

Everything New

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Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6

Sermon

When I was growing up, everything was *new and improved*. Colgate toothpaste: new and improved. Tide laundry detergent: new and improved. Nuclear missiles: new and improved.

New and improved! A simple slogan with a simple point. “You deserve the best!” So go ahead and buy a front-loading feedbag for your camel! And trade in your two-year-old cellphone for a new iPhone Xs! You know you want it! You know you need it!

WELL, HERE’S THE TRUTH. Most of the time, we don’t need *new and improved*. Most of the time, what we already have is good enough. And sometimes what’s old is better than what’s new. So don’t let yourself be fooled when someone tries to sell you something *new and improved*.

But what about this? It’s from the Bible. *The one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!”* (Revelation 21:5). “I am making everything new!” Is that a slogan? Does God have something to sell us? And if that’s not it, then are we at least talking about something real? And is it something we can get our hands on? Or is it just a dream?

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Every one of us has seen the old. We deal with the old every day, whether it’s a twelve-year-old car or fifty-seven-year-old knees, whether it’s a lying politician or a cheating quarterback. We know the old. We know it in our bones. So we’re ready for a dream. We’re ready for everything new. Especially if it means new and improved! But when is that ever going to happen?

REVELATION 21 IS NOT NOT A “NEW AND IMPROVED” VISION. But it is a vision about something new. And something new was needed back in the first century, because the Roman world had decided not to make room for the church. And something new is needed these days, because every day in too many places the church faces real danger, the kind of danger that can cost your life.

So we're ready for something new. The church is always ready for the vision of Revelation 21: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. . . . And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven . . .* (Revelation 21:1-2). It's a vision of the end. And that end can't come soon enough.

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But is the vision of Revelation 21 only about the end? Is it just a "some day" vision? Do you know what I mean by that? I mean not now, not yet, but "some day" God will come to us. I mean not now, not yet, but "some day" God will fix this mess. I mean not now, not yet, but "some day" everything will be new, and improved.

IS THAT THE KIND OF VISION WE HAVE IN REVELATION 21? Well, yes. Revelation looks forward to "some day" in the future. But also, no. Because at its heart, Revelation 21 is a Gospel vision, and the hope of the Gospel is more than "some day." Let me show you what I mean by that.

Revelation 21 says: *I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them . . ."* (v. 3). That's a really hopeful saying, isn't it? Of course it is. And we usually connect that with the future, don't we, with "some day"? But is that right?

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The hope is that God will come and will be fully, wonderfully with his people. The hope is that God will be with his people in a way that makes everything new. Well, when does that happen? Does that happen "some day" in some far-off future, a future we've already been waiting for for two thousand years? Or is there more to it than that?

JEWES IN THE FIRST-CENTURY HOPED THAT GOD WOULD BE WITH THEM IN THREE WAYS. First, through the *shekinah*, which is the dwelling-place of God. Second, through the *memra*, which is the Word of God. And third, through the *yeqara*, which is the glory of God. They hoped that God would reveal his glory by coming to live among them again and by feeding them with his life-giving Word.

Keep that in mind while I repeat a familiar verse of Scripture, John 1:14: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory . . .* Okay; now let me say it again, this time putting in those Hebrew words: *The memra (the Word) became flesh and made his shekinah (his dwelling) among us. We have seen his yeqara (his glory) . . .*

Now, if you add this up, it means Revelation 21 is not only a “some day” vision. It’s also an “already” vision. In Jesus Christ, God has already come to dwell with us. And in Jesus Christ, God already makes everything new. Already.

Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:17: *If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* This means already everything is different. And this means we can’t look at things the same old way (v. 16).

And listen to Colossians 3: *You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator* (vv. 9b-10). So everything is new. In Christ, we are new. And Christ is making us new.

THIS MEANS THAT, FOR US, HEAVEN IS NOT JUST A “SOME DAY” REALITY. Heaven is not far away in time or space. The new Jerusalem is not far away in time or space. In Jesus Christ, the new heaven and the new earth are already here. In Jesus Christ, the New Jerusalem is already here. Oh, it’s still coming. There is a perfection of all things that we’re still waiting for. But at the same time, it’s already here.

Heaven is not far away in time or space. Yes, heaven is coming. But heaven is also here. Heaven is also now. Can you see it? With new eyes, can you see it? With eyes that don’t look at things the same old way, can you see it?

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When we welcome new members into the church, when we baptize them, when we teach them the old, old story of Jesus and his love, when we bless them and feed them at the Table of the Lord, in other words, when the church lives out its calling to be the mother of the faithful, where they come to birth, that is heaven here and now.

When disciples of Jesus Christ spend time with the poor and the homeless and the sick and the imprisoned, when they build homes, build relationships, and build hope, that is heaven here and now.

When the church gathers to worship God, when we pour our hearts into our songs and into our prayers, when we want to dance because of the color and the wonder of the life God gives us, that is heaven here and now.

IT’S A BEAUTIFUL DAY THAT WE’RE HOPING FOR, A NEW DAY. And it’s here already in countless ways. If we open our eyes, we’ll see it. We’ll see Christ at work among us. We’ll see Christ at work in others. We’ll recognize God with us, here now, doing a new thing, seasoning us through all kinds of struggles and challenges and disappointments, seasoning us until we burst with flavor.

What we can see, when our eyes have been opened, it's heaven on earth. Really. Already.

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Still don't believe it? Well, look, we've been here for a while now this evening. And our feet are firmly planted on this earth, this old earth. But Jesus is among us. He promised us that. His *shekinah*, his dwelling, is here with us and wherever two or three gather in his name. And his *memra*, his Word, has been with us. Because we have been listening to the Word and taking the Word on our own lips. And when we look around in this room, we can see his *yeqara*, his glory. Because this is the body of Christ, "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:23).

And it's not a dream, not a bit of it. And to be honest, there's nothing new and improved about it. It's the same old thing as always. It's the same old thing that keeps making us new all the time.

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Glory and thanks be to God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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