

“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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And 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 from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Many years ago in Sunday School, we taught the children a song which said, “Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace. I’m going to see my Saviour’s face, ‘cause heaven is a wonderful place.” To say that heaven is a wonderful place truly is an understatement. Heaven is far, far beyond description and far beyond our understanding in this world. Even so, Scripture does speak to us of the blessings and glory of that home God has prepared for us. We see some of that glory revealed for us in our text today. After teaching a bible study on heaven, one woman said to me, “you make heaven sound so wonderful that I can’t wait to get there. I suggested that maybe we could arrange a bus trip for that coming Thursday, at which she quickly added, “oh, no! I don’t want to go that soon!”

We often find ourselves caught in a struggle. On the one hand, this life and this world are all that we really know. We have the family, the friends and all the relationships we enjoy as part of our lives. We have things we want to accomplish. We have places we want to visit. In his poem, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, Robert Frost spoke of life saying, “ But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep.” We can’t envision departing this world until everything we want to do has been accomplished.

St. Paul had both a similar and yet differing idea in this regard. He said: *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”* (Philippians 1:21–24, ESV) For Paul, the things he wanted to accomplish were not an end in themselves and not for himself. He felt it important to remain in this world for the sake of the Gospel. He wanted everyone to come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Redeemer. He knew God had given him the task of bringing the Gospel to the nations of the world. By the grace of God he would work to accomplish his God-given task. But Paul was always ready, always eager, to depart this life because he knew that the life that awaited him was a better life; a new and improved life with the Saviour who had lived and died and risen for him and for us all.

We are now in the last half of the Easter season. The early weeks of Easter reveal the resurrected Christ to us and assure us that the Lord, who died for us on that horrible cross, is the Lord who rose as victor over sin, death and the grave. In these latter weeks of Easter we shift our focus and begin to look ahead to Christ’s ascension into heaven. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells His disciples: *“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”* (John 16:16, ESV) Jesus is talking about His death and resurrection, but He also points them to His ascension. In the verses before our Gospel reading, Jesus said: *“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.”* (John 14:28–29, ESV) Jesus also promised His disciples: *“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”* (John 16:7, ESV) Jesus promises His disciples—and us, too—that He will give us everything we need to be His people in this world, even as He reminds us that this world is temporary. As we live in this world, we live to the glory of the Lord who has saved us for His glory, but we always look forward to the wonderful life that will be ours with Him in heaven. What joy we have, for Jesus has said: *“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that*

where I am you may be also.” (John 14:2–3, ESV)

In our text today, John reminds us that this world is passing away. When we read John’s Spirit-given Revelation, he tells us over and over that this world is corrupt and evil. He speaks of the sin and rebellion of people throughout the ages, including our sinfulness and our rebellion against God. John saw the pain, the sorrow and evil of this world. He also saw that God has planned, and will bring about His judgement on sinful mankind. Many people are overwhelmed by what they see as the scary stuff in Revelation and the description of the final destruction on the day of judgment. But aren’t the things we see around us just as scary? Don’t we experience more than our share of griefs, disappointments and struggles in this world? I have heard more than a few people ask, “how long can things keep going on like this in the world?” Only God knows the time line that He has determined by His grace. Our lives are even more fleeting. The psalmist reminds us: ***“O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”*** (Psalm 39:4–5, ESV)

Now, in the face of this, God gives John the vision he shares with us—that sure and certain vision of the new heaven and the new earth. To call it new and improved—well, that is also an understatement. John hears a voice declare the glory of this new and improved heaven and earth: ***“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*** Of all the blessings of heaven, there is nothing greater than this: we will dwell with God, walking with Him as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. We will get to see Him as He truly is, or as Paul said: ***“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”*** (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV)

We also rejoice that in this new and improved home that God has prepared for us the destructive power, temptation and evil of sin is eradicated forever. Freed from sin, God’s people will no long weep and mourn, for death and pain and suffering are gone. All the sorrow that sin has brought into this world has, as John says, passed away.

Dear people, loved by God, rejoice in the life that is yours through Jesus Christ! We live in this world, but we do not want to cling to this world. Why would we want to cling to the broken, imperfect and often painful things of this world when God has prepared something so much better for us? Why would we want to go on being separated from God when He has done everything necessary to draw us to Himself?

God declares that ***these words are trustworthy and true***. The truth of God’s promise is revealed for us in the Saviour, the One John calls ***the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end***. From the very beginning God has planned the way to bring lost and condemned people like you and me to the glory of His wonderful Kingdom. To do it, the Eternal Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ had to leave the wonder and joy of that Kingdom to come and live among us. He lived the holy life that we have never been able to live and then offered His holy life in our place on the cross. He took our place so that He could make us new, and through His resurrection He lives to make all things new. Clinging to Him, trusting in His love and forgiveness given to us so freely, we know that the best is yet to come. We have new life now, and the new and improved life lies before us through Christ.

On this “singing Sunday” we sing the praises of our God who has prepared this new and improved life for us. In His time He will call us out of this world and into that wonderful life. I have always said that among the songs I would have used at my funeral is one entitled, “This World Is Not My Home”. My favourite version has a Dixieland beat and energy. As we close today, I want to share it with you, as we all look forward to the new and improved life that is ours by the grace of God. Amen.

This Earth is Not My Home
<https://youtu.be/2KqcZsE9o9k>