

OUT WITH THE OLD & IN WITH THE NEW – REVELATION 21:1-6

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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, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell 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 the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.



Grace and peace to you from him who is, who was, and who is to come,

OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW. That’s a little bit of what I was feeling this last week. A big project that Kristin and I got accomplished was going through all of our stuff and getting rid of the stuff we didn’t need or don’t wear anymore. Before, our closets and cupboards were overflowing with stuff we didn’t need, and now after can actually see the floor in our closets and can reach in our cupboards without being afraid of what is going to fall out. Some people call this a spring cleaning.

Businesses apply this phrase when there’s a merger of companies – OUT WITH THE OLD POLICIES AND PEOPLE, IN WITH THE NEW. The same motto applies during the offseason with sports franchises as bottom dweller teams overhaul their management and coaching staff in attempts to get better. OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW. Many times in can be beneficial to look through your stuff, to look through your company, to look through anything you are a part of to find out if you still need the old, or if it would be better to get something new.

That is the attitude that the Apostle John had on his mind when God inspired him to write this section of Revelation. For 20 whole chapters, God had been telling John what was going to happen to the earth, what was going to happen at Judgment Day, and now he tells John the wonderful news, “**God is making everything new.**” God might as well be saying OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW.

1. A new dwelling
2. A new confidence

The Apostle John has just finished describing for the final time that in the end Satan will be defeated and will no longer be able to harm any of God's chosen people. He has just gotten done describing how the unbelieving world has been defeated and will no longer be able to harm God's chosen people. And now he talks about the reward for the believer. **"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.'"**

At first glance, we might wonder, why did God bring about a new heaven and a new earth? If everything that could possibly harm us has been taken care of, then why couldn't we just continue to enjoy this life? Unless, everything that can possibly harm us has not been taken care of. And that is precisely the reason why God is bringing about a new heaven and a new earth, because the current dwelling place is not good enough – neither for God, nor for us. Maybe as a way to explain this, let's take a look through human history as described in the Bible.

We can go all the way back to the beginning of creation – when our world began. God made the world out of nothing in just six days, and gave Adam and Eve the task to tend for the Garden of Eden. During the time when Adam and Eve were perfect, God would walk with them in the Garden and converse with them. You might say that God dwelt with men. But after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit from the tree, disobeying God, there were no more long walks with God in the Garden of Eden, in fact there were no more walks period in the Garden of Eden as God banished them. Because of sin, God could no longer dwell with his people. And sin wreaked havoc on the world.

Then fast forward a couple thousand years as God worked his way into history to bring up a nation that would be his very own – the Israelites. They grew into a nation as slaves in Egypt, but God brought them out of there with his miraculous power. At that time – during which the Israelites wandered in the desert – God once more dwelt with his people. Not in the same way as he did with Adam and Eve, but in a visible way. The tabernacle – the portable tent structure that served as the center for Israel's worship – was God's visible presence with his people. That was where the pillar of cloud and fire watched over the Israelites. The pillar of fire and cloud disappeared as the Israelites entered the Promised Land, but God still gave them a visible sign of his presence in the Temple.

Fast forward another several hundred years and we see how God once again dwelt with his people. The apostle John in his gospel writes these words, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."** This was none other than Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, making his dwelling with men. But even that did not last too long. Yes, Jesus fulfilled what God wanted him to do – he lived a perfect life and died an innocent death to pay for our sins, but living here on this earth was never the plan. We heard that in our gospel reading. **"I will be with you only a little while longer...where I am going you cannot come."** Jesus was no longer going to physically dwell with us, and we were still not able to dwell with him.

But why? Our sinful nature is the reason we cannot dwell with God. That is how devastating our sin is to our relationship with God. God had intended the earth to be a perfect world, in which he would enjoy a perfect relationship with his creation – us. Sin changed that, we changed that. Oh sure, we can try and convince ourselves that our sins are not that bad. We can try to convince ourselves that the world really is not that bad of a place. And certainly I'm not meaning to say that there is nothing good in the

world, or nothing we can enjoy (it is after all still God's creation). But if all we do is to enjoy the life we have before us, then what happens after?

That's obviously what Jesus came to fix. He is the one through that death and resurrection that restored the relationship we have with God. He said, **"No one comes to the Father except through me"** and **"I am the way, the truth, and the life."** Those who believe in Jesus are restored in their relationship with God. And yet, even though the relationship with God is restored, you have not been sipping margaritas with him in some heavenly siesta. That's because even though God has created in you a new person who desires to be with him, we still have a stubborn sinful nature clinging to our coattails. It is the sinful nature that continues to draw us into sins, even after we have been saved.

And it is that sinful nature that does not enable us to realize full dwelling with God. For our sinfulness and God's holiness do not mix, it cannot mix. God's work of saving us is done, it is complete, we are saved right now, but we are still waiting for the time when we will no longer have that sinful nature dogging us around. That's what John is talking about in this section of Revelation. Jesus himself says, **"I am making everything new."** Just as our current earthly bodies will be transformed to be more like his glorified body, so all of creation will be transformed also. It is then, and only then, when everything that has to do with sin is taken care of, that God can dwell with his people.

OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW. John says, **"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God, 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."** The end of the world, or Judgment Day, will mark the time when God will dwell with his people, in a way unknown since the creation of the world.

(2)

And it is the same God who was around at the creation of the world that will be around at the end of the world – he is **"the Alpha and Omega."** Which is what makes his words true, we can trust them. How different that is than anything else we can compare it to.

We can say OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW, but we would have to continually repeat the process. Our new will become old – new clothes get faded and holey, new cars accumulate miles, even our own bodies, once young and vibrant, start to break down. But this will not be so with God and his new. His new will always be new, it is a new that won't spoil, or perish or fade, and this means not only will we be able to enjoy a new dwelling, but we can have a new confidence right now.

It's the confidence of knowing what God has said is true, that this is coming, even when we cannot see it, even when we don't fully understand it. It is coming even when the scoffers say we are foolish to believe it. Listen to this, **"To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."** Jesus oftentimes compared his Word to life giving water. Just as physical water can keep you alive physically, so the spiritual water of God's Word keeps you alive spiritually. And so it's no wonder when you don't drink the spiritual water, you are not spiritually alive.

But to those of us who drink from the spring of living water without cost, we have confidence. We can have a confidence to display our faith, not flaunt it, but display it. Think about it. If you really believe what you believe is true (God will dwell with men), how will you share that with others? Sometimes people think the starting place is inviting them to church, and if you can do that great. But really the starting point is you being a good neighbor, a caring friend, a loving family member. It is taking the opportunities God gives you to share your faith. It's about praying boldly that God might use you to share the good news, instead of just hoping that he will work apart from us.

Our confidence will only grow as we are immersed in God's Word – here in church, in a Bible study, in personal and family devotions. Our confidence will only grow as we practice sharing our faith. This is not a new revelation to you, but it's one that we all need to be reminded of from time to time. The last few weekends have served as good reminders for me. Two weeks ago was the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society rally. One of the speakers talked about witnessing to Mormons. Many people can see Mormons as the enemy and that can affect how we respond to them. Instead, the speaker reminded us they are not the enemy, but they are victims. Last weekend, I went to a leadership seminar, where the presenter reminded us one of the characteristics of not only a leader, but of a Christian is selflessness. Put the wellbeing of others before your own.

OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW. I was certainly glad when I was able to clean out my closets. But I'm even gladder that is what God will do for us. OUT WITH THE OLD – our sinful nature and everything with it, AND IN WITH THE NEW – a new dwelling place where we will be with God and he will be with us, and a new confidence so that we might share with others where they might receive water without cost from the springs of life. Amen.