

## **A new heaven and earth for the bride of Christ**

### **Revelation 21:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea no longer existed. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And from the throne I heard a loud voice that said, "Look! God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away." <sup>5</sup> The one who was seated on the throne said to me, "Look, I am making everything new!" He also said, "Write, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup> And he said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To anyone who is thirsty, I will give freely from the spring of the water of life.*

Imagine what life was like following the week of creation. Before that nothing existed except God. But then God said, "Let there be light." And in less than a week, a perfect world existed. The weather was perfect—no storms anywhere. No diseases that made people sick. No pain of any kind that anyone had to endure. Relationships were flawless—no hurt feelings, no words spoken against anyone. How enjoyable life was for Adam and Eve. It was perfect. It was paradise.

But then that dreadful day came when our perfect world went away. One of God's angels led a heavenly rebellion against God and was cast out of God's presence forever. Knowing he could never get back at God, he set his sights on the crown of God's creation—those special creatures that God made in his own holy image. With the slyness of a serpent the old evil foe got Adam and Eve not only to question God's goodness, but to blatantly defy his command. When that tragic ordeal was over, God's holy image was lost in both of them. They convinced themselves to hide from the All-present One. Did they eat what God forbid? Well, who could blame them? That woman you gave me, Lord. She made me eat. That serpent you made, Lord. It deceived me and I ate. Perfection was gone. Paradise was lost. God's perfect world was over and done. Sin ruined everything. Now there are threatening storms, disease, pain, hatred, and unholiness abounds. And in the end, death for all. What began was perfect. What was left was tragic.

And now came God's holy verdict. Since the wages of sin is death and the soul that sins must die, what hope is there for any violators of God's holy will? Well, God in his grace found a way to satisfy his holy demands and still accept us sinners. God promised the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head. God crafted our world's history to bring his Son in at just the right time to win forgiveness for every sin and salvation for every soul. When his saving work was complete and God's righteous demands were met, God raised him back to life and welcomed him home to heaven. Now the mission for every faithful follower is getting the word out. That's why John was still in the world. But what could John do now that he was banished and isolated to an island? Who could he tell about the Savior now that he was separated from all humanity by sea water?

God could still use him. And he would. He gave him visions to record. And that included the vision of heaven. In it God promised a new heaven and a new earth for his church, the bride of

Christ. This vision brings comfort to any suffering in this life. It brings lasting peace of God's continual presence.

In John's vision he saw *a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea no longer existed.* The sea that kept John from contacting others, did not exist in the new heaven and earth. The first world that was ruined by sin was no more. Instead, John saw *the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*" This same description of the city is used in the previous chapter for God's church. It's glorification on the last day is called the marriage of the Lamb. In last week's reading from Revelation 7, it is described as a great multitude. They were standing before the throne. They had robes that were made white by the blood of the Lamb. The adornment of Christ's bride consists of the robes of righteousness and the garments of salvation which God himself has clothed his people.

For many of us it was the day of our baptism, when many of us wore miniature white gowns. That is appropriate because it was the day we became the bride of Christ. In that water combined with God's word we were washed clean of sin and given a robe of our Savior's righteousness—the holy life he lived all his days in life. In exchange for his righteousness, he took our sin—every thought, word, and deed that did not measure up to God's perfect standard. He went to a cross and suffered hell's punishment for every one of us. Now we appear radiant like a bride on her wedding day. That's why we were dressed in white gowns on the day we became the bride of Christ.

But that didn't mean life would be easy. We still have to deal with Satan and his evil influence on this world and our sinful flesh that we cannot convert. They all want to see us fail day after day and leave us hopelessly in despair. So what can we do. Return daily to your baptism and drown that sinful flesh with sorrow over sin and repentant faith in Christ. And keep looking ahead to the day we'll be done with sin as John saw it in his visions. Then we'll have lasting peace knowing we'll be in God's continual presence.

John heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: *God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away.*" The message came from God himself. It must be reliable promising any suffering person they can build their hope for a better time to come. During Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, God gave his people visible evidence of his gracious presence. It was a tent or tabernacle. In the new heaven and the new earth God would live in the midst of his people in a very special way. When God dwells with his redeemed at that time they will no longer walk by faith, but by sight. They will have a clear, visible evidence that God is dwelling with them. Whenever suffering was inflicted by some enemy leaving them thinking they were forsaken by God, this promise of God dwelling with them would assure them that God was still in control. They would see the truth of what they now could only believe.

That God is really their God, that he loves them and is concerned about them, having planned their salvation, was now evident. There is no longer any reason to weep, for death has been conquered. The story of man's redemption began when man fell into sin and brought the curse of death to our world. The story will be complete when death goes out of existence. On the

night of his betrayal Jesus promised his disciples, *"You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy"* (John 16:20). Now in this vision John sees the final and complete fulfillment of the promise. Sorrow, crying and pain, all have vanished from the church in final victory. The old order of things has passed away.

The vision continues: *The one who was seated on the throne said to me, "Look, I am making everything new!"* God reminds John and us that the conquest of death and pain and sorrow is his work. A new heaven and earth are brought into being by God himself. Such a perfect world can only come when the present world is destroyed. The present world labors under the curse of sin. It must perish to make room for a new heaven and earth. This will not be brought into being by human effort or skill but by the almighty power of God. The task of the church is not to build a perfect social order. The church's mission is to proclaim gospel promises through which people come to share in the new heaven and new earth that God will make.

What John had seen and heard was not meant for his eyes and ears only. John is told, *"Write, for these words are trustworthy and true."* John was to share the message with others. His writing would come by inspiration from the Holy Spirit. It would be included in Holy Scripture. Because these words are trustworthy and true the church can safely find in them a firm hope in times of tribulation. The tears of God's people will surely be wiped away. Death and pain and sorrow will surely come to an end. Just like a human contract is put in writing, God was through John putting down his promise in writing.

The vision continues: *And he said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.* Whatever God promises is as good as done. He is the eternal one. Before the earth and the world were formed God was. When the present sky and earth have passed away, he still will be. These words reassure us that the enemies of God's people endure only for a time. When they and the world in which they often seem to be in control come to an end, God still will be.

The vision concludes: *To anyone who is thirsty, I will give freely from the spring of the water of life.* People are spiritually thirsty when they sense their great need for forgiveness and salvation. They are invited to drink from the water of life freely. The gospel offer of forgiveness and salvation is freely given. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, *"Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:14). God will continue to build and preserve his church by satisfying the spiritually thirsty with his free and gracious offer of forgiveness. He will bring them into the heavenly Jerusalem.

Imagine a world free from sin. Imagine what life was like for our first parents before sin came and ruined it all. They felt no pain, no sorrow, no tears, no death. Since sin entered our world that is all we've known—pain, sorrow, tears and death. But God in his grace has found a way to restore perfection. He sent his Son into our world to win us God's favor and makes things right. Because of Christ, we can look ahead to a new heaven and earth; a world without pain, without sorrow, no tears and no death because no sin is there anywhere. And by God's grace in Christ you and I will be there, with no more suffering, with life in God's continual presence. It will be perfect. It will be paradise. It is yours in Christ.