

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
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**“Dwelling With the Lord”
Psalm 24:1-10
Revelation 21:1-4**

**All Saints’ Day
November 4, 2018**

Psalm 24:1-10

A Psalm of David.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!

Revelation 21:1-4

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."

"Dwelling With the Lord"

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Back in 1982, Steven Spielberg produced one of science-fiction's most memorable movies, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. To be fair, in my youth I was terrified of E.T. As I got older, though, I began to appreciate its messages of friendship and hope. One realization I made was at E.T.'s famous line, "E.T. phone home." You see, he just knew earth was not home. While he came to earth to study its botany and became close with the young boy Elliot, the reality was E.T. was not of this world and wanted to go home. In a lot of ways, this temporal earth is not our home. While we live and die here, make friends and work here, have families and build livelihoods here, the reality is this is not our eternal home.

Jesus, when brought before Pilate, tells him, "My kingdom is not of this world."¹ While this world was created through him, this world is not Jesus' kingdom. Jesus' kingdom has no end, this world will end. The inhabitants of heaven enjoy immortality, the inhabitants of earth are mortals. The denizens of paradise are in close and constant proximity to God, we citizens of this

terrestrial ball are distant from God. You see, the rule of law for this place is the flesh. And we see it all the time. The passions of the flesh guide the actions of everyone, both sinner and saint. The flesh ages, withers, and eventually perishes. The flesh wars and ravages, fighting for dominance. The unredeemed give in fully to the flesh, but the redeemed are not free from sin's grasp. We struggle through, battling the desires of the flesh. While the world gives in, we must not give up.

The Apostle Paul encourages us to present ourselves as living sacrifices, "holy and acceptable to God" by not being "conformed to this world" but "transformed by the renewal of your mind."² We dwell with God in this time and space by being transformed through the Holy Spirit. While we yet reside on this planet, we must strive to dwell with the Lord. Think about that word, "dwell." The dictionary defines dwell as a verb "to live or stay as a permanent resident."³ A dwelling place is your home. And many of us have dwelt in our domiciles for generations. The human race has an intense emotional connection to home. We like to say "home is where the heart is." But the reality is, our hearts get attached to buildings, communities, and people. We have a natural inclination for dwelling places. Why is this? Well, I believe it's because we know this is not our final dwelling place. We are yearning for our true home with God.

In his high priestly prayer, shortly before his arrest, Jesus says of us, his disciples and inheritors, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world...As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."⁴ The phrase, "in this world but not of it," is heard in many Christian circles. While the phrase itself does not appear in Scripture, its concepts are deeply rooted in Christ's own words. Just as Christ and his kingdom are not of this world, so are we not *of* this world. This is not our home, at least not our final home. But we are nonetheless *in* this world. This world is our living space, our workplace, and our mission field. Just as Christ was sent into this world to do God's work, so are we sent out into the world to continue his ministry.

Just because our true and final dwelling is in heaven, does not mean we are to be hermits in this life. The Great Commission given after the resurrection says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...[and] teaching them."⁵ In being transformed by the renewal of our minds, we are transformed from workers of lawlessness to fishers of men. As true inhabitants of heaven we are to try our best to bear witness to that true dwelling place. Think about this. In most cases we like to have our houses as presentable, especially when guests are coming. If you have young children, sure, the house will likely be messy, but I doubt you leave food strewn on the walls or waste piling up in the baskets. Generally speaking, all of us have a modicum of decorum when it comes to our homes.

Since our true and final dwelling place is in heaven with God, and the people around us see this true dwelling through us, doesn't it make sense, then, that we ought to keep ourselves presentable, as Paul suggests? And we know that God wants to dwell with his people. And he does through the Holy Spirit. Logically, then, shouldn't we want to present the dwelling place of the Lord as place fit for a king? This is why Paul tells us to be transformed by God and not conformed to the world.

Some folks argue that, because our true dwelling place is with God, we are to despise and reject our temporary residence. Yes, we are not to be conformed to this world, but we are also not to be isolated from it. This was one of Calvin's biggest critiques of monasticism. That monks and nuns were isolating themselves from the world, cloistering in communities that were inaccessible to the common man, was not what Paul had in mind. Our job is to go out into the world, that the world might see our transformation, and be moved to welcome that same transforming message.

But what's our motivation? Once we get our house in order, many of us are just fine with staying there and letting others come visit. In a lot of ways, the church is like that. We build grand and beautiful buildings to attract newcomers. Historically, nothing could be taller than the church steeple, because the church's prominence in the cityscape was to be a beacon. This way of thinking engenders in us a notion that sinners need to come to the church. It seems preposterous that the church should go out to the sinner. And yet, that's exactly what Jesus wants us to do. What should motivate us to do this? The very fact that God *wants* to dwell with us should be our motivation.

In his vision of the new heaven and the new earth, John sees that the old heaven and the old earth pass away. In order for something new to come, something old must go away. It can't go on the highest shelf or in the attic, for the old can be rediscovered there. For something truly new to come to pass, the old must pass away. In the case of heavenly bliss, the old world must die. We find descriptions of the apocalypse throughout Scripture. The old world and the old way of doing things are wiped out to be replaced by the new, heavenly way of life. After the refiner's fire purges the old, the new can descend. John sees the new Jerusalem, more beautiful than any human can imagine, all decked out as a blushing bride for her husband-to-be.

And then a voice speaks to John and gives to him the motivation we need. "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man." So often we hear—and I'm guilty of preaching it—that God doesn't want to hang out with us because we are sinful. And yes, things that are sinful can't exist in God's presence, but the reality is, he has always wanted us to be near to him. I love thinking about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, walking with God, talking with him, enjoying his presence. And he enjoying theirs! He has always wanted to dwell with us. This is an encouraging truth that should motivate us to share it with those who feel God is aloof.

"He *will dwell with them*, and *they will be* his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." This is *the* definition of relationship. God with us; we with him. He doesn't want to be some distant puppeteer. He wants to be in your life. He wants to be the center of your life, just as you are the center of his. Is it hard to imagine that you are the center of God's life? It's hard for us to fathom because we have such limited reach. It's hard for me to have God as the center of my life, and Betsy, and my family, and my church. I'm limited in this way. But God, he's unlimited. It is possible for him to have each of us at the center of his heart. He wants to be in relationship with us, and, furthermore, he wants us to be in relationship with one another. What

better way is there to witness to that relationship than by being in relationship with our neighbors?

And in that relationship, “death shall be no more.” This is the ultimate benefit of dwelling with God. Yes, we will die. All of us will come to that same end. Some sooner than we want, and others later than is desired. But the hope present in Christ’s unearthly Kingdom is that death shall be no more. In death we transition from a life of limits and corruption, to a life of limitlessness and wholeness. To dwell with God is forever. It is eternal. Which means there is life after death. That reality should be our greatest motivation to bring the Good News to the ends of the earth. Death has lost its sting. The resurrection of Christ has won for us victory over the grave. And while we yet mourn and grieve the loved ones we have lost, we rejoice knowing that all the saints of every time and place have, as their final resting place, the New Jerusalem, which will one day penetrate this temporary home. And of that day, we repeat with St. John, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, your desire for us is to dwell with you forever. Far too often we ignore your calling to chase after temporary pleasures and the enjoyment of sin. Forgive us for our insolence. Help us to model lives that bear witness to our final dwelling place. Just as the new Jerusalem was envisioned all decked out, so too should we display our Groom and Head. We give thanks to you, O God, for placing in our midst and in our time very many saints who, during their time here on earth, displayed and portrayed for us what it means to be Christ’s disciples. May we never forget their memory, may we rejoice in their dwelling with you, and may we hope for the day when we, too, shall join your courts of praise.

¹ John 18:36

² Romans 12:1-2

³ Dictionary.com, *dwell*. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dwell>

⁴ John 17:16, 18

⁵ Matthew 28:19-20