

**Revelation 21:1-6
December 30, '18**

“ALL THINGS NEW”

OUR OLDEST SON, DEREK, WAS HERE WITH HIS FAMILY FOR A COUPLE DAYS AFTER CHRISTMAS THIS WEEK & DEREK AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE IN A WARM & FUZZY, FATHER-AND-SON EXPERIENCE DURING THEIR VISIT.

SHOWPLACE CINEMAS SOUTH HAS BEEN RUNNING OLD CHRISTMAS CLASSICS DURING DECEMBER & DEREK SAID HE HAD NEVER SEEN “*IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE.*”

THEY HAD A 10:00 SHOWING & DEREK & I WENT AT TEN O’CLOCK – BUT WE DIDN’T GO INTO THE THEATER WHERE THE JIMMY STEWART CHRISTMAS CLASSIC “*IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE*” “WAS SHOWING.

NO, DEREK & I WALKED INTO THE THEATER RIGHT NEXT TO THAT ONE WHERE THE BRUCE WILLIS CHRISTMAS CLASSIC “*DIE HARD*” WAS SHOWING.

TALK ABOUT A WARM & FUZZY, FATHER-SON EXPERIENCE!

I THINK WE WERE BOTH GLAD THAT THE LIGHTS DIDN’T COME ON IMMEDIATELY AS THE MOVIE ENDED BECAUSE I’M SURE WE WERE BOTH SHEDDING A TEAR AT THAT MOVING MOMENT NEAR THE END WHERE JOHN & AL (BRUCE WILLIS & REGINALD VELJOHNSON) FINALLY MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME AND SHARE A HEARTWARMING EMBRACE AFTER THE ORDEAL AT THE NAKATOMI TOWER.

THAT'S JUST BEFORE WILLIS HOPS IN ARGYLE'S LIMOUSINE AS THEY RACE OFF TO THE STRAINS OF "LET IT SNOW" & THE CARNAGE LEFT BEHIND.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE GASPED WHEN I SAID DEREK HAD NEVER SEEN "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE" BECAUSE IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN "DIE HARD," YOU'VE MISSED OUT ON A CHRISTMAS CLASSIC AS MUCH AS DEREK HAS!

AS I WATCHED "DIE HARD" THAT NIGHT, I TRIED TO SEE IT IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

I TRIED WATCHING IT AS IF I'D NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE BECAUSE I'M SURE THE ONLY CHRISTMAS MOVIE I'VE SEEN MORE THAN "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE" IS "DIE HARD."

I WANTED TO TRY TO SEE IT WITH FRESH EYES BECAUSE IT'S SOMETHING THAT'S SO VERY FAMILIAR TO ME.

WE NEED TO DO THAT WITH A LOT OF THINGS IN LIFE – TRY TO SEE THEM WITH FRESH EYES.

THIS PASSAGE IN REVELATION & THE MESSAGE IT PROCLAIMS IS ONE OF THOSE THINGS.

IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH ANY PASSAGE AT ALL IN REVELATION, IT'S PROBABLY THIS ONE.

IT'S A PASSAGE THAT SPEAKS CLEARLY ABOUT NEW THINGS & WHILE IT MAY BE WELL-KNOWN, I DON'T THINK IT IS WELL-UNDERSTOOD.

THIS PASSAGE REALLY FLIES IN THE FACE OF THINGS WE TRADITIONALLY HAVE COME TO BELIEVE.

IN LOOKING AT THESE WORDS OF JOHN IN REVELATION, I THINK THEY OFFER US PROFOUND GUIDELINES FOR THE WAY IN

WHICH WE LOOK AT THE FUTURE – THE WAY IN WHICH WE LOOK AT THE NEW YEAR.

THESE WORDS ARE UNLIKE MOST OF THE WORDS IN REVELATION BECAUSE, UNLIKE MOST OF THE REST OF THE BOOK, THESE ARE NOT THE WORDS OF JOHN, BUT RATHER THE WORDS OF GOD.

WHAT GOD SAYS HERE IS INCREDIBLY REVOLUTIONARY.

IT SEEMS TO CONTRADICT WHAT WE’VE COME TO BELIEVE ABOUT THE END TIMES.

GOD TELLS US THAT HEAVEN IS GOING TO COME TO *US* INSTEAD OF *US* GOING TO HEAVEN.

THAT’S A FAR CRY FROM WHAT MOST OF US HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED, ISN’T IT?

BUT IT’S RIGHT THERE IN THESE WORDS WE’VE READ THIS MORNING!

FIRST, WE HAVE JOHN SETTING THE STAGE.

HE SAYS, “*THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH...AND I SAW THE HOLY CITY...COMING DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN...*”

AND THEN, TO CONFIRM WHAT JOHN HAS SAID, WE HEAR A VOICE FROM THE THRONE SAY, “*SEE, THE HOME OF GOD IS AMONG MORTALS. HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM AS THEIR GOD...*”

CONTRARY TO POPULAR APOCALYPTIC THINKING, THERE IS NO RAPTURE – NO CHRISTIANS BEING SNATCHED FROM EARTH & TRANSPORTED TO HEAVEN.

INSTEAD, IT IS GOD WHO IS “RAPTURED” DOWN TO EARTH TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE AMONG US!

THAT UNDERSTANDING MAKES THIS AN EXTRAORDINARILY APPROPRIATE PASSAGE FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

GOD COMING TO EARTH TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE AMONG US IS PRECISELY WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT.

IT'S THE INCARNATION THAT IS THE FOCUS OF OUR CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS – GOD BEING BORN IN HUMAN FLESH IN THE PERSON OF JESUS OF NAZARETH WHO IS IMMANUEL – “*GOD WITH US.*”

BOTH OF THESE IDEAS ARE INCREDIBLY REVOLUTIONARY.

THE IDEA OF GOD LIVING AS A REAL PERSON AT A REAL TIME IN HUMAN HISTORY IS REALLY BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION.

EQUALLY REVOLUTIONARY & INCOMPREHENSIBLE IS THE IDEA OF GOD USHERING HEAVEN TO EARTH.

THIS REVOLUTIONARY IDEA OF HEAVEN ON EARTH IS THRILLING TO CONSIDER.

AND IT'S HERE IN THIS PASSAGE THAT WE FIND THOSE WORDS THAT BRING SUCH COMFORT TO US IN A TIME OF SORROW OR GRIEF WHEN THE VOICE FROM THE THRONE SAYS, “*HE WILL WIPE EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES. DEATH WILL BE NO MORE; MOURNING AND CRYING AND PAIN WILL BE NO MORE...*”

AND THEN, THAT SAME VOICE SAYS, “*SEE, I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW!*”

REMEMBER – THIS ISN'T SOME FARAWAY PIE-IN-THE-SKY KIND OF PLACE – THIS IS RIGHT HERE ON EARTH – RIGHT IN THE VERY PLACE THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN TO DWELL!

YES – THIS IS A REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT THAT GOD IS COMING TO MAKE THINGS BRAND NEW!

WHAT'S IMPORTANT ABOUT THIS, THOUGH, IS THAT THE BOOK OF REVELATION ISN'T THE ONLY PLACE WE READ WORDS LIKE THESE.

ALL THROUGH SCRIPTURE WE FIND GOD DOING A NEW THING. THROUGH THE PROPHET ISAIAH, GOD SAYS, “REMEMBER NOT THE FORMER THINGS, NOR CONSIDER THE THINGS OF OLD. BEHOLD, I AM DOING A NEW THING.”

THROUGH THE PROPHET EZEKIEL, GOD SAYS, “I WILL GIVE THEM A NEW HEART AND I WILL PUT A NEW SPIRIT WITHIN THEM.”

THE APOSTLE PAUL SAYS TO THE CORINTHIANS, “THE OLD HAS PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, ALL THINGS ARE NEW.”

THESE ARE GOOD WORDS TO HEAR AT THE END OF AN OLD YEAR AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ONE.

THEY ARE WORDS THAT ASSURE US THAT GOD IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR FUTURE THAN HE IS ABOUT OUR PAST.

THAT’S THE POINT OF ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OUR WEEKLY WORSHIP HERE AT EASTMINSTER – OUR CONFESSION OF SIN AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS.

THAT’S WHY WE FOLLOW IT UP EACH WEEK WITH THE GLORIA PATRI – SINGING GLORY TO GOD FOR THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS – THE PROMISE THAT GOD IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR FUTURE THAN OUR PAST.

EVERY MOMENT WE EXPERIENCE GOD’S FORGIVENESS WE ARE GIVEN A NEW BEGINNING – A NEW START ON THE FUTURE THAT GOD HOLDS BEFORE US.

LET’S GO BACK, THOUGH, TO THIS REVOLUTIONARY IDEA OF HEAVEN COMING TO EARTH INSTEAD OF US GOING TO HEAVEN.

WHEN GOD TELLS US THAT HEAVEN IS GOING TO BE HERE & THAT GOD IS GOING TO USHER IN THAT ETERNAL KINGDOM RIGHT

WHERE WE LIVE, WE'RE ALSO BEING TOLD THAT WE HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

HERE AGAIN, WE FIND PASSAGES GALORE THAT SUPPORT SUCH AN UNDERSTANDING.

GO ALL THE WAY BACK TO GENESIS AND WE FIND GOD INVOLVING ABRAHAM & SARAH IN THE DIVINE PLAN FOR THE WORLD.

AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PLAN IS SPELLED OUT IN THIS PASSAGE WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.

WE HAVE A PLACE IN GOD'S PLAN TO USHER IN A NEW KINGDOM ON THIS EARTH.

AGAIN, THIS IS A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA, BUT IT'S RIGHT THERE IN GOD'S WORD!

AND IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR US TO CONNECT OUR OWN PERSONAL ROLE IN THAT PLAN WHEN WE CONSIDER OUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS.

LET ME SUGGEST THAT, AT THE BEGINNING OF A BRAND NEW YEAR, YOU MAKE A SERIOUS EFFORT TO LOOK AT THE WORLD AROUND YOU IN A NEW WAY.

AS I WATCHED "DIE HARD" FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, I TRIED TO SEE IT WITH FRESH EYES – TO SEE SOMETHING I'D NEVER NOTICED BEFORE.

THIS PASSAGE IN REVELATION LETS US LOOK AT THE IDEA OF THE END TIMES IN A BRAND NEW WAY.

IT ERASES THINGS WE ALWAYS THOUGHT TO BE TRUE & OFFERS US A BRAND NEW PERSPECTIVE.

WHY NOT TRY TO DO THAT WITH THE PEOPLE YOU ENCOUNTER EVERY DAY?

WHY NOT MAKE A SERIOUS EFFORT TO LOOK AT THEM DIFFERENTLY THAN YOU HAVE BEFORE.

I KNOW I'VE SHARED THIS STORY WITH YOU BUT I FIND THAT IT'S ONE THAT I NEED TO BE REMINDED OF ON A REGULAR BASIS.

IT'S SOMETHING THAT'S TOLD BY A MAN ON BOARD A BUS.

HE SAYS, "I WAS RIDING THE BUS TO WORK ONE DAY, SITTING BY MYSELF & READING THE MORNING PAPER.

THE BUS STOPPED IN FRONT OF A HOSPITAL & A MAN BOARDED WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN.

THE MAN SAT DOWN NEXT TO ME, AND SEEMED TO BE COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS TO EVERYTHING AROUND HIM – INCLUDING HIS TWO CHILDREN.

THE LITTLE BOY & GIRL RAN UP & DOWN THE AISLE, SCREAMING & BOTHERING OTHER PASSENGERS.

THEIR FATHER DID NOTHING TO STOP THEM OR CONTROL THEM. HE SEEMED LOST IN ANOTHER WORLD & I FOUND IT VERY AGGRAVATING.

THE MORE THIS WENT ON, THE MORE & MORE AGITATED I BECAME.

HOW COULD THIS MAN BE SO OBLIVIOUS & IRRESPONSIBLE AS TO LET HIS CHILDREN BEHAVE LIKE THIS!?

FINALLY, THE MAN TURNED TO ME & SAID, 'I'M SORRY ABOUT MY CHILDREN. I DON'T USUALLY ALLOW THEM TO BEHAVE LIKE THIS, BUT THEIR MOTHER JUST DIED BEFORE WE LEFT THE HOSPITAL, AND I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO TELL THEM.'

IN THAT MOMENT, MY ENTIRE ATTITUDE TOWARD THIS MAN CHANGED.

IT WENT FROM EXTREME AGITATION TO OVERWHELMING SYMPATHY.

I SAW HIM IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY.

NOW, WHEN I LOOK AT PEOPLE, I REALIZE THAT I DON'T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT SOMEONE IS EXPERIENCING IN THEIR LIFE.

I TRY TO BE MORE SENSITIVE & UNDERSTANDING WHEN SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOR DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS OF THEM."

WOULDN'T THAT BE SOUND ADVICE FOR ALL OF US AT THE BEGINNING OF A BRAND NEW YEAR.

SO OFTEN IT'S TRUE – WE DON'T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT SOMEONE IS EXPERIENCING IN THEIR LIFE & WE WOULD DO WELL TO BE MORE SENSITIVE & UNDERSTANDING WHEN SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOR DOESN'T MEET OUR EXPECTATIONS.

LET ME SUGGEST ANOTHER AREA OF LIFE WHERE IT WOULD BE GOOD TO MAKE AN EFFORT TO SEE THINGS WITH FRESH EYES.

THAT'S IN YOUR ATTITUDE & INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

WE SO OFTEN LOOK AT THE CHURCH WITH THE QUESTION OF "WHAT CAN I GET OUT OF IT – WHAT IS THE CHURCH GOING TO OFFER ME?"

LET ME SUGGEST THAT YOU REVERSE THOSE TWO & CONSIDER THEIR OPPOSITES – "WHAT CAN I PUT INTO THE CHURCH & WHAT AM I GOING TO OFFER IT?"

LIKE THAT PASSAGE IN REVELATION, THAT KIND OF THINKING MAY BE A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF THE COMMON UNDERSTANDING, BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS – AND, IF TRUTH BE TOLD, EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEED AS WELL – GIVING MORE THAN GETTING & SERVING RATHER THAN BEING SERVED.

THE BEGINNING OF A BRAND NEW YEAR IS A GOOD TIME TO LOOK WITH FRESH EYES UPON OTHER PEOPLE & A GOOD TIME TO LOOK WITH FRESH EYES UPON YOUR ROLE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

I TOLD YOU THAT WHEN I WAS WATCHING “*DIE HARD*” LAST WEEK, I TRIED TO SEE IT WITH FRESH EYES – I TRIED TO SEE SOMETHING I’D NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

SURE ENOUGH, THERE WAS SOMETHING I’D NEVER NOTICED IN ALL THE TIMES I’D WATCHED IT BEFORE – ADMITTEDLY SOMETHING THAT MOST DIE-HARD “*DIE HARD*” FANS WOULD SURELY KNOW.

IT’S VERY MUCH LIKE THE ROBERT DENIRO CLIMBING-THE-SIDE-OF-THE-MOUNTAIN SCENE IN THE MOVIE “THE MISSION.”

AS JOHN MCCLAIN IS TRYING TO PULL HIS WIFE FROM THE CLUTCHES OF THE EVIL VILLAIN HANS GRUBER WHO DANGLES FROM A 30TH FLOOR WINDOW, THE ONLY WAY TO DO SO IS TO YANK FROM HER WRIST THE ROLEX WATCH SHE HAD RECEIVED EARLIER THAT NIGHT AS A CHRISTMAS BONUS.

SHE HAD TO LET GO OF SOMETHING COSTLY TO PRESERVE SOMETHING THAT WAS PRICELESS – HER VERY LIFE & THE LOVE OF HER HUSBAND.

IT WAS ONLY AS SHE LET GO THAT HER LIFE & HER MARRIAGE WERE BOTH GIVEN A BRAND NEW START.

ONE OF THE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS DEREK GAVE ME WAS, APPROPRIATELY, THE BOOK ON WHICH “*DIE HARD*” IS BASED.

HE GAVE IT TO ME BEFORE I EVEN TOLD HIM WE’D BE GOING TO SEE IT THAT VERY NIGHT.

THE BOOK IS ENTITLED NOTHING LASTS FOREVER.

THE AUTHOR, RODERICK THORP, IS HALF RIGHT.

NOTHING *BAD* LASTS FOREVER.

**THAT'S BECAUSE GOD IS ALWAYS DOING A NEW THING –
ALWAYS WORKING TO BRING ABOUT GOOD IN THE WORLD & GOOD
IN OUR LIVES.**

**WE'RE PARTNERS WITH GOD IN MAKING THAT GOOD COME TO
PASS.**

**AS WE STAND AT THE BEGINNING OF A BRAND NEW YEAR, LET'S
ALL TAKE THAT PARTNER ROLE SERIOUSLY – MAKING GOOD COME
OUT OF BAD. AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*