

## We'll Be Together at Last

A sermon based on Revelation 21:1-6 – ***“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.<sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> ‘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.”***

***<sup>5</sup> 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.”***

***<sup>6</sup> 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 God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

He built up the nerve, rehearsed his speech, planned the day to the very last detail and at the end of a wonderful date, he got down on one knee. "Will you marry me?" he asked as he pulled the ring out of his pocket. With no hesitation at all she said, "Yes! Of course I will!" They were engaged!

There was so much to do within the next 12 months. They'd need to plan the service, pick the hymns, choose a caterer and a reception hall, and of course, take the marriage preparation class with their pastor.

As the weeks turned into months the many preparations kept her busy. The many expenses kept him nervous. But they both were counting down the days until the two would become one and with eager excitement they anticipated that day that would begin the rest of their days together.

This morning as we accompany the Apostle John as he gets a glimpse into heaven, we see our risen Redeemer revealed as the groom who's prepared everything with perfect care for that wonderful day when he would marry his beautiful bride—the Church—you and me. And when the wedding happens, everything will be new and wonderful. We'll be made new and perfect and holy. And we'll be brought to our new home, which will be perfect and wonderful beyond our wildest imaginations. And best of all, we'll be with our Savior, together at last.

How exciting to be engaged! Those of you who are married, do you remember back to those days? How wonderful to anticipate not just the wedding, but the marriage...how, when that day would come, the relationship changes, mostly for the better. No more being apart. No more huge long distance phone bills. No more goodbyes, just goodnights. But when you're engaged, you're not quite there yet.

Well, in a sense, we're engaged to Jesus. We belong to him. He's promised himself to us. He's promised he'll take us into his home, care for us forever, and give us all we need with no more sadness or sorrow or pain. But we're not together yet. That's still to come.

John pictures the happy reunion with our Savior when he says, "**there was no longer any sea.**" Um, what's mean? Any of you who enjoy fishing worried? You don't need to be. Understand Revelation is picture language. So, what's wrong with the sea John says it will be no more?

Well, do you know where John was when he saw this vision? He had been exiled to the tiny island of Patmos. To him, the sea must have been a picture of danger, of separation from his family and friends, of a barrier that kept them apart. But in heaven there are no more barriers, no more separation, no more sea. He and his Savior would be together at last.

Listen as he continued, "**Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.**" If you can think back to the Old Testament, God dwelled with his people in ages past in the tabernacle and in the temple. But, you know, even then, it was always at a distance. God was always in the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest could go, and only on certain days. It's like the engaged couple "being together" over a phone call or over Facetime or Snapchat. It's just not the same as being face-to-face or in each other's arms.

Well, friends, in the same way, God is with **us** now and always, but soon we will be with God face-to-face... just, not yet. Now we're engaged. And the engagement is the time to prepare, the time to get ready.

So, here's a quiz question for you: If the formal dinner starts at 6pm and the couple needs to leave at 5:30 to get there on time, what time does she need to start getting ready to leave by 5:30? It's a trick question! She won't be ready until 5:45 no matter when she starts. Guys, am I right?

How long does it take for a woman to get ready for a date? How long does it take for a woman to get ready for her wedding? It takes a while because she cares. She wants everything to be just right. She wants everything to be beautiful and wonderful for that special event.

And so do we! But we have a problem. We've been unfaithful to our fiancé. We've cheated on him with our sin, with our lust, with our lies, and with our selfishness. We don't make for a very beautiful bride. We're filthy. We stink.

Did any of you ever watch the episode of *Seinfeld* where Jerry's car had a funky stink to it? They tried everything to get rid of the smell, but it just wouldn't go away. Well, several years ago, a show called *Mythbusters* did an episode on that premise. They put two dead pigs in a new car and sealed it in a shipping container for two months. Then they opened up the container, opened up the car, and removed what was left of the pigs. Then they tried to clean it and remove the putrid odor. Nothing they did worked. The smell wouldn't go away.

That's what we're like before God in the stink of our sin. We're not a lovely bride, but as disgusting as two rotting pig corpses. And we can't make the stink go away. In both *Seinfeld* and in *Mythbusters*, they had to just get rid of the car. And that's what we deserve too—to be disposed of. We don't deserve to be with God for one second. We deserve to pass away. We deserve to be destroyed with the old heavens and earth on Judgment Day.

But God doesn't do that. Instead he says, **"I am making everything new!"** And that includes us. He makes us not just refurbished or cleaned, but brand new! By his death, he took our sin away and made us clean. By his perfect life, he gave us our wedding gown—the robes of his righteousness. By his resurrection he makes us alive and his beautiful bride—drop dead gorgeous in his sight! And he's given us new hearts and new spirits. In Ezekiel 36:25-26 he promised, **"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."**

And though we're still just engaged, the day is coming soon when we will be together at last with *our* Savior for all of eternity!

And in the meantime, he's busy getting everything ready for us, fussing over every last detail, fussing over your place in heaven the way a woman fusses getting ready for a hot date. In this morning's Gospel we heard Jesus tell his disciples he'd soon be going away. In John 14:2 he told them why: **"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."** And what a home it will be!

A man got a new job in a new city. And he moved there ahead of the rest of his family. While his wife was cleaning up their old house getting it ready for sale, he was purchasing their new home.

But they didn't get a mover for their relocation. You see, his new job offered such a great signing bonus they decided that apart from a few sentimental items, they didn't want their old stuff in their new home. He hired painters to put on a fresh coat, installed new carpeting, and bought all new furniture and decorations, the things he knew she would love.

When she arrived, everything was perfect. It was all brand new. It was all so beautiful. She could tell no expense was spared. And she loved it.

After Jesus' resurrection he ascended into heaven. But he's not up there relaxing and catching up on old reruns. He's preparing a place for you and for me there. But he's doing a better job than any husband could ever do (even if he had unlimited resources). Jesus knows you perfectly. He knows your likes and dislikes and is preparing the perfect place for you. In heaven, everything will be new. Nothing will be imperfect in any way because sin will no longer corrupt anything.

There, **"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."** You know, we sinners can't even begin to imagine how awesome it'll be in heaven so John has to resort to describing it by the absence of the negatives we know so well. There will be no tears, no crying out, no mourning, no cause for sorrow of any kind because the thing that cause tears in this life—death and pain—will be absent too. It will be brand new and perfect in every way.

And so our present suffering—whatever it might be—doesn't matter. We'll be together at last with our Savior in his paradise soon enough. And every frustration or sorrow or pain will quickly be forgotten like a stubbed toe is soon forgotten on a holiday cruise.

I once went to a party to celebrate with someone who just retired. But the thing is, even though we had the party on a Friday, he still has to go in to work the following Monday and Tuesday. He wasn't quite

done. But I bet those days at work weren't be that bad because there was a light at the end of the tunnel. The real work was done. Soon he was retired for real. And that retirement would involve vacations and travels, time spent with family, and, Lord-willing, wonderful times.

So too, we may have suffering and pain and trouble in this life while we wait for Jesus to come and pick us up. But our work isn't that bad. There's a light at the end of the tunnel! The real work is done! Our sins are forgiven! We've been made new! Our Savior is coming! And very soon we'll be together at last for an eternal vacation in his paradise, time spent with family, time spent with Jesus, with wonderful times ahead.

So hang in there. All this will be over soon. Keep working for what little time you have left. Work like you do the day before a vacation—eager to get what you need to do done, eager to go. Remain faithful to Jesus while you wait. For soon enough, the engagement will be over and our eternal honeymoon will begin. We'll be together at last. We'll be together at last! Amen.

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