

Christ the Beginning of God's (New) Creation

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 3, 2023
PASSAGES	Revelation 3:14; Revelation 1:4-5; Colossians 1:15-18; Isaiah 65:16-18; Psalm 89:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Colossians 3:1-4
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:34:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Revelation gives Jesus a title that sounds, at first, like a mistake: *the beginning of God's creation*. It is not a claim that he was made. It is a claim that the new heavens and the new earth start inside his risen body — and that everything God is doing to make all things new, he is doing in Christ and not merely because of him.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Seeing the words *beginning* and *creation* together does not mean the subject is Genesis. In Revelation 3:14 the subject is the resurrection.
- ◆ Revelation interprets itself. Each letter opens with a description of Jesus lifted from chapter one, and the phrase that matches “the beginning of God's creation” there is “the firstborn of the dead.”
- ◆ “Firstborn” in the New Testament is not a statement about when Jesus started. It is a statement about rank and about being first out of the grave.
- ◆ Isaiah 65 puts the God of Amen and the making of new heavens and a new earth in the same breath, and it gives the reason: joy and gladness. The new creation is not damage control.
- ◆ Paul's preposition is the whole point. A person is a new creation *in Christ*; the cosmos is reconciled *in him*; our life is hidden *in him*. The new world has a location, and the location is a body.

- ◆ Heaven is not a paradise where Jesus occasionally makes an appearance. He fills all in all — he takes up all the space, and that is what makes it heaven.
- ◆ Whether this lands as confusion or as relief may come down to one thing: whether you actually know him.

► 1:34:38

By the time Matt reached the pulpit, the congregation had already sung, taken communion, blessed a departing board member and laid hands on Andy and Sarah as Hope's new worship director. “I could just not preach and still feel like my heart is full,” he said, “but preachers have to preach.” What followed was short by his own warning and unusually concentrated: one verse, held up and turned over, as a meditation on the person of Jesus.

1. Closing one series, opening another

► 1:35:15

This message ends Hope's series in the Book of Revelation — *Reading Revelation Responsibly* — and starts the Christmas series on the incarnation of the Son of God. Matt named the two things he hoped had stuck. First, that Revelation is scripture about our Lord. Second, how densely it is packed with the Old Testament: the volume of allusion and echo in one short book is, in his words, beyond comprehension. Both of those convictions do the work in what follows.

2. The verse that sounds like a contradiction

► 1:36:40

“The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.”

REVELATION 3:14 ↗

The church had already met this verse in the letter to Laodicea, and Matt suspected it had quietly bothered people then. Read the words *beginning* and *creation* side by side and the mind goes straight to [Genesis 1](#) — and then to a problem, because the Son is eternal. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. The church landed on the phrase *eternally begotten* to say how he has always been Son to a Father who has always been Father.

“Just because you see the word *beginning* and the word *creation* doesn't mean we're talking about Genesis,” Matt said. Jesus Christ is the beginning of God's *new* creation of all things, heaven and earth, in his body raised from the dead.

3. Revelation explains itself

► 1:38:51

The first evidence is structural. Every letter in chapters 2 and 3 opens with a description of Jesus drawn from the vision in chapter one, and every one of those descriptions is chosen for the church receiving it. Smyrna gets “the first and the last, who died and came to life” — and is then called to be faithful unto death. That title comes straight from

“I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

► 1:39:23

So follow the same pattern back for Laodicea:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”

REVELATION 1:4–5 ↗

“The faithful witness” matches word for word. And what stands where “the beginning of God's creation” stands is *the firstborn of the dead*. Matt also noticed a likely pun underneath it: the Greek word for *ruler* and the word for *beginning* are close cousins, and here the ruler of kings on earth and the firstborn from the dead sit side by side.

4. Firstborn from the dead

► 1:40:30

This is not a limb Matt went out on alone. Paul pairs the same ideas:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

COLOSSIANS 1:15–18 ↗

Both titles, one sentence apart. He is before all things and everything was made through him — and still, “all of this new creation stuff is starting in his broken, dead and resurrected body.”

5. The God of Amen who makes all things new

► 1:42:07

Matt flagged Isaiah 43 for anyone who wants to dig into the witness language on their own — who is a witness, God or his people, and what it means that Jesus is the faithful and true one — and then set it aside for time. He went instead to the chapter where both halves of the title turn up together.

► 1:42:44

“So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth... For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 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.”

ISAIAH 65:16–18 ↗

“God of truth” is, in the Hebrew, the God of *Amen*. So the God of Amen is the one who announces new heavens and a new earth — and Matt stopped on the reason given for it. Not repair, not bookkeeping: joy and gladness. God creates all things new for the sake of joy.

6. The firstborn and the highest of the kings of the earth

► 1:44:02

“He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’ And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.”

PSALM 89:26–27 ↗

► 1:45:17

There is the same pairing Revelation 1 uses, sitting in a psalm about the Messiah. And in what sense is Jesus firstborn? He is eternally the Son, and he was truly born a man — but firstborn *of the dead* means he took our humanity, died in it, and was raised by the glory of God. First fruits. He opened his broken body generously, so that if we share a death like his, we will share a resurrection like his.

7. New creation happens in a body

► 1:45:53

From there Matt walked a chain of texts, and the point of the chain is a preposition.

“He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:15–17 ↗

► 1:47:22

Isaiah's old-and-new language, turned personal — and the door into it is *in Christ*. Then it widens past the individual:

in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, making peace. Cosmic reconciliation, not vaguely on account of Jesus or loosely associated with him, but in him.

► 1:48:21

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19–26 ↗

Death came through a man and the undoing of death comes through a man — and the order matters: Christ first, then his people at his coming, then the handing of the kingdom to the Father with every hostile power put down. Matt wondered aloud whether Paul had [Psalm 89](#) open in front of him — the Messianic firstborn who rules over all, and here the risen first fruits who must reign until every enemy is under his feet. The theme is unmistakable by now, and it is always the resurrection.

8. Hidden in him

► 1:50:12

The same logic runs through [Ephesians 1:20–23](#), where God raises Christ, seats him above every rule and authority and every name that is named in this age and the next, and gives him as head over all things to the church, “the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

► [1:50:55](#)

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God... For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

COLOSSIANS 3:1–4 ↗

Matt stopped to ask why the language keeps piling up like that — hidden in Christ, the fullness, taking up all the space. “New creation isn't happening just merely somewhat associated with Jesus,” he said. “It's because of his body, and taking place mysteriously within him — because our lives are hidden in him.”

► [1:51:31](#)

A few verses later the practical edge shows: put off the old self, put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator, where there is not Greek and Jew. Every category we sort each other by is relativised by the one who fills everything.

► [1:52:06](#)

Then he put the whole chain back into the verse he started with. “What is the point of all this? When John writes that Jesus is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation, what it means is that everything God is doing” — as he seeks justice, redemption and reconciliation, and creates all things new — “is happening in and because of Jesus Christ's broken, dead and resurrected body.” Justice and redemption and reconciliation are not separate programmes running alongside Revelation 3:14; they are what that title is describing.

9. Not a paradise where Jesus makes an appearance

► [1:52:45](#)

Matt admitted the obvious risk with a message like this: it can land as engaging or as abstract, and the first instinct is to ask how any of it is about me. Mostly, he said, it isn't — at least not right away.

► [1:53:31](#)

Then came the question he used to put to the youth group: would you rather have paradise with every luxury you can imagine, or be with Christ in an old mop closet? The picture he was arguing against is

the one where Jesus features in heaven the way a celebrity does — you might spot him at the grocery store picking fruit, or wait in a line long enough to shake his hand, or go downtown in the New Jerusalem and get a sticker.

Underneath the celebrity picture is a second one he rejected just as flatly: “It's not like our existence is just some ghost trapped in a body and then we get to go to ghost paradise.” The resurrection he had been tracing all morning is bodily — which is why the destination is not a disembodied pleasant place, and not a place organised mostly around our own enjoyment.

► 1:54:09

“It's not that he merely features in the periphery,” Matt said. “He is so central that it is he who fills all in all. It's not just that he's there — he takes up all the space.” The new creation came in him. The reconciliation of all things happened in him. Our lives are hidden in him. He is why our souls are satisfied in the presence of the Lord, and it is all wrapped up in the eternal Son of God entering our humanity and our death so that we could walk in newness of life in his life.

Where it leaves you

► 1:55:08

“This is either a great mystery and confusion, or a great relief and source of comfort,” Matt said, “and the difference may be whether we know him.” So the charge at the end of a doctrinal message was not to study harder. Know him. Let him into your life. Sit at his feet in his presence. Then he prayed that the Spirit would enable the room to fix its eyes on Jesus, trust him, and see its glorious inheritance in him all the more — which is where a Christmas series ought to begin.

With the series closed and the new one opened, he called the Heart Ministry teams forward to pray with anyone who wanted it, told the congregation to hand out several hugs on the way out — it did not have to be a member of the Colmes family — and sent the room out the way Hope always sends it: go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Revelation 3:14
- Genesis 1
- Revelation 2:8
- Revelation 1:18
- Revelation 1:4–5
- Colossians 1:15–18
- Isaiah 43
- Isaiah 65:16–18
- Psalm 89:26–27
- Romans 6:5
- 2 Corinthians 5:15–17
- Colossians 1:19–20
- 1 Corinthians 15:19–26
- Ephesians 1:20–23
- Colossians 3:1–4
- Colossians 3:9–11

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Read Revelation 3:14 cold, the way the Laodiceans would have. What did you assume it meant before this message, and what changed?
2. Matt showed Revelation interpreting itself by pairing chapter 3 with chapter 1. Where else have you let a hard verse sit unresolved instead of letting the book explain it?
3. Isaiah 65 says God creates new heavens and a new earth for joy and gladness. How does that sit against the way you usually picture God's motives?
4. Paul keeps saying in Christ rather than because of Christ. What does the difference between those two change about how you think of yourself?
5. If Jesus fills all in all rather than appearing at the edges of a pleasant place, what would it look like this week to know him rather than just know about him?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAYleYsJ9jM&t=5678s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.