

## **“The Dwelling of God is with Men”** (Revelation 21:1–8) (12.19.21)

Revelation 21:1–8 (NIV84)

**21** 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, “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.<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 him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.<sup>7</sup> He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.<sup>8</sup> 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.”

## **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“The Dwelling of God is with Men”**

INTRODUCTION:

Do the promises of this scripture seem too good to be true? They are words of GREAT HOPE for followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes, in this festive season, the harsh realities of our broken world are revealed more clearly by the disparity between God’s desire for us and the pain and the suffering we witness all around.

Reverend Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a professor and prominent theologian. As a German Lutheran Pastor, he was well known to be an anti-Nazi dissident. He was a founder of a movement called the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer ran and raised funds for an underground seminary in Germany. Although he was free in the United States, in 1939, he felt compelled to return to Germany to become more active in the Resistance.

The following is an excerpt from a letter that Bonhoeffer wrote to his parents, on November 29,

1943, while a prisoner in Tegel prison camp. It is used as the first day of an Advent Devotional book.

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. *Revelation 3:20*

### **“The Advent Season Is a Season of Waiting”**

Jesus stands at the door knocking (Rev. 3:20). In total reality, he comes in the form of the beggar, of the dissolute human child in ragged clothes, asking for help. He confronts you in every person that you meet. As long as there are people, Christ will walk the earth as your neighbor, as the one through whom God calls you, speaks to you, makes demands on you. That is the great seriousness and great blessedness of the Advent message. Christ is standing at the door; he lives in the form of a human being among us. Do you want to close the door or open it?

It may strike us as strange to see Christ in such a near face, but he said it, [Note that Bonhoeffer is referring here to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25.] and those who withdraw from the serious reality of the Advent message cannot talk of the coming of Christ in their heart, either....

Christ is knocking. It's still not Christmas, but it's also still not the great last Advent, the last coming of Christ. Through all the Advents of our life that we celebrate runs the longing for the last Advent, when the word will be: "See, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

The Advent season is a season of waiting, but our whole life is an Advent season, that is, a season of waiting for the last Advent, for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

We can, and should also, celebrate Christmas despite the ruins around us.... I think of you as you now sit together with the children and with all the Advent decorations—as in earlier years you did with us. We must do all this, even more intensively because we do not know how much longer we have.

BODY:

As of today, I have been preaching to you for seven years. During those seven years, I have preached as my main text from 52 of the 66 books of the Bible. And, I have quoted from most of the remaining 14. It seems fitting that we are coming to the end of the Book of Revelation as we come to the end of this calendar year. We have this wonderful hope filled text today followed by chapter 22 next Sunday, the end of our Bibles.

Last week, in Revelation 12, we read about the cosmic clash: war in heaven, war on earth – our inward battle and the battle in the spiritual realm. Then we examined this conflict as a consistent theme throughout scripture.

Now, we have another prominent theme of our Bible. That theme is one of relationship between God and His creation of man and woman in the image of the divine. Of course, Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Because sin separates us from God, they were exiled from the daily presence of the Lord.

The rest of scripture is a catalog of human waywardness, siding with Satan against the perfect righteousness of our Holy, Holy, Holy God. Abraham and Sara were chosen as the spiritual parents of God's chosen people. Moses was sent to rescue Israel from their bondage in Egypt under Pharaoh. Almighty God led them by a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day.

A Holy Tabernacle was constructed to Jehovah's exacting decrees. In the innermost sanctum, the holy of holies, God's presence was upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, which held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments and a jar of heavenly manna. Wherever the people went, God and the Tabernacle went with them.

As God parted the Red Sea for the people to escape bondage, He parted the Jordan River at flood stage so the Chosen People could enter into the Promised Land. The people called Israel became a nation of Israel. In the Holy City of Jerusalem, a magnificent Temple was built by King Solomon. Again, the Lord made exacting decrees in its construction. Again, the holy of holies housed the presence of God upon the Mercy Seat covering the Ark of the Covenant.

So, you might assume everything would have been fine from then on. Unfortunately, not. Israel was an unfaithful wife and the Almighty called prophets like Hosea to demonstrate the misery of an adulteress people. Israel proved that we are unable to maintain our end of the covenant. The sacrificial system required the daily shedding of blood, a lamb sacrificed morning and night, because of the people's sin.

If only there was a solution to our separation from our heavenly Father. What could be done? No human being could have thought of this. God would take on human flesh, be incarnated as human being, in the person of baby Jesus. He would be called Emmanuel, God WITH US!! He would lead a sinless perfect life and become the final and perfect sacrifice. All of our sin would be

paid for so that we could be perpetually in the presence of God.

Before Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, He promised the sending of God the Holy Spirit to His disciples. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (NIV84)<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

There is another way that we are joined to the Triune Godhead. We have been told that the Church is the Body of Christ of which Jesus is the Head. This is one reason why we are warned not to forsake the assembly of the saints. If we do, we are distancing ourselves from God and the God ordained representative here on earth. What can be more connected than a body? And Jesus as the head, leads us and rules over us.

In the prophetic book of Ezekiel 37:27 (NIV84), we hear the desire of God's heart. "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Paul prays in Ephesians 3:16–19 (NIV84)

<sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in

your inner being,<sup>17</sup> so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

As a symbol of relationship, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem is described as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. This is to be our future abode. Every bride beams with joy and expectation on her wedding day. There are few days in our lives that are more filled with celebration. Families are joined together and the future is bright and hope filled. But let us remember this marriage is truly holy matrimony; there is no hint of sin and it is forever. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. It speaks of the intimacy we will have with God.

We read in Rev. 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.” We all experience these things in this life to one extent or another. I often wonder how people without the Lord Jesus are able to deal with these heart hardships.



Rachel Hixon wrote:

On Christmas Day in 1863 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [the famous poet] continued to grieve the death of his beloved second wife Fannie who had died two years prior when her housedress caught fire. Longfellow himself tried to extinguish those flames with his own body but Fannie did not survive the accident. During the subsequent two years Henry's oldest son would enlist in the Union army to fight in the Civil War. On December 1 of that year, Henry would receive a telegram that his son had been shot during a battle of the Mine Run campaign. The location of the exit wound from the bullet would put his son at risk of being paralyzed.

This father of six, now widowed, worried for the future of his children, all while cannons thundered in the south, captured his feelings as he heard the bells that Christmas day in his poem titled, 'Christmas Bells'.

Yesterday as we sang this poem (now song) in our church congregation, I felt as though I could relate a little more to Longfellow and his feelings of despair that were overcome with hope by what he chose to listen to. He chose amidst the grief, amidst the cannons, amidst the fighting and hate to listen to the bells of hope. Those bells would

breathe peace into his life just as they have into mine.

I include below the words to the entire poem with verses that are not included in the song. They paint the beautiful picture of a man who found his hope as he bowed his head and listened more intently to his maker. "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep, God is not dead, nor doth He sleep!"

I know that bowing our heads is the first step toward hope and peace in our lives.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day

Their old, familiar carols play,

And wild and sweet

The words repeat

Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,

The belfries of all Christendom

Had rolled along

The unbroken song

Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,

The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime,  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song

Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;

The Wrong shall fail,

The Right prevail,

With peace on earth, good-will to men."

{Play on your baritone ukulele}

To whom are all these blessings offered? When the people, Israel, wandered in the wilderness, they drank from the Rock that was Christ. Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well that if she had asked Him, He would have given her living water without end.

Everyone is thirsty until they drink from the spring of the water of life. Psalm 42:1-2 (NIV84)

<sup>1</sup> As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, O God.

<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

Isaiah 55:1 (NIV84)

“Come, all you who are thirsty,  
come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
come, buy and eat!

People are always trying to satisfy their thirst with sorry substitutes for our Loving Lord. What this world offers is a counterfeit. For a season, they may be contented, but it passes and again they will need to seek another “fix” of secular soda – all fizz and no fulfillment.

Five verses from the very end of our Bible, we hear this great invitation: Revelation 22:17 (NIV84) The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

So, you can see that the invitation is made to every person. The invitation to drink at the oasis of rest in God is all inclusive. Unfortunately, too many disqualify themselves.

There are several lists of disqualifiers in scripture that are similar to what we find here. For me, the most surprising to see was cowardness. But when you consider that in each of the seven messages to the seven Churches of Revelation and then three

more times, Christians are called to overcome, it should not be surprising. The alternative to courage and faithfulness is the second death, the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

## CONCLUSION:

Carol and I have a large Rubbermaid storage bin on our deck off of our kitchen. The lid of the bin is a natural catch basin for water. Well, because it is fall, there are now leaves and other debris all mixed in with the water. It is kind of a mess and I have been meaning to go out and remove the lid, tip over the water and get rid of the mess – then wipe it clean.

On Friday morning, I looked out and there was a pair, male and female, of red-headed woodpeckers drinking from the water. Then a pair of small birds, with blue on them, flew up to the railing next to the storage bin. They were waiting for their turn and then they enjoyed it together.

This made me think of how the Lord provides for us and our thirst. This world looks like a mess too; but, it is a place where God provides. Not only are our physical needs met, but our need for relationship. Of course, I realize that sometimes this life is a struggle in both of those categories for many people. At the same time, we have HOPE in the promises of the New Heaven and New Earth.

We have the promise of dwelling with our Creator. We have the promise that **All** things will be made NEW.

One commentator makes this amazing observation: **God does not merely bring the End, God *is* the End.**

**God as defined by the Lamb is himself the temple, the place of the divine-human encounter.**

My friends, this encounter, though not in all its fullness, is available to each of us today. Isn't this what our hearts yearn for above all things – relationship with a perfect and holy love?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.