

Prayer of Preparation: God of a new heaven and new earth, come dwell with us. In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.

I have a bold statement to make about our prophesy lesson from Revelation today. Here it is: God is bringing heaven down to earth to dwell among God's people. Yep. Heaven is coming to us, and I haven't heard such good news in a long, long time.

I know you're wondering about the bold statement. The reason I call it a bold statement is because when John of Patmos writes, "*And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,*" he's not talking about us being raptured and going up to heaven. John is saying that God is coming to us and bringing heaven right along with him.

Imagine that. God with us; wiping our tears, joining in our pain and suffering, and holding us when we mourn the death of our loved ones. It's a very different picture of Revelation than what we are usually taught. We love to hear about the sound of trumpets calling our loved ones from the sea and from the ground. There's a poetic justice, a sense of "rightness" in that portion of Revelation...but what about the people who remain? Does God forget about them?

Never. God never forgets. Never has. Never will. God is coming for ALL CREATION so that we may be restored. I want you to take a fresh look at the word **dwell** where John says, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will **dwell** with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God..." Some scholars have translated the Greek word **dwell** to mean "among," "with," or even "home." Those are good interpretations of the Greek, but the literal meaning is "**tent**." It's the same "**tent**" the Israelites used when God led them out of Egypt. Translated literally the scripture reading becomes, "See, the **tent** of God is among mortal. He will **tent** with them as their God..." The **tent** John is referring to is the tent of meeting the Israelites construction to house God's presence with Israel as described in Exodus.

So what is John saying? God will surely dwell among us in the New Jerusalem as he did with the Israelites. This is God's promise to us: God will return and with God's return the old earth will pass away and heaven will replace it. The promise we receive in Revelation is living our lives with God in our midst.

Here's the second part of John's revelation, "*...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.*" Y'all, this is the end of creation's story. An end to death, destruction, pain, sorrow, injustice, hunger, sickness, disease, homelessness, war, and all the -isms of this world. When heaven comes down all of those are wiped away and we live with God in our midst once again.

What are we supposed to do until then? Certainly not sit on our tailbones and wait! Here's what Jesus has commanded us:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love one another. That's what we are commanded to do and love is who we are commanded to be. There's no getting around it. Jesus commanded it and we are to be about the business of doing it. Not the Halmark television love. No, it's a love steeped in our love for God Almighty. It's a love which calls us to be Jesus in all places to all people. It's a love which knows that people **and** the earth groan. It's a love which says

when we see creation in pain, we will be the one who will wipe away tears. It's a love which says that when creation is sick, we will be the ones to minister at sick beds and contamination sites.

It's a love that rejoices when others rejoice. It's a love that brings hope to those who are sad. It's a love that provides shelter to those people and places devastated by war. It's a love that wipes away tears, sits with those who mourn, visits the prisons, writes cards for the sick, delivers communion, calls a friend, and is help when all around us seems hopeless.

It's the love that Jesus commands us to have and the new heaven and new earth will bring to peoples *from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*. John's revelation does something very bold. It tells us the end of all creation's story. That end is a new heaven and a new earth in which God dwells among us, love surrounds us, and God's peace reigns within us. But until that day, Jesus commands us to love.

Response to the Word: Gracious God, you have made your home with us on earth. We bless you for coming to dwell with us, for wiping our tears, and for mourning alongside us. We thank you that heaven is bound for us as we are sent into the world to be the church. **Amen.**