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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“GOD’S DWELLING PLACE”
Revelation 21:1-6

- **The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by [his] Spirit to a valley filled with bones. He led me back and forth among the old, dry bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground....**

Then he said to me, “These bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘We have become old, dry bones – all hope is gone.’”
(Ezekiel 37:1-2, 11).

Does anyone here feel like dried up bones? Is anyone here in need of hope?

Our text today is about real hope and its fulfillment.

- Revelation 21:1 ~ **“Then 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.”**

John is not talking about actual H₂O, the liquid we drink and wash with and splash around in. **“There was no longer any sea”** is a figure of speech.

Most ancient people hated the sea: their sailors got lost in its vastness, their vessels sank in its violent storms – and who knew what razor-toothed monsters lay in wait to gobble up the unsuspecting voyager? Consequently, in many cultures the sea symbolized chaos and danger.

→ In Isaiah 57:20 the sea embodies the turmoil that wicked people suffer and also inflict on their neighbors. In

Ephesians 4:14 it signifies spiritual immaturity and victimization. In Revelation 13:1, 5 the sea is the environment from which the Anti-Christ emerges.

★ So when John says **“there was no longer any sea”** his concern is not with physical geography, but to describe a new reality {Swete} **“rising from the decay and wreck of the old,”** a new realm of peace and security in which all is as it should be.

→ Peter puts it this way: {1 Pe 1:3-4} **“In his great mercy”** the **“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..., and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade,”** and which **“is kept in heaven for”** us.

This is real hope!

- Revelation 21:2 ~ **“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”**

★ 1st, Notice the social dimension of our hope.

☑ A certain station broadcasts worship music. Their videos alternate between dramatic scenes of mountains and rocky coastlines and soothing ones of meadows and streams. The images are lovely.

Yet there is never a sign of human life. There are no quaint log cabins, no well-ordered row crops, no telltale tire tracks, no picnickers or hikers or explorers. It is a world depopulated of people.

I realize that some of us commune best with God out in his creation. That is a gift! But if isolation is our picture of heaven on earth, our vision is distorted.

The LORD's plan for us culminates with the New Jerusalem.

This city is beautiful, awe-inspiring, and un-spoiled by the deceit, immorality, violence, and idolatry that infest the cities we build. Nevertheless, it is a city.

The focus here is on people. This city is a holy fellowship, a model neighborhood, an ideal community. It is the perfect society in which each citizen exercises right relationship with God, self and others.

Real hope is in the coming of a city, the capital city of God's kingdom.

★ Notice, 2nd, the direction of movement: the Holy City comes down to us.

- Consider Babel in Genesis 11. The proud people of Shinar plan a huge construction project: {11:4} **“a great city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make” “a monument to our greatness!”**

In fact, it is a shrine to their foolishness.

Are we so different? Don't we sometimes believe the lie that our hope is in the tower of religious busyness or biblical knowledge or spiritual exertion or moral virtue? Don't we labor and toil and sweat to raise our tower to heaven, one storey at a time?

- Spiritual self-reliance is bad enough, but it easily degrades into something worse. Isaiah 14:13-14 is condemns the king of Babylon, and possibly Satan: **“You said... ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on ...the utmost heights of [the sacred mountain]. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”** But things don't work out as planned, do

they? Instead (verse 15), **“You are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit.”**

It is good to lift our hands and hearts to the Almighty and cry out for his presence. {Jas 4:8} **“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”** Yet it is bad to try to pull ourselves up to God by our bootstraps. All such efforts alienate us from him.

This is real hope – not that we will make it to heaven, but that God will bring heaven down to us.

- On to Revelation 21:3 ~ **“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”**

Salvation history records a progressive revelation of God's good presence.

- Exodus 19 describes God's visit to his people at Sinai. He gave Israel two days to prepare, and warned: {19:12, 20} **“Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death.... On the morning of the third day.... the LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai.”** With the exception of Moses and the priests, no one was allowed to come any closer than the foot of the mountain, on pain of death.

This set the paradigm for most Old Covenant encounters with God. He was accessible, but only from a distance and through human mediators. His approach filled Israel with anxiety and dread.

- Fast-forward to the New Testament. John 1:14: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** During his incarnation, God the Son physically took up residence among us.

He was close enough to touch and many people did, largely because **“he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness”** (Philippians 2:7). Those who loved Jesus occasionally experienced dread in his presence; but for the most part they were filled with reverence and awe and comfort. His approach was a joyful event.

We do not see Jesus in the flesh. But He promised: {Jn 14:16-17} **“The Father... will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth....he lives with you and will be in you.”**

- At his Ascension Messiah {Luke 24:51} **“was taken up into heaven.”** Ten days later, on Pentecost, He fulfilled his promise: the disciples were {Acts 2:4} **“were filled with the Holy Spirit”** Since then, He enters all who follow Christ. {Eph 2:22} Together we **“are being built...to become a dwelling in God which lives.”**

- ★ Our current experience of God is more personal than in the Old Covenant, yet less tangible than for the original disciples. But when the words of Revelation 21 come to pass {Rev 1:4} we will see the majesty of the Father **“who is, and who was, and who is to come.”** We will touch the Son, **“the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”**

We will be completely filled by the Spirit, who is **“the sevenfold Spirit before [the Father’s] throne.”**

This is real hope!

- Revelation 21:4-5a ~ **“He 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. He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’**

- ★ We talked about this at length last week, when we examined Revelation 7. After **“the Holy City”** comes **“down out of heaven”** God’s people will cry no more tears for sin, no more tears for suffering, no more tears for death.

This is real hope!

- Finally, Revelation 21:5b-6 ~ **“Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ 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 without cost from the spring of the water of life.’”**

- ★ Our hope is as real as its guarantor and the process of fulfillment.

- ☑ Friedrich Nietzsche said, **“Hope is the worst of evils, for it prolongs the torment of man.”**

He was an atheist. Ignore God, and hope’s only guarantors are our limited selves, fallible humanity, and the heartless universe.

But God is the Beginning: He is the source of all life. God is the End: not only is He eternal, union with him is the goal for which we have been created.

Our hope is real because God is perfectly reliable.
His **“words are trustworthy and true.”**

→ The fulfillment of our hope is well underway. It began with Christ’s first coming and accelerated with the giving of the Spirit. Through Jesus {Rom 5:2, 5} **“we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.... this [hope] will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”**

Does anyone here feel like dried up bones? Is anyone here in need of hope?

✪ To live with God in his Holy City, the New Jerusalem, after it comes down out of heaven – this is real hope.

I can hardly wait!