

Revelation 21:5-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-21/revelation-215-8/>

He who sits on the throne speaks directly to John in his vision, telling him that God is in control and is going to reward the overcomer and punish the unbelieving.

Now a pronouncement is made, *And He who sits on the throne said* (v 5). This is the first time in Revelation that the person sitting on the throne is clearly the one delivering the message. In this case He speaks in the first person, saying *I am making all things new*. The word *throne* appears thirty seven times in the NASB95 translation of Revelation, and usually refers to God's throne. This is probably because a major theme of the book is that God reigns on His throne, regardless of how poorly things might be going on earth. God desires that we look beyond earthly chaos and trust that His plan is working out, that He has all things under control.

In the beginning of chapter 21, John "saw a new heaven and a new earth" and learned that on this new earth "there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (Revelation 21:1,4). This sentiment is continued in the opening statement where He who sits on the throne asserts, *Behold, I am making all things new* (v 5). God rested after the original creation, and now He is *making all things new*. The first step to God *making all things new* will be for all things to be destroyed with fire (2 Peter 3:7, 12). Out of this fiery destruction will come a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

There has been much said about the throne throughout Revelation, but this is the first time that *He who sits on the throne* has spoken in the first person. He says to write it down what He is speaking ("*Write, for these words are faithful and true*" v 5), which lets the reader know that this is very important.

The message starts by emphasizing that God is in control: "*It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end*" (v 6). *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. So this is like saying "A to Z" in English. God is the *beginning and the end* and it is inferred that He is also everything in between. He is the one who started everything and will be the one to end everything. He gets to say when it is finished.

Next, He states that He will give a gift to anyone who believes: "*I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost*" (v 6). The phrase *without cost* means without any obligation. There is no requirement to pay, now or later. This gift God offers to *the one who thirsts* is completely free. The thirst God speaks of here is a thirst for life. For God offers to *the one who thirsts* a drink that is of *the water of life*.

The key verb in this statement is *give*. God gives freely to anyone who 1) admits to having thirst and 2) is willing to receive the gift of the *water of life* that is freely given by Jesus.

This picture is very similar to the picture Jesus paints to Nicodemus in John 3 to describe how to be born spiritually; to be given new spiritual life (John 3:5). Jesus described that receiving the

new life of spiritual birth comes through having enough faith to look upon Jesus, hoping to be delivered from the poisonous venom of sin (John 3:14-15). In this Revelation passage, God similarly describes that new life is a gift to be freely given to anyone who recognizes their need (thirst/death) and is willing to receive by faith the gift of new life in Christ.

God states that *I will give*; this means we do not have to do anything to deserve the *water of life*; it is *without cost*. All we have to do is recognize our need (thirst) and believe in order to receive the gift. All who are thirsty and come to Jesus will drink from the *spring of the water of life*. This statement is unconditional. God accepts all who believe without condition; all who believe are His children.

All that is required in order to be born spiritually and become God's child is say to Him, "I'm thirsty, can I have a drink?" To this request God will *give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost*.

However, God rewards His children based on their degree of faithfulness (2 Corinthians 5:10). Some of those who drink of *the water of life* will be overcomers and some will not (Revelation 3:21). God now speaks of each servant who *overcomes*. Each person who *overcomes* will receive the reward of the inheritance (Colossians 3:23),

He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (v 7).

The phrase *these things* (that will be inherited) likely refers to the new creation—the new earth. The idea of inheritance is to possess, to reign over, to steward. God is *making all things new*, and each person who *overcomes will inherit these things*. It will be for those who overcome to share the throne of authority with Jesus. As Jesus stated earlier in Revelation:

"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."
(Revelation 3:21).

It is important to remember that the entire book of Revelation is addressed to "His bond-servants"—those who already believe in Jesus. As the book comes to a close, God speaks in the first person to ensure that every one of His children understands two things:

1. Every person who receives the free gift of eternal life is accepted forever; God will never reject His children, regardless of what they do (Romans 11:29)
2. As children of the King, each child has the opportunity to demonstrate their worthiness to be "promoted" to greater levels of responsibility within His Kingdom. To those who overcome, God will grant incredible rewards; they will inherit the earth.

Every believer is a child of God, having received a free gift from Jesus of the *water of life*. But only some of God's children will become a "son," which is one way scripture refers to the one who *will inherit these things*. Jesus has always been God's son, the second member of the Trinity (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). But Jesus was given the title of "Son" when He inherited

authority over the earth as His reward for faithfulness (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:8-11; Hebrews 1:5; Revelation 3:21).

In order to be given the reward of receiving the inheritance, believers must overcome, even as Jesus overcame (Revelation 3:21). To inherit this reward requires a believer to be a faithful witness and not fear death, loss, or rejection (Hebrews 12:1-2). Jesus overcame death, loss, and rejection, and learned obedience, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). As a result of this suffering of death, Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor” in that He was granted authority over all the earth (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:10-11).

It is Jesus’s intent to bring “many sons to glory” by sharing His reign with them (Hebrews 2:10). This passage of Hebrews 2:5-11 cites Psalm 8, which highlights that God’s original (good) design was for humans to reign over the earth, even though they were a “little lower” than the angels. God’s purpose in this was to silence Satan and his followers (Psalm 8:2). Due to the fall, it appears that Satan was restored as the prince of the world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). But every sin was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and Jesus restored the “crown” of “glory and honor” God gave humans to have authority over the earth (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus’s disciples expected Him to use His authority to restore the kingdom to Israel and displace the despised Romans from ruling over them (Acts 1:6). However, Jesus instead instructed His followers, His bond-servants, to make disciples by leading them to belief and then teaching them His commands (Matthew 28:19-20). When His children walk in faith, following His commands, they bring a small bit of restoration to the world. God will greatly reward such faithfulness, and will give a great reward of inheritance, as *he who overcomes will inherit these things* (the new earth).

Jesus has been in eternity for all time—He is God. The question then is how Jesus can be “begotten” as a son, since He is already the Son of God.

In this instance, “Son” is a title of reward. Hebrews 1:5 pictures a reward ceremony from the ancient eastern suzerainty-vassal treaty structure ([for more, read our article link](#)). In this treaty, the suzerain, or the superior king, has a vassal/servant, a subordinate king, who he wants to honor as a particularly faithful servant. When the superior king desires to honor the faithfulness of one of his servants he has a ceremony in which he adopts the servant as a “son” and confers the privilege of reigning over the kingdom with him, bestowing upon him a greater responsibility.

Jesus was an obedient and faithful servant, deserving of such an honor. As we see in Philippians 2:8-9. His Father, the Great Suzerain, “adopted” Him as a “Son” over all the earth, as well as over all the heavens (Matthew 28:18). Jesus was already equal with God, but now due to His faithfulness as a human He was elevated to rule with God as a human. Accordingly, Jesus opened the door for all of humanity to be restored to their original creative design to rule over the earth (Psalm 8).

Jesus here is being used as an example for all believers: “Be faithful as I have been faithful and you will inherit as I have inherited” (Revelation 3:21).

Only Jesus is the true Son who has been given all authority as a human (Matthew 28:18). The One on the throne now asserts: *He who overcomes will inherit these things*, just as Jesus inherited the heavens and the earth.

Next, those who will not *inherit* are addressed:

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (v 8).

This verse likely has a different application to believers and unbelievers. It is stated that for people who display these sinful behaviors, *their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*. As we have already seen, the *part* that an unbeliever has in the lake of fire is to be consumed by it; that is their permanent experience (Revelation 20:15). However, the fire of the *second death* will be applied to refine and purify believers ([see commentary on Revelation 2:11](#)).

Since the immediate context here refers to those believers who inherit the earth, contrasted with those believers who do not inherit the earth, we will focus most of our attention on how this verse might apply to unfaithful believers.

The listed behaviors associated with those who will not *inherit* is a similar list to the fruits of the flesh from Galatians 5. This is a list of behaviors that believers are acknowledged to be able to choose, but are encouraged to avoid. Note that the end of the passage emphasizes that believers who follow these deeds will “not inherit the kingdom of God”:

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, faction, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
(Galatians 5:19-21)

To “not inherit the kingdom of God” likely includes the experience of life both on this earth as well as the new earth that is to come. In the new earth that is to come, only *he who overcomes* that *will inherit these things*.

This list of deeds of the flesh from Galatians is in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit listed in the subsequent verses. The fruit of the Spirit describe a life of love—the deeds of the flesh describe a life of exploitation.

The context in Galatians 5 is that the flesh and Spirit both dwell within each believer, and each of these entities “lust” to get us to choose to walk in their way. This list of fleshly behaviors is offered such that we might be able to discern when we are walking in the flesh versus the Spirit. Galatians admonishes us to walk in the Spirit that we might gain the great reward of inheriting the kingdom (Galatians 5:5:16, 6:8-9).

The fruits of the flesh largely have to do with seeking to control or extract from others or to pursue various forms of escape or sensual pleasure.

The fruit of the Spirit, by contrast, primarily exhibits inner peace and love and service toward others:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
(Galatians 5:22-23)

Galatians agrees with Revelation, saying that “those who practice such things [deeds of the flesh] will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21). Revelation 21:8 says something similar, but adds that they will have a *part that will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*. As we saw in Revelation 2:11, those believers who overcome will not “will not be hurt by the second death.” This indicates that the second death, which is the lake of fire, will hurt but not consume believers who are not overcomers. This is consistent with the picture of God’s judgment fire consuming fleshly deeds of believers at the judgement seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-17). The fire will hurt but not consume.

The alternative to being hurt by the fire of God’s judgement at His judgement seat is to be an overcomer and endure the fiery trials during life on this earth (1 Peter 4:12-14; James 1:2-4, 12). It seems that a trial of fire is required to burn away the flesh such that we can be freed to fully live in the Spirit, and our basic choice is “Now or later?” In this passage, and a primary theme of Revelation, is the vastly superior choice: choose now. If we are faithful now, and endure rejection and loss from the world, we overcome, and *he who overcomes will inherit these things* (the new earth).

It helps to envision what reigning in the new earth might look like. Since Jesus is a servant, there will be no tyrants. To lead in the new earth will be to serve. And the service will be in intimate harmony with Jesus. This is made apparent in Jesus’ parable of the talents. In that parable, Jesus rewards the faithful servants by saying:

“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”
(Matthew 25:21)

The Greek word translated as “slave” in Matthew 25:21 is “doulos.” This is the same Greek word translated “bond-servants” in Revelation 1:1, the people to whom this letter is addressed. The faithful “doulos” in the parable is not only given reign over “many things.” The faithful “doulos” is also invited to “enter into the joy of your master.” This indicates that one of the primary aspects of the great reward of being an overcomer is an increased intimacy with Christ. This fits with our human experience on earth, that we develop closer bonds and intimacy with those with whom we have shared experiences—particularly experiences with great purpose.

It is also worth noting that the admonitions in Revelation apply to all believers, male and female, rich and poor, regardless of nationality or ethnicity (Romans 2:11; Galatians 3:28).

Many of the behaviors on the list in Revelation 21:8 are clearly inconsistent with someone being deemed worthy to *inherit these things*. This would include the *abominable and murderers and immoral persons*. Such acts logically deserve a refining cleansing with *fire and brimstone* rather than a reward. But what about the *cowardly and unbelieving*?

To be *cowardly* might initially seem to us like a benign act, but it keeps us from gaining the great reward of inheriting *these things*. *Cowardly and unbelieving* are likely listed together due to their linked nature. The reason we fear, and are therefore *cowardly*, is due to lack of belief.

An example can be found in Mark 4. There, Jesus addresses His disciples who remain fearful after He has calmed the raging storm:

“And He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”
(Mark 4:40)

It appears here that being afraid, or *cowardly*, stems from a lack of faith, or being *unbelieving*. We overcome being cowardly by growing our faith. John asserts that one of the reasons he wrote his gospel was that those who believe might live in faith: that “believing you may have life in His name”(John 20:31). To walk in faith is to experience the “life” of Jesus through living in His resurrection power.

Faith leads to boldness. In order to be a faithful witness and not fear death, loss, or rejection, we need to have the courage to walk in faith that God’s reward will be more than worth any loss we endure for staying the course (Hebrews 11:6).

It took belief and the physical proof of Jesus’ wounds to help Thomas overcome being *cowardly*,

“Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’”
(John 20:27)

Thomas was blessed when he believed. But Jesus asserted that those who believed without seeing would be blessed to a greater degree (John 20:29). There is, therefore, an immense encouragement here for believers. First of all, God’s children will never be rejected (Revelation 21:6). We are His regardless of our choices. But secondly, our choices have immense impact on the world, our life experience, and our future. What we do really matters. This is regardless of what the world says about our station. Status in the world means nothing in God’s economy.

It would be natural to hope that verse 8 is not addressed to believers because this is a list of those who will not *inherit* the kingdom and will instead suffer the *second death*. We naturally avoid facing adverse consequences. But this is a self-examination opportunity to determine whether we are walking in the Spirit. We can all become *cowardly and unbelieving* or *immoral persons* or *liars* if we follow the desires of our flesh.

The desire of our flesh is appealing. That is why John admonishes us to avoid loving the things of the world:

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

(1 John 2:15-16)

When we walk in the ways of the world, we are not walking in the ways of the Father.

The list of behaviors in v 8 can be placed side by side with the “deeds of the flesh” set forth in Galatians 5:

- *cowardly and unbelieving* interestingly do not seem to have a direct parallel in Galatians 5:19-21:
 - They might be considered as being the root problem as to why people walk in the flesh in the first place—they do not have sufficient faith that God’s ways are for their best.
- *murderers and immoral persons* might be seen as parallel to these “deeds of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21:
 - “immorality, impurity, sensuality, enmities, drunkenness, carousing.”
- *abominable* might be seen as having a parallel with:
 - “strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,” and “envying.”
- *sorcerers* has a parallel with “sorcery” in Galatians 5:20
- *Idolaters* has a parallel with “idolatry” in Galatians 5:20
- *and all liars*, also does not seem to have a direct parallel with Galatians 5:19-21:
 - However, it would seem that the entire list of fruit of the Spirit represent what is true and right, while all the deeds of the flesh represent what is twisted and false.

There is sufficient overlap to correlate that the “deeds of the flesh” in Galatians 5 are the same basic behaviors as those who get “fire” in Revelation 21:8. As Galatians 6 asserts:

“For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

(Galatians 6:8)

This admonition from Galatians 6 is also written to believers, as is the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1). The basic proposition is that each person “reaps what they sow”—meaning there are consequences that stem from our choices. The consequence of choosing to walk in the deeds of the flesh is to “reap corruption.” The word translated “corruption” is also translated “corruption” in this verse from 1 Peter:

“For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”

(1 Peter 5:4)

The idea of “corruption” fits with a twisting of God’s (good) design for creation. The word “corruption” aptly describes rusted iron or decayed wood, indicating in each case an eroded usefulness of purpose. In the same way, the fleshly ways of the world corrupt humans from their intended design to serve one another in love. The fleshly ways of the world lead humans to exploitation and extraction, corrupting God’s design of “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Thus concludes the address from *He who sits on the throne*, which can be summarized as follows:

The gift is something that you can’t mess up. If you have enough faith to thirst and ask for a drink of water, you’re in. Don’t ever worry about belonging. It’s yours.

Now that you belong, learn how to walk in courageous faith apart from the world’s system. And if you do, you’re going to get the same reward God the Father gave His own Son as a victor in life.

We don’t want to lose out on that.

Biblical Text

⁵And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” ⁶Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. ⁸But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”