THE DWELLING OF GOD IS WITH MEN

Revelation 21:1-8

Key Verse: 21:3

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘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.”

In the last lesson, the great white throne judgment was a truly dreadful one. The dead, great and small, were raised to life, standing before the throne. Books were opened and another book was opened, which is the book of life. Each person was judged according to what he had done as recorded in the books. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. This is eternal punishment in the final hell. God is holy and righteous, thoroughly hating sin. If there was no eternal punishment, God’s holiness and righteousness could not stand and there would be no eternal life. God is the God of promise and all the promises of God written in the Bible are to be fulfilled. The Bible is consistent and what is written in it is truly amazing. The great white throne judgment is too awful to imagine. In the same degree, what God has prepared for his people redeemed in Christ Jesus, the Lamb through his blood is too wonderful to imagine.

Today’s passage is the introduction to the new heavens and the new earth, particularly the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It introduces us to the idea and some of the features of this final state, and then more detail follows from verse 9. Yet this passage is the core, the very heart of Revelation and the pinnacle of the whole Bible. It contains a new heaven and a new earth, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, and the dwelling of God with men and God and men living together eternally in perfectly pure and loving relationship in a perfectly new environment. And it is unambiguously written concerning who can live in the holy city and who cannot. As we study this passage, may the ultimate glorious hope of God fill our hearts so that we can press on in our life of faith, overcoming any obstacles and walking on the purer and higher ground of faith, while the world becomes more and more ungodly and hostile toward true believers.

**First, new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem (1-2).** Verse 1 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” Here “Then I saw” or “And I saw” in other translations is written now 7th time from 19:11. We can think of the seven events in chronological sequence: the Lord’s return, the defeat of Antichrist, the banishment of Satan at the beginning of the millennial kingdom, the kingdom, the release of Satan and his destruction, the great white throne and then the new heaven and the new earth. This is the eschatological sequence leading up to the eternal state, signaled by the little phrase “And I saw” or “Then I saw.”

It was written in 20:11, “…Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them.” Here John testifies that he saw a new heaven and a new earth.” This terminology of new heaven and new earth is drawn from the Old Testament. Isaiah 65:17 says, “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.
And 66:22 says, “As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before me….”

Isaiah refers twice to the new heaven and the new earth. And so, John is taking that phrase right from the pen of the prophet. What Isaiah had predicted is now a reality in the vision that John is having.

We can believe that the LORD God Almighty has enough power to do this new creation when we refer to Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Here the word “new” is not the word *neos*, which means “new” as opposed to old. It’s the word *kainos*, which means “new in quality”, “different”, “not found exactly like this before.” The quality of the new creation is completely different from the one we now know. And we won’t even have any remembrance of the one that now exists. So John did not write, “…the old heaven and old earth” but “the first heaven and the first earth” had passed away.

Then John recorded the difference between the new heaven and the new earth and the first heaven and the first earth, just one difference to give a clue – “and there was no longer any sea.” This is a surprising statement. We know that three-quarters of the earth’s surface is covered with the water. When the water of the seas evaporates, it becomes rain pouring out from the sky to the earth and it flows through the rivers and goes into the sea again. This cycle keeps. In a sense the earth is a water ball. And we know that our blood is 90% water and our flesh is 65% water. The world in which we live is basically a watery world. The sea is emblematic of a water-based environment. Man’s existence is water-based. So “there was no longer any sea” means that the new heaven and the new earth don’t operate on water anymore. In 22:1, it is written that the river of the water of life was flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” As it is written, the water is the water of life, not H2O kind. So the new heaven and the new earth are totally different beyond our imagine. As for John, writing just “there was no longer any sea” is enough for one to understand his point. With no sea and no water life is going to be so completely different than anything we could even understand in its glorified form. The eternal state is totally different. We will dwell in an eternally new heaven and earth that will be based on a completely different life principle than what we know now in this created universe.

Then verse 2 says, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” Here we can think of the meaning of the holy city. We know that there has been a historical holy city, Jerusalem. King David conquered this city and made it the capital of Israel and the city of David. It was a holy city meaning setting apart for God. There would be a holy city, the city God loves at the millennial kingdom, where Christ rules. The rebels surrounded even this city in the kingdom of Christ and tried to destroy it. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. Now John saw the holy city in the new heaven and the new earth. Now this holy city is called the new Jerusalem. This city is truly the holy city because every person in it is perfectly holy as indicated in 20:6, “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.”

Then John wrote, “coming down out of heaven from God.” In Revelation, it is written 3 times. The risen Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia in 3:12,“Him who overcomes…I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from God…” Here in 21:2, John wrote this, and in 21:10, “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” John wanted the readers to understand this very clearly.

Scripture simply delineates three heavens. Apostle Paul said that he was once caught up to the third heaven and heard inexpressible things which he was not permitted to tell (2 Cor. 12:2). The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven; that’s the atmosphere around the earth, the air we breathe. The second heaven is the heaven of the heavenly bodies – the planets, the stars, the moons, and everything else. These two heavens were stained by sin and destroyed at the great white throne judgment. The last heaven is the heaven of God; it’s the divine heaven, the abode of God and angels and saints. This third heaven is absolutely holy and pure and unthinkable to be stained by sin. And this is the heaven where the redeemed souls go after death. John saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out heaven from God, in this new heaven and new earth.

Then John said, “…prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” According to 21:9-10, the holy city is the bride, the wife of the Lamb, for all the residents of the holy city are holy people of God redeemed and cleansed by the Lamb’s blood. We remember that in chapter 19, John heard in heaven what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, “…the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride made herself ready” (21:7), and then he heard an angel’s saying “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” (21:9). At this point the wedding of the Lamb was consummated with the wedding supper and ceremony. Now all the redeems of all ages are included in the bride group and in the new heaven and the new earth the Lamb and the bride get together in perfect union to live forever in the bridal city. What a beautiful imagery! We are reminded of Genesis 2:22-25 that God prepared a woman and brought her to Adam and the marriage was done before God. That marriage was impaired, but here is the complete perfect one when God prepared this bride and gave the bride to the Son, the Lamb. Praise God!

**Second, the dwelling of God with mem (3-6a).** Then verse 3 says, “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.” In KJV, ASB “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men…” Wow! This is truly amazing. The tabernacle is skēnē, “ a tent”, “the place of abode,” “the place where you live.” In the New Jerusalem, this is the Father’s house, and the Father’s house is among his own. Jesus went away to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house so that the Father could live in his house with all of his people (Jn. 14:12)

The dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. Again God himself will be with them. God will be their God and they will be his people. Here “with” or “among” is written three times. According to 1 Timothy 6:10, God lives in unapproachable light, and no one has seen him or can see him. But now men in glorified form in both body and spirit live together with God, God being among them. The Immanuel God with us (Mt. 1:23) is really with us, not just in human flesh in the form of Jesus Christ; but now Immanuel is with us in all His fullness, no more veiled in flesh, no more in a Holy of Holies in a tabernacle or a temple, no more in a cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night, no more is God transcendent. God and men live in the same house together.

We see that in Garden of Eden God and man had a beautiful relationship. Genesis 3:8 says, “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” This showed the beautiful fellowship between God and man and the tragedy of the broken relationship because of sin. Since man’s fall, God’s earnest desire has been to restore the relationship and live together with men again. For this God commanded his chosen nation Israel to build a tabernacle in desert so that he night dwell among his people. God said to Moses in Exodus 25:8, “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.” It was through the sacrifice of animals for man’s sin as a temporary remedy. He also promised to the obedient in Leviticus 26:11-12, “I will put my dwelling place (tabernacle) among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people”

Then God sent his Son as the Redeemer at the very right time according to his eternal redemptive plan. Apostle John wrote in John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” He also wrote in 1 John 1:1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” John was so marveled at the life with Jesus the Son of God that he expressed it this way. This was the description of the Son of God living among sinful men on earth for the limited time of three years. Now we know that Christ’s atoning sacrificial death and resurrection God dwells in us through the Spirit, which is also an amazing blessing. Here God lives with men forever, men seeing God perfectly (22:4). Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” This came true in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, in the new heaven and the new earth.

Apostle Peter described it this way in 2 Peter 3:13, “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” All human beings long for our eternal home to live together with God the Father from whom we came. While on earth, this was Jesus’ prayer for all believers of all generations in John 17:24, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

We thank and praise God for this immeasurable hope of living together with our God the Father through the grace of his Son Christ Jesus.

Verse 4 says, “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.” We can imagine that when men live with God, there will be utmost joy and happiness, although we do not know the state. Yet, instead of using positive expressions, the voice from the throne spoke with negative expressions so that we may understand better based on what we experienced here. The life in the first heaven and the first earth is marked with tears, sorrow, death, mourning, crying and pain. These are the old order of things, more correctly the first order of things, under the power of sin and death. In that life with God there will no more sorrow, even no memory of sorrow in their minds and hearts but be full of life and constant joy. Surely there will be no tears of broken relationship, no tears of separation and loneliness, no tears over lost ones, no tears of remorse and regret, etc.; all be gone forever. Only bliss and joy, unmitigated, unrestrained, unlimited, unhindered, unrestricted, undiminished joy, for eternity

And then John adds a positive statement of some sort in verse 5. It doesn’t give us any detail, but here is a positive statement nonetheless: “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!” Again, this newness is totally new, completely different from oldness. This newness comes from God. People can make new cars and build new houses and building, but not this kind of newness. Hebrews 9:11 says, “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.” It is not of this earthly creation. It’s completely different than the creation we know now, completely different. One is a corruptible one, the others is an incorruptible one. One is a perishable one, the other is an imperishable one. One is an earthly one, the other a heavenly one – utterly different, utterly unique; no entropy (gradual decline into disorder), no atrophy (decrease in size); no decay, no decline; no used up energy, no waste, eternally fresh.

Then he said, “Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.” Probably at this point John was overwhelmed by what he had seen and heard that he just dropped his quill. But the one who was seated on the throne said, “Write this down for these words re trustworthy and true”, meaning “keep writing.” God really wants us to believe the new heaven and the new earth, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the new life in the dwelling of God with men, everything being made new. “The words “trustworthy and true” are the same Greek words of “faithful and true” as the rider on the white horse is called Faithful and True (19:11; 3:14) and as Jesus is the faithful and true witness shown to the church in Laodicea. Only God is faithful and true, and only his words are trustworthy and true.

Then in verse 6 John wrote, “He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” When the seventh bowl was poured out into the air, out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne saying, “It is done!” Now completely “it is done.” Everything is done. This is the moment when redemptive history ends. This is the end of all redemptive history.

God said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” In chapter 1:7, the first message in Revelation was spoken, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him”, the Lord God said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” God saw Christ’s first coming and second coming and this new life with God in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth from the very beginning of man’s fall, even from the beginning of everything, and he can see the beginning at the end. Sinful human beings can see only the present. They cannot see the bright future in their adverse human situation, and they cannot remember the past miserable state at their favourable present situation. But Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 2:10, “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” May we always remember God who is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.”

**Third, the residents of the Holy City (6b-8).** God said to John continually, “To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” Who can live in the Holy City? Anyone who is thirty, anyone who is thirsty for God, who is desperate in the need of God. A Psalmist said in Psalm 42:1-2, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” God said in Isaiah 55:1-2, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good and our soul will delight in the richest of fare.” Still God’s invitation is going on to this wonderful life and the wonderful place.

In Revelation, the risen Christ promised to the overcomers in each of the seven churches, to the church of Ephesus, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7), to the church of Smyrna, “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death” (2:11), to the church of Pergamum, “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it” (2:17), to the church of Thyatira, “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—just as I have received authority from my Father” (2:28), to the church of Sardis, “He who overcomes will, like them, dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels” (3:5), to the church of Philadelphia, “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from God; and I will also write on him my new name” (3:12), and to the church of Laodicea, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21). Now God said, “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” Wow! We remember that at the time of Jesus’ baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22). May God help us to be overcomers of faith in every situation.

Then God said in verse 8, “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” Here is the last mention of the lake of fire, the lake of burning sulfur, or the fiery lake of burning sulfur, after three times of mentioning it, in 19:20. “The two of them (the beast and the false prophet) were thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur”, in 20:10, “the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown” in 20:14, 15, “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” and then here in 21:8 with the detailed the list of those who go to the horrifying place: the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars. The fiery lake of burning sulfur makes a sharp contrast to the Holy City in the new heaven and the new earth. God made the distinction very clearly, who will go where. He is the God of distinction in the end.

We praise God for the indescribable glorious hope of the new heaven and the new earth, the Holy City the new Jerusalem, and the dwelling of God with men. He will live with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. With this glorious hope in our hearts may we be overcomers of faith and participate in God’s invitation to thirsty souls to this wonderful place and the wonderful life.