

The New and the Enduring

The Revelation 21.1-6; 1 Corinthians 13.8-13
1.1.12 (New Year's Day)

Revelation 21 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And 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." ⁶ Then 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.*

1 Corinthians 13 *Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. ¹³ But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Today is New Year's Day... and THIS is a stray sermon, not connected with a series (as we normally do) but a *special* sermon for this *special* day. THIS is a sermon about newness (like the New Year) AND about permanence, *what remains*, the enduring: The New and the Enduring.

We *HAVE* been looking at the start of the Bible (recent sermons in Genesis/Abraham) but now we're at the END, the terminus, where history is headed. This is the *purpose* and goal of it all, when all things become new and yet when one thing remains, the greatest thing, LOVE.

If we cherish this view of the future, how will it affect the now? How might it change the New Year if we get a clarified look AT and longing FOR the New World? That's the point, today.

Let's look at: 1) OUT with the Old and Obsolete; IN with the New and Enduring 2) How's it gonna' be? 3) WHAT About the Here and Now?

We're just coming out of Christmas and one favorite verse we always read to explain the Christmas event is the prologue of John (1.14): "The Word became flesh and *'tabernacled'* among us." That is, the Mind of God, God's Essence, His Self dwelled in a human tent. In Jesus Christ, the Mind of God became flesh and tabernacled/tented/camped/dwelted among us.

And here, in the epilogue of *his two-volume work*, the same author, St. John, makes another reference to the Tabernacle or Dwelling Place of God,

"(v.3) Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men and He will dwell among them and they shall be His people and God Himself will be among them"

It's the same word at the start and finish of the book of "John/Revelation" – the dwelling of God among His people begins in the Tent called Jesus Christ and is completed when that Tabernacle/Temple, the dwelling of God is and remains among His perfected, completed people, the New Jerusalem, the Church.

The Presence of God banishes the old and the obsolete – everything that was marred by sin and was in so many ways hostile to us *is somehow passed away*, "the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea". Anything adverse to our well-being or harmful is passed away. The sea was a symbol for ancient people of terror and death. (BTW – for you scuba lovers there is another picture in ch 15 of the sea – simply made new and tamed)...

The God who Temples among His people AND whose people ARE His Temple and ARE His City – "HE will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" ... Everything we dread, all the results of our sin, *everything that came out of our rebellion against God* WILL PASS AWAY.

The whole environment of sin and its effects will be gone.

AND ALSO what we once needed to combat our sin and to withstand the fallen-ness of the world – *the good gifts of the Spirit* will be no longer necessary.

Prophecy and tongues which were used to reveal God to a church and a world that was ignorant of God...these supernatural forms of communication that God once used to cut

through the fog of our spiritual blindness and superstition – they won't be needed. They WILL BE obsolete.

The imparting of knowledge – the church teaching doctrine and helping people know *about* God so that they could also know God and relate to God, that passing on of knowledge will be unnecessary. God will be known! (Jer. 31.34)

There was a time when the church needed that – these manifestations and these studies *because we were partial and incomplete in our knowledge and experience of God...infantile...in so many ways, shooting in the dark. But in the end...FACE TO FACE.*

Not partial but complete. Not childish but adult. Not seeing a cloudy, blurry reflection but FACE TO FACE. "I will know fully and be fully known".

And when the Old and Obsolete are passed away and all things have become new...a new order of things...even THAT which has been our spiritual respiration, OUR PATTERN OF BREATHING as we now know it, EVEN THAT will be obsolete.

Faith, Hope and Love – we won't need that kind of faith that intellectually accepts what cannot be *seen or touched or proven*. And all we have hoped for is now fulfilled – so hope & faith are unnecessary/obsolete!

AND... love...?

"**BUT** love", says Paul, "love never fails/dies, never ceases, never stop being useful, is NEVER obsolete:

"but now faith, hope, love abide these three; but the greatest of these is love"

Love never fails, never ceases, love never becomes unnecessary LOVE REMAINS FOREVER.

Now what does this mean? What does this tell us about heaven, about the afterlife and about eternity when virtually everything we dread is gone *and when virtually everything we've utilized to get by in THIS life spiritually will be pointless* AND when ...something that we have only tasted but remains to us largely a mystery and a SKILL that makes all of us feel like amateurs...like weaklings... How's it gonna' BE when this STRANGE LIQUEUR we have only sipped...when it becomes like drinking water, like bath water...like ocean water?

In 1739...before the founding of this nation... the great American preacher and philosopher and later the third president of Princeton College, Jonathan Edwards preached a series of sermons on First Corinthians ch. 13. The last of those sermons is called "Heaven: a World of Love".

In that sermon Edwards applies his immense powers of reason and his sanctified imagination to describe a love that comes FROM GOD to all His people *and is then REFRACTED to one another.*

It's a love that we have, up 'til now, received only by faith in what Jesus Christ did to put Himself in front of the justice that we deserved.

The apostles' prayer that the eyes of our hearts be wide opened to know and experience what it means that the spotless Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us – that we would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge – THAT PRAYER will THEN be fully answered AND WE WILL EXPERIENCE FULLY THE DEEP, DEEP LOVE OF GOD.

It's a love that, apart from faith in Jesus Christ, we have only imagined because it has no self-interest ...and we have never met ANYone who has a complete lack of self-interest. That new and enduring love HAS NO SIN.

It's a love that knows no envy. It truly celebrates the elevation of *the other person* with absolutely NO sense of jealousy. The holiest people in heaven are also the humblest and therefore more able to love.

We will never love one another openly and affectionately and feel insecure about it WONDERING if the other person loves me in return... We will never feel a lack of love or suspect that we are being slighted or overlooked.

There will be no hypocrisy so you will never have to wonder if you are being "loved" but for ulterior motives. There will be nothing underhanded or less than totally sincere and honest. There will be no such thing as flattery. "Everyone will be just what he or she seems to be and will really have all the love they seem to have"(p.340). We will never have trouble expressing our love for one another. Nor will we be reserved because someone is unknown to us – there will be an unhindered sense of intimacy between everyone far deeper than what even the closest family enjoys on earth. We will all feel that we belong there and that we belong to one another.

There will never be a misunderstanding or a miscommunication to hamper our love for God or for one another.

Edward's picture of heaven is a deeply communal picture. He admits that Scripture doesn't really say what we'll be doing there – somehow loving and serving God and serving and loving one another. But in that, there'll be no curse: no selfishness or envy or revenge or fear or anxiety or treachery or unfaithfulness or inconsistency or divisions or jealousy or weirdness or suspicion *but only "full acquaintance and perfect intimacy in all."*

One final quote from Edwards, "and each shall belong to every other, and all shall enjoy each other in...honor, without any sickness, or grief, or persecution, or sorrow, or any enemy to bother them, or any busybody to create jealousy or misunderstanding, or mar the perfect, and holy, and blessed peace that reigns in heaven!

And all this in the garden of God — in the paradise of love, where everything is filled with love, and everything conspires to promote and kindle it, and keep up its flame, and nothing ever interrupts it, but everything has been fitted by an all-wise God for its full enjoyment under the greatest advantages forever! And all, too, where the beauty of the beloved objects shall never fade, and love shall never grow weary nor decay, but the soul shall more and more rejoice in love forever!

Oh! what tranquillity will there be in such a world as this! And who can express the fullness and blessedness of this peace! What a calm is this! How sweet, and holy, and joyous! What a haven of rest to enter, after having passed through the storms and tempests of this world, in which pride, and selfishness, and envy, and malice, and scorn, and contempt, and contention, and vice, are as waves of a restless ocean, always rolling, and often dashed about in violence and fury! What a Canaan of rest to come to, after going through this waste and howling wilderness, full of snares, and pitfalls, and poisonous serpents, where no rest could be found!" (end quote)

Well, don't worry...I won't start speaking or preaching that way – worrieth not! But I'm glad for that picture...I hope it helped you. I did me. What it will be like to live in a world of perfect love (A shout out to Jonathan Edwards and his 45 page sermon!)

Now let me end with a four suggestions on how to put this to work in the here and now:

#1 – Heaven is not a hippy commune/ashram where everyone's stoned or like a Stepford Wife. I know some of what I said and read may conjure that in our minds but

that's only because we really can't imagine a world without sin. (still individuality, not merger...)

#2 – Now, we see through a glass darkly...we don't know-it-all; we know dimly...AND we love dimly. We don't have to be fake and pretend we're in heaven now. We pray, "*On earth as it is in heaven*" but also be prepared to often love and be loved POORLY in this life...AND be prepared to repent a lot.

#3 – Do TRY to imagine a world without sin. We all use our minds for a lot of things that are less than helpful. This could turn out to be REALLY helpful – think about Heaven. (maybe read the whole Edwards sermon – online) If you really do think of this destiny, *this new and coming earth*, a new order without death and sin and if you get fixated on it – the pain of this world will seem smaller. Think of it in comparison. 2 Corinthians 4.

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" 16-17

#4 - Be sure you know how to get there AND know that there IS an alternative. Some people would not be happy there so God has made a place for them.

You have to be fitted for heaven. You have to be declared perfectly righteous in the sight of God and that only comes when a Perfectly Righteous Person agrees to live and die in your place (the Deeper Magic!).

Be sure your confidence is in Him.

If it IS, little by little you'll begin wanting to BE in this place of perfect love, the place that has God and the Lamb who sits on the throne as the main attraction and where everyone loves with holy love.

Even today, you can transfer your trust and be declared righteous not by me but by God Himself. You can be reconciled to God today by what Jesus Christ did and you can begin the renovation that starts now, progresses through this life (a growing desire for holy love) and then IS FINISHED on that glorious Day.