

I am making everything new

Rev. 21: 1-5, Phil. 3:13-14

January 7, 2007 at TIBC

Introduction: Happy New Year of 2007! NEW...Begin... start... There's something refreshing and optimistic about these words, whether they refer to the dawn of a new day, the birth of a child, the prelude of a symphony, the first miles of a family vacation. The newness of things excites people. Kids are excited about their NEW toys, ladies are excited about their NEW clothes and men are excited about NEW cars and stuff like that. New beginnings stir up in us a sense of hope and imaginative visions of the future. Here in our text today, a vision – the new Jerusalem – is the most exciting and sure-to-happen event.

(Let's read it all together and Pray)

Revelation 21:1-5 (*The New Jerusalem*) 1Then 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. 2I saw the Holy City, **the new** Jerusalem, **coming down** out of heaven from God, **prepared** as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And 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. 4He 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." 5He 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."

The word NEW is repeated four times in these verses, and the Greek word is 'Kainos', which describes something being brand new, spanking new. It also carries the meaning fresh or unused, recently made, and something that is superior. The passage is a retelling of the return of Christ from the viewpoint of the Bride. It recapitulates the glorification of the bride of the lamb. Now the story is told with the focus on the bride. To be the bride is to be the Holy City, the Jerusalem, to live in the presence of God and the Lamb, and to experience protection, joy and the everlasting life-giving light of God.

I. Forgetting what is behind (Phil. 3:13)

The first (old) heaven and earth had passed away (*Revelation 21:1*)

This world we live in, which was the first and thus old earth, is imperfect, full of hurts and sins. I'm glad that the Bible tells us a truth that one day it is going away. When Christ returns, The first (old) heaven and earth had passed away.

We live in a sinful world, sins of others and our own sins. If you don't believe it, just review the last year - review 2006: how many things we've done wrong, how many times we sinned against God, and men? We learned on Friday night that 'sin' means 'missing the mark' – the bull's eye we target, which we constantly miss. (by the way, you're missing out a lot if you're not coming on Friday nights. God is doing something amazing). How many marks have we missed? Someone said, they wish to just go home, bury their head on a pillow and pretend the world and problems do not exist. Others expect it and hope they'll survive. Some run. Some hide. God's people should face life and its challenges differently. We should not go into hiding.

By all means do whatever you can and should do to deal with sin, and do whatever you can and should do to deal with sin in others. Learn from your own experience and your own history. But we must let go of things that hinder us. We must pray for strength and help from God to forget those things, which are behind. What is urgent is the challenge of the day, not the clutter of the past.

The wisdom of God's Word teaches us this mature option we have about the past – **forgetting what is behind!** It is not recommended that we let the pain of the past keep us from the duty of today! Here in Phil. 3:13 this word "forgetting" translates a Greek word that means to *neglect*. In the ordinary routine of daily life we do not want to be forgetful. On the contrary, we are disappointed and we may disappoint others when we forget things. The busier we are, though, and perhaps the older we are, the easier we tend to forget things. But there are cases where forgetfulness is a virtue; it is valuable and recommended.

If you have done something wrong, you can recognize it, repent of it, and ask God to forgive you and be thankful for the pardon Jesus died for us to have. If somebody has done something to hurt you, you can take up the problem with the offender. If you have done something to hurt somebody, you can take responsibility for that sin and make it right with the injured person. If you are not willing to do that, you can ask God to help you get over it, and go on with your life.

II. Straining towards what is ahead (Phil. 3:13) **The new Jerusalem, coming down (Revelation 21:2)**

No more earth and its sinfulness but a new heaven and a new earth, a holy city for you and I to worship together day in and day out. "I will make all things new" says the Lord. He's going to change everything on Judgement Day. He's going to provide and give us our place that He has been preparing for us since He ascended back into heaven. We will see our heavenly home where we will live forever.

As Christians, we've a lot to look forward, hope in Christ, and the heavenly dwelling He prepares for us. I really believe it's also important to us as we begin this new year heavenward. ...Think – how can we thank God for we will have 2007! Outlook for 2007? What do you do with challenges? We should not get overwhelmed by the challenges.

God said, "I am making everything new." The NAS says, "Behold, I am making all things new." This year, and every year, can and should be a year of renewal in our lives.... In our life together as a fellowship, as well as in our lives as individual believers. Specifically this morning, in this message I'm challenging you to think that His return can be any time, it could happen in your life time, it could happen tomorrow. The Bible did not tell us a time, but it is SOON! I want to first look at the idea that God is in the business of renewing, of making all things new.

III. Pressing toward the goal (Phil. 3:14)

Prepared as a bride beautifully dressed (*Revelation 21:2*)

God has a clear goal for us to attain – as a Christian, we - the church - must be prepared – like a bride beautifully dressed when Christ returns. We're to be holy and pure. I know of one of our church goals – a prayer focus on Bible study, to be led by Dr. Rue Scott based off I, II, and III John. 'Growing in Love with God'. If God give us the Greatest Commandment to love him, can we set it up as one of our goals in this year? (my bi-

lingual Bible has only 9 pages. If you don't have time for this, you won't have it for anything else. If you don't take advantage of a rich teaching on a method to study these 9 pages, are you going on your own with the other 2,000+ pages?

But how about your personal goals? Are you prepared for 2007? What is your goal? New Year resolutions? My goal is to continue focus on preaching, praying, caring and visitation. I'd also challenge myself and you with His vision – International Village – I'll pick it up and run with it. I shared with the church last Business meeting, and will again next Sunday.

Like many of you, I too, struggled with God's seeming silence, inactivity and indifference. The prophet Habakkuk who is known for and often questioned God for inactivity in the midst of lawlessness and injustice. "How could you?", asked Habakkuk. God's answer to him was that He has been doing something all along. His seeming silence did not mean inactivity. The fact is God has been into something – raising up the Babylonians.

We learn from Habakkuk's encounter with God about God's sovereignty. He is in control of the world. He is not indifferent to injustice and to abuses. He has set a day of reckoning. So the key is to pray to God and seek Him and what he is doing so that we can join him. Instead of dwelling in the past, we look to future. What is God doing in our midst? New lives – Alex and Liu Liu (OK to share?) Friday, Dec 22 teaching to big group; Christmas gatherings and 50 families mailing. Now, what is your plan of actions?

"Vision"

The leader of a certain Indian tribe encamped at the base of a mountain was dying. The chief summoned his three sons and said, "I am dying and one of you must succeed me as the head of our tribe. I want each of you to climb our holy mountain and **bring back something beautiful**. The one whose gift is the most outstanding will succeed me." After several days the sons returned. The first brought his father a flower, which grew near the summit and was extremely rare and beautiful. The second son brought his father a stone, which was colorful, smooth, and round, having been polished by rain and sandy winds. The third son's hand was empty.

He said, "Father, I have brought nothing back to show you. As I stood on top of the holy mountain, I saw that on the other side was a beautiful land filled with green pastures and a crystal lake. And I have **a vision** of where our tribe could go **for a better life**. I was so overwhelmed by what I saw and by what I was thinking that I could not bring anything back." And the father replied, "You shall be our tribe's new leader, for you have brought back the most precious thing of all—**the gift of vision for a better future.**"¹

If there is no vision, the work grinds to a halt, and people become frustrated in their Christian walk. The Bible says this very clearly 'Where there is no vision, people perish'. My personal spiritual experience: In the past year, I was disappointed, discouraged, demotivated, and downhearted, ...none of which describes the 'John Long' who used to be known for being ambitious, motivated, efficient, effective... At times, I even lost the joy of serving Him and almost losing God's vision for TIBC. I repented of my self-centeredness, double-mindedness and lack of communicating His vision, trust in His Way. Let us Facing the New Year with a Fresh and Renewed Vision of God

IV. Win the prize (Phil. 3:14)

Now the dwelling of God is with men(*Revelation 21:3*)

This passage tells us that the PRIZE of our waiting is not a thing, not a what, but a person, a whom. We wait for God. God's presence, His revelation is our source of strength in times of trouble. The joy of the Lord is my strength! To know that He is with you is the key to life.

Revelation 21:3...They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4He 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.

*5He 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."*

Wait for what is to come. Wait for the promise. Your hope lies in the coming of the promise. So what is the promise? The writer of Hebrews helps us understand what to wait for? In Hebrews 10:35-39 *"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."* But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

Waiting for God is not to be done passively, but to wait in faith, or to wait faithfully. The righteous person will remain faithful to God. While waiting he continues to be faithful to his covenant with God. Our call is not to wait in silence. Not biting our tongue while waiting. We are called to live joyfully because we know that God is in control and because you know that you could trust him.

Conclusion: *(Revelation 21:4)* **When we have God, we have everything.** As we begin the year, we do away with false hopes of the easy life or the realities of a cold and hopeless world. This old earth is passing away, and we have a hope for new heaven and earth. Our hope is in a sovereign God who rules from his holy temple. While the Christmas message is still fresh, His invitation is NOW! Express your trust in Him by rejoicing in Him everyday for the rest of your lives. God can bring you to a new level of reality about who we are that will restore you to your full potential. God has created everyone with a full and powerful potential. We are like the earth without God in need of a word of direction, power and hope from God to bring us to our full potential. Our failures can be turned to success. Our darkness can become light. What we don't know and can be revealed. We will come into order. We will come into fruitfulness and multiply. God has a plan for us when we go off track. God is a God of restoration and hope. He is the God of reconciliation. Your potential goes beyond the natural world. Can you see it?

We seek the treasures of this world only to find there are more and even greater accomplishments with God's divine power. We held on to the smaller natural word without God only to lose the bigger miracle of heavens resources. Are you ready to embrace the divine plan? The Bible tells us in our earthen vessel is treasure. Only God can mine it. Only God can cause it be received. Come to the light hear the word. Do you desire to know and accept God? Are you struggling with the past? What are your goals and wishes for this year 2007? Come and let God lead you and bless you in the year ahead!

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the new Jerusalem, coming down (*Revelation 21:2*)

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prepared as a bride beautifully dressed (*Revelation 21:2*)

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Now the dwelling of God is with men (*Revelation 21:3*)

Conclusion: (*Revelation 21:4-5*)

1 Cited from: Paul J. Wharton, Stories and Parables for Preachers and Teachers (Mahwah, NJ & New York: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 29-30.

Sermon Objective: Facing the New Year with a Fresh Vision of God is aimed at helping God's people face the New Year and its challenges, courageously knowing that God is in control.

Children's moment – a comparison between OLD and NEW

While Christmas is still fresh, let me ask you – how many of you received some new toys from Santa? (Would some one like to tell?) How many of you like new toys? Better than old ones?

Further illustration -

- Brand new box of chocolate vs. an opened, half-empty box of chocolates
- Brand new \$20 bill vs. a wrinkled, dirty and old bill