

“A New Creation, a New Commandment”

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 the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home¹ of God is among mortals. He will dwell² with them; they will be his peoples,³ and God himself will be with them;⁴ ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then 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 as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

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Dana and I spent Friday night and most of Saturday in a pre-natal class. It was an overwhelming experience at times on the one hand, but on the other it is really helpful. It was overwhelming because it just threw the immediacy of a baby coming just right there in our faces and they even used videos. If you want to see someone having anxiety just watch me watching a video of someone giving birth. Speaking as the man, for me this whole pregnancy thing hasn't been that different from the way life was before. But for Dana, I just can't imagine what she must be feeling and thinking and scared to death of with all she's been through with all that's changed for her...then comes the big day. I'm thinking "my love is going to go through that. This is serious stuff. This is really going to happen." Life from here on out is completely new to us even if it doesn't quite feel that way to me now because I don't have a mini-me growing inside that's going to come out regardless. The only thing that I can do to calm the anxiety of that day is try to imagine what the baby will be like, what life will be like after he's here. Children are work but they do have a way of surprising a person with joy.

These pre-natal classes are also helpful because they give us a "no holds barred" picture of what to expect and how to handle it. There is a new life coming for us and it's going to be a life in which a real hope is being fulfilled before our very eyes. I look at pregnancy as being hope embodied. It's looking forward to the days that will that this little person who changes everything about our lives. It's like new creation; a new heaven and a new earth. When the Bible talks about hope, it's not talking about pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking. It's talking about looking forward to a real something new, that can only be seen by imaginative glimpses, but like pregnancy there's something of the new day growing in us right now so that we know that the hope is real.

How many times has your lives been changed by something completely, utterly, and irreversibly new. Think about that. What do I mean by new? Well, the word for "new" here in Revelation 21 isn't new like buying a new car or new house or a new pair of shoes. These things come and go. They don't really change who you are. New here means you can't go back. You're changed. The old life is gone and a new one has begun. So, how many times has your life

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become irreversibly new, no turning back? How many times has something new utterly changed your role and purpose in life, changed who you are?

I can think of a few times. One was the days when God first made himself real to me. He hit me head on with the revelation of his steadfast love and faithfulness. Who I would be and where I would go from there on in life was very uncertain. But One thing I was certain of was that God was with me and was giving me living water to drink and that was making all things new in and for me. Another time is this call into the ministry. No matter who you are there is no sufficient preparation for ministry. Christ uses the ministry to shape the minister. This isn't true just for ministers. It's true for all Christians. Everyone who is a sired from above Christian (that's what born again really means), sired by God's gift of the Holy Spirit, the free gift of God's presence with and in us, will always be in the process of being made new until birthing day comes at the New Creation. Marriage really changes things too. You can't just be yourself when you're married. The marriage relationship when it's reasonably functional forces you to change to become faithful and supportive. It makes you learn to communicate. It makes you learn how to lay down your life for someone God has entrusted you accompany. Parenthood I'm sure will be the same way. You can't run about as a parent doing whatever you want to do hoping the kid will somehow fit into your life. You have to lay down your life, die to yourself for the little ones, so that they can grow up knowing what love is.

These are new things; new relationships that completely, utterly, and irrevocably make life new. The lives we had before these relationships have gone away. They are only memory. This new way of being is what John means when he said I saw a new heaven and the new earth. This vision of the new is a real hope just as pregnancy is a real hope. You see, there is something new that God has done that is changing this creation like a baby growing in the womb and then one day – New Creation, New Creation where death will be no more, where mourning and crying and pain will be no more. That something new is that God has come to live with his people and he freely gives us to drink of the Living Water who is the Holy Spirit. When God the Son became human God irreversibly came to dwell among his people and continues to be present with us now in, through, and as the Holy Spirit until Christ returns. God's presence in this the First Creation is irreversibly making all things new. Just as pregnancy changes peoples lives, so it is with God's presence in our midst, in the midst of all of humanity. God is not in some far away place called heaven that we go to when we die. He is right here with us now making earth to be as it is in heaven.

If you will bear with me on this, the new creation that this first creation is pregnant with now is the new Jerusalem which God has been working to adorn like a new bride for her husband. The new Jerusalem is the Church which will one day be all of humanity – the new Humanity. We are the embryo of that new Humanity. We are those who were thirsty to whom God has freely given the Living Water of his very self that begins to change us to what we will be in the New Creation and that is like Christ Jesus. Because God is really with us we have a real hope and this means we must live according to it now so that the rest

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of humanity and indeed the whole creation will know that God is making all things new, that God truly cares.

For now things are changing according to a simple commandment. “A new Commandment I give you,” Jesus said, “that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jesus later defined this love as, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” The amazing thing that I have found in my life since God poured himself out on me is that this one commandment seeks to irreversibly define everything about my life. I cannot in good conscience be a good person if I do not set myself aside and take interest in the lives of the people around me. Life ain't about me anymore. It's about everybody else. When I ask a person “How are you” I have to be ready to listen and be supportive of their needs or celebrate with them in their joys. If I can't at least do that, I am a hypocrite. We don't go unsupported for God has put other people in our lives to be supportive of us. Nevertheless, we must be intentional about being supportive of others.

Moreover, I cannot be a faithful minister unless I am putting myself, my needs, my ideals about what it is to be a church aside and simply being there for you people. It takes a long time for that sort of a pastoral relationship to develop and therefore Dana and I have no plans to go anywhere else.

Moreover, I cannot be a faithful husband unless I am dying to myself for Dana and here needs and it is with here. Being faithful to the promise to love one another as Christ has loved us both is what marriage is about. It ain't easy. Marriage isn't about this namby-pamby stuff of you just need to accept me as I am. Marriage is about making the effort of being as Christ is to that particular person God has entrusted you to accompany. Soon there will be parenthood. Raising children is all about Jesus commandment to love as he has loved us. We can't expect to have our own lives thinking the kids will somehow fit in. Now there's the task of being a family, being a Christian family – a New Creation kind of family.

This new commandment to love is the way that God is making all things irreversibly new until he makes all things irreversibly New. In giving himself to us, to be in us and among us, God has created a new humanity that loves as Jesus has loved us. I'm just saying that this first creation is pregnant with this new humanity of people just like us who are growing and being changed by the living water of the living word of this living commandment made alive in us by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in all your relationships love as God has loved you. Amen.