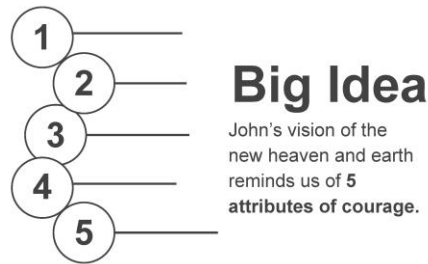
In the end times there will be a kind of sorting out, the true followers of Jesus from the fakes and from those who outright rejected Jesus. The bible gives several word pictures of this last judgement: sifting of wheat from weeds (Matt. 13:24-43); sorting good fish from bad fish (Matt. 13:47-50); separating sheep from goats (Matt. 25:31-46).

The fiery lake is another reference to hell which is an eternal separation from God. It pictures the anguish that will result.

God does not give the true believer this kind of cowardice.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1.7)

Let's go back to our big idea.



I get this idea of courage from the word overcome from verse 7.



Sometimes when we think of courage we think of the **Braveheart** of the world or when we read about someone rushing into a **burning house** to rescue someone. Those are most definitely examples of great courage, but most of us won't need to lead a fighting army or have the opportunity for heroic acts like these.

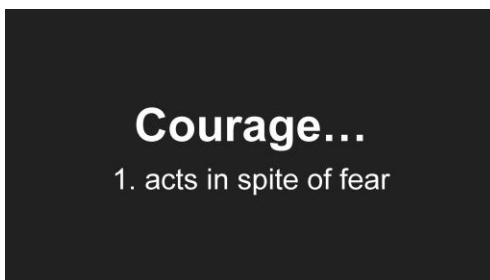


Maybe in those situations we should call those acts bravery, the mental state apart from fear that prompts people to do heroic things. Courage is a bit more nuanced, more of a virtue. Whereas bravery might be taking action without the presence of the emotion of fear (someone without thinking just rushes into the burning house without deliberating about what might happen to them), courage is more like taking action in spite of fear.

It's knowing that something is difficult, dangerous, or hard, but doing it anyway. Bravery is more spontaneous whereas courage comes through thought and foresight. A brave act often shuts down the thinking part of our mind and the person acts on simply impulse. Courage, however, happens with full awareness and often when feelings of fear are present.

Courage...

1. acts in spite of fear.



The Lord knows how powerful fear is. It's wired into our brains to feel fear when we sense danger, feel unsafe, or feel uncertain about something. As a result, one of the most often repeated statements in the Bible is this *do not fear*.

Somebody has counted and said it's in the Bible 365 times. I'm not sure if it's that exact, but it appears hundreds of times. So, courage does not mean that we do not feel the emotion of fear. Rather it means we don't yield to that feeling of fear. We don't let fear keep us from doing what we should do.

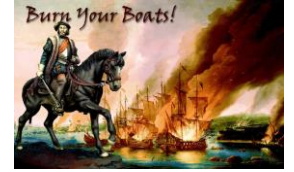
We don't let fear stifle us from what God wants us to do. You better believe those early Christians felt some fear when they refused to worship the emperor and knew the consequence. You better believe that those early martyrs felt fear as they walked to their death in the arena to be torn to shreds.

2. **does the right thing**, because it is the right thing.

2. does the right thing

Number 1 and 2 are cousins. You see fear does not stifle doing the right thing. In fact, commitment to do the right thing may mean *burning your boats* and thus not being able to go back to where you were.

The phrase '**burning the boats**' comes from **from 1519 during the Spanish conquest of Mexico**, when Hernán Cortés the Spanish commander, burned his ships so



that his men would have to conquer or die. Although we may not agree with what he did through his conquest, what he did pictures true commitment, where there is no turning back.

3. **anticipates the benefits of courage**.

3. anticipates the benefits of courage

These early believers who were living in a terrible time of persecution, believed that God was in control, that Jesus would win, and that they would inherit all the promised blessings of God. They had hope and faith that God would do what he said. Look at what they and we have to look forward to.

- God would dwell with them. They would experience a richness in their relationship untainted by sin and sorrow. That beautiful phrase should be so encouraging to us. **They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.** He will wipe all their tears away.

- Death will be no more
- Everything will be new.
- The innermost thirsts of their being would be forever met.

4. **draws strength from courageous examples**.

4. draws strength from courageous examples

Aren't we inspired when we hear the stories of those who have persevered, overcome their challenges, fought despite the odds? One of the most inspirational people I know is my daughter Tiffany who was diagnosed with a brain tumor at age 1 and has had 10 brain surgeries and complications from that tumor. I've shared from time to time our journey together. Yet, Tiffany earned a college degree, a double masters degree, is getting another certificate in recreation therapy, and faithfully serves and loves Jesus. When you hear those kinds of stories of courageous people, it inspires us to be

courageous, doesn't it? We need to hear each other's stories of courage. That's part of what being with the body of Christ does for us.

5. **is animated by a someone greater than them**.

5. is animated by a someone greater than them

Hebrews 11 is called the faith chapter. The writer lists several people and groups who lived by faith in God, even though they didn't physically see what awaited them. Their faith in the Lord empowered, animated, gave life to their courage to do courageous things and not act in cowardly ways. It begins this way.

Hebrews 11.1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

They saw by faith. One example was Abraham. Hebrews records this about him.

Hebrews 11.10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11.13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

You see, we have all these promises that we will experience one day. It requires faith in that one who is greater than our self-interests, Jesus, and courage to stand strong.

The bible is full of verses that tell us to be courageous.

Psalm 27.14 Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous.

Deuteronomy 31.6 Be strong and courageous.

Joshua 1.9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.

So, let's look at these again.

Big idea: John's vision of the new heaven and earth reminds us of 5 attributes of courage.

Courage...



So, I want to pose this question to you.

What is something courageous I need to do this week?

1. A decision I've been putting off.
2. A conversation I need to have.
3. A habit I need to stop or start.
4. An attitude I need to address.
5. An act of kindness I need to show.
6. An apology I need to give.
7. Forgiveness I need to offer.
8. Or ???

This week, be courageous and do the right thing.