

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. (Revelation 21:1-6)

You Have to Wait and See

You’ve been looking forward to it for so long. You made the plans. You’ve imagined what you are going to do. You can’t wait for what or who you will see and can practically taste the food you are going to enjoy. You’ve been careful to not blow it out of proportion lest you make it impossible to live up to your expectations. You are almost worried that it’s going to disappoint which can lead to more worrying and anxiety whether you want to go in the first place. What if you won’t like it? What if it’s not what you were looking forward to? Will I be able to do everything I want? Will I enjoy my time? You don’t know. How could you? You aren’t at that point yet. Whether it’s a trip you’ve long looked forward to, a special event you want to take place, someone you are excited to be with, you just have to wait and see. At the same time, as great as that vacation might be and as much as we love seeing certain people, nothing will compare with what God has in store for us with him. Through the eyes of the apostle John, we see what God’s people are waiting for: **“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” (v.1-2).**

The apostle John is on the island of Patmos. A political prisoner of the state separated from those he loves John is left waiting. The church hardly looks victorious as persecution hounds it. It does not look all that glorious as sin attacks it, false teachings divide it, and lukewarm Christians go through the motions. While he waits, the Lord gives him this vision. Everything has been destroyed on the Last Day. But from all the destruction John sees a new heaven and new earth transformed from the old. He sees the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the place where God dwells among his

people descending from God. And how beautiful she is! She is dressed like a bride on her wedding day; no one and nothing outshines her.

As he sees all this John hears a loud voice from the throne speak: **“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’^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”** (v. 3-4). Here is something new! God had dwelt amongst his people in the Old Testament in the tabernacle and temple. But they were still separated from him. Only the High Priest could enter his presence in the Most Holy Place one day a year. God brought himself closer to us when true God from eternity took on flesh and blood and dwelt amongst us in the Person Jesus (John 1:14). But then they could not see him any longer when he ascended on high, fills all things and we see him with eyes of faith and not with sight. But in the new heavens and new earth God and his people live together under one roof. Nothing separates us. Those he has chosen from before the creation of the world will be his people always in His presence as God himself will be with them and their God. As a mom assures her child only the way that mom can that it will be okay as she wipes away those tears, here is your loving God who will gently brush away every tear that tries to fall promising that it will happen no more. As a father hugs his child and assures that it will be okay, nothing will harm you, I’ll protect you, here is your heavenly Father assuring you hounding death will never haunt you again, no more tearful good-byes. All that caused you grief, those tears to flow, sadness and so much pain, it’s all passed. It will never hurt you again. It will be no more.

Sounds incredible, doesn’t it? Almost impossible? It’s hard to comprehend because that’s just not what we see today. No, much like John, we see a church that doesn’t look all glorious or victorious divided by sin, controversies, and sinful people. You see it in your life and life of others. From our first breath to the last life is filled with pain. You have plenty of grief and sadness because you care about him, but he refuses to repent. You know he should know better, but he just doesn’t want to listen or care. You are worn down and tired from your own battles against temptation and the weight on your shoulders because you have fallen into sin again. You feel the anxiety of life that leaves you at the brink of tears crying out in anger or despair because you just do not know what you are supposed to do. You feel the pain others have caused you. You are well aware of the distress you’ve put on your own life because of poor decisions you have made.

It is hard to imagine death no longer existing. We know two things in life are inevitable: death and taxes. You can run away from taxes, you cannot with death.

Maybe it's not your own death that grips you too much but it's the thought of her no longer being with you. It's the thought of, what are you going to do if he goes before you? Or it's loved ones who are already past. You know they are in a better place. You still miss him. There are days when you wish you could hear her voice just one more time.

As great and wonderful this all is that God lets us see through the eyes of John, it's not here yet! We must wait. But while we wait, busy schedules, busy families, never-ending to-do lists and so much else easily distracts us. What God promises here seems so far off in the distance. While suffering and struggling, frustrations and disappointments badger us, we turn inward and wonder, "Why me?" Instead of blessed we feel foolish, naïve, almost ashamed because we don't have the relationships someone else has, we are on the outside, we don't have the things, experiences, life like someone else does. The temptation is that we need to take this in our own hands; make a paradise here on this earth. We want the tears dried now. We want the satisfaction yesterday. We want to fit in and be loved. We focus on what we see right now and wonder when is God going to take care of all of this?

Look! The loud voice from the voice says, "**I am making everything new! These words are faithful and true; put your hope and trust in them. It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give water as a gift to the thirsty from the spring of life**" (v.5-6). Look! Yes, God gives these promises of what is to come. At the same time, he's already carrying them out for you today. Yes, while here, we suffer and struggle and we wait. But you aren't the first ones and unless Christ comes back today you won't be the last. While you wait, look at the saints, the holy ones who have gone before us. Look and see how they were mistreated, persecuted, wanderers and strangers in this world. See how they were thrown into prison, sawed in two, stoned and flogged. Look and see how God was with them and through faith led them to victory. They were no different from you.

Look! It is done. The Lamb was slain now sits on the throne. He made his dwelling amongst us and shared in our weaknesses to struggle alongside us. The ones he came to save did not recognize him. They mistreated him and put him to death. But that's why he came! He took on our flesh and blood so that Lord would lay on him the sin of us all. He shared in our humanity so that he would shed that sinless blood to make the payment for all our sins. It is finished, he cried from the cross. The work to save you is done. The blood of Jesus purifies and makes you clean of every sin that you have done and that has been done against you. You are his saints, holy ones, washed in the blood of the Lamb! Satan's work is destroyed; his head is crushed. Know without a doubt it really is done because Jesus lives! He is the firstborn from the dead, a promise of peace with God in his blood and life in his name.

So, yes, we must wait behind this veil of tears flowing over a sin-filled world and sinful people. As Jesus suffered in this world, we should not be surprised when we have been called to suffer and endure as well. But Jesus invites you, **“Come to me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:28-29). And before we come to him, he descends to you and gives you the water of life the the preaching of His word. With that word he shows us what is to come while already giving you a taste of it today. Because Jesus our Redeemer lives, he wipes away all our tears as we face the grim thought of death. Death has been swallowed up in victory and lost its sting. It is not the end for God’s people but the door through which he brings us through this veil of tears to him. For your souls thirsting for contentment and peace he gives the water of life that promises the griefs, pain, and sadness of this sinful world somehow and in some way, he’s using even all of that for our eternal good. It might just be to draw us closer to him to drink more from his thirst-quenching word, to rely, and trust him. Already today we see him making things new as we die to sin and are raised to life again new creations in the waters of baptism. He quenches our thirsty souls as he invites us to a heavenly banquet where we join with those loved ones who are already with the Lord and countless others in the marriage feast of the Lamb. Here we receive his body and blood in, with, under the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper.

As we celebrate All Saints Day we rejoice with those saints who have gone before us praising our faithful God before his throne. We remember with thanksgiving all those the Lord has already called home to him. We thank the Lord that we see in them an example of what it means to endure until the end of life. We thank the Lord because he continues to use the same Word and Sacraments—baptism, the Lord’s Supper—to bring his people to him. We look forward to when we will join them at the heavenly banquet and feast Jesus has prepared for us!

But we aren’t there yet. We still wait. But while we wait, there’s plenty of work to do today. He doesn’t leave us to stare off into the clouds waiting to see when he shows up. Don’t worry; no one is going to miss it. Instead, look for your neighbor who needs Jesus’ love and assurance. Share this life-giving word so that more will be brought to him. Because how can they hear if no tells them? Look. He’s making everything new. He’s doing it already today. It’s hard to imagine what heaven will be like. One thing is for certain: it’s going to be better and we aren’t going to wish we were anywhere else. Just wait and see. Amen.