

your family—that's old. Sickness and disease—that's old. Sadness and loneliness and depression—that's old. *"I am making everything new!"* God was so urgent about these words, that he commanded John, *"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* To you and I who live in the middle of the old, who suffer because of the old, God wants you to know that the new is coming. It's a done deal.

In fact, God says, *"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."* I like to think about God's forgiveness and salvation like a water tower. Is there enough water in our water towers for every person in Saint Peter? Absolutely! Can I get a drink from the water tower right here in the front of church? No! I need to be connected with a pipe to the water tower. When Jesus died on the cross, he won forgiveness and salvation and eternal life—God's love—for every person in the world. It's there! How do I get it? What's the pipe? Faith in Jesus our Savior. Are you thirsty? Do you feel this longing in your heart for something more? You need Jesus!

That leads to what I think is the kicker—how much does all this new stuff cost? Heaven, new life, God's love—how much? *"To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."* How much? *"Without cost."* God's love is without cost. It's free! God doesn't just love you when you love him. God doesn't just love you when you go to church. God doesn't just love you on your good days. He loves you without cost. Now let me ask you this: What will bring you more peace and joy in your life? Looking at and living for yourself? Or looking at and living for Jesus? *"I am making all things new."* Do it, Jesus, make them new! Wow, Jesus loves us!

Now, after all that, after all that he has done, Jesus looks at you, and with his earnest, loving voice, he says, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* You know how Jesus has loved us. Without cost. Undeserved. To all. So how can we go back to the old way of looking at ourselves in the mirror? Are you still going to refuse to talk to that person? That's old. Everybody does that. Are you still going to look out for your own self-interests? That's old. Everybody does that. Are you going to make sure you win every argument? That's old. Everybody does that. Why not try something new? Love like Jesus loves.

It's not easy, but here's God's promise. *"He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."* Until the day you die, the devil will try to lure you to stare at yourself. Our world will encourage you to make everything about you. A part of you will always yearn to focus on your own reflection. But you are God's child. So here's Jesus' challenge for you today: Try something new. Look at his love for you on the cross. Look at his love waiting for you in heaven. And then do something radical—love like Jesus loves. Every one. Every time. Without cost. Try something new!

Revelation 21:1-7
Pastor Nathan Nass

Easter 5
April 24, 2016

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. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He 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." ⁵He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

"Try Something New"

In Greek mythology, there was a man named Narcissus. Have you heard of him? According to the legend, Narcissus was strikingly handsome. Men wanted to be like him. Women swooned over him. Yet, for all his outward beauty, Narcissus was terribly proud and vain. He only cared about himself. So one day one of his enemies thought of a way to trick him. He lured Narcissus to a pool where he became so enamored of his own reflection in the water that he couldn't look away. He kept staring at himself. After a long time, Narcissus finally realized his reflection in the pool would never return his love. So he despaired and took his own life.

Now that's just a made-up story. It didn't actually happen! Except that it happens all the time. I think that story about Narcissus describes every one of us by nature. We're talking about love today, and by nature we are wired to love ourselves, like a baby loves looking in a mirror. Over time, we stop liking to look at ourselves in mirrors, but we never stop loving ourselves. Every person thinks their ideas are right. Every person thinks their opinions matter most. Every person thinks they don't get the attention they deserve. There's a word for that. Narcissism. It's the most natural thing in the world to interpret life in regard to how it impacts me.

Don't believe me? Look around. We live in a world dominated by selfie sticks. It's easy to judge our worth based on how many likes we get on Facebook. All day long we hear all sorts of people sharing all sorts of opinions. Voters vote for politicians who tell them what they want to hear. Church shoppers look for churches that teach what they

want to believe. Deep down, every one of us is a narcissist. All sin is narcissism because all sin is self-centered love. Just remember where that ends up.

I want you to try something new today. Actually, Jesus tells you to try something new. He tells you how to live in a way that most people can't imagine. On the night before he died, Jesus told his disciples something crazy different from everything else in the world. He said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13:34-35).

That's it? That doesn't sound new, does it? Love one another? Jesus, that's what God's been telling us to do all along! So what was new about Jesus' command that night? This is how God had phrased his command to love before: *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus himself had put it like this: *"Do to others what you would have them do to you"* (Matthew 7:12). That's sometimes called the golden rule. Even people who aren't Christians quote it today. Love others like you want them to love you. Now here's Jesus' new command: *"As I have loved you, so you also must love one another."*

Do you see a difference? God's first command—*"Love your neighbor as yourself"*—focuses you on your love. I want to love others like I love me. That's true! But like we've already said, our love isn't an example for anybody! Our love has all sorts of conditions and excuses and looks out for its own good. What's different about Jesus' new command? *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* His new command focuses us on Jesus' love for us. It takes love to a new level. How many conditions are on Jesus' love? None! He loved us to death. He loved everyone to death. And so on the night before he died, Jesus pointed to himself and challenged us to try something new: "Love like me!"

I think it's safe to say that people don't love like Jesus loved. That's exactly why Jesus tells us to love like him! If you were to love like Jesus, you would stand out, just like Jesus wants. In fact, he says, *"by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* You can't really know how to love without knowing Jesus. The world understands *"Do to others as you would have them do to you."* The world understands love based on conditions, based on give and take. The world doesn't understand, *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* The world doesn't understand the unconditional love of God. So how do you love? Do you love like Jesus loves?

It's a struggle, isn't it? It's a huge struggle to break away from me-centered Narcissistic love to Jesus-centered love. I wonder if Paul was thinking about this when he talked about how the good he wanted to do, he didn't do. We want to love like Jesus does, but we don't, because it's always the most natural thing in the world to think of ourselves first! God understands the struggle. He knows how selfish our love is by nature. He realizes that

this new love is hard for our old sinful natures. God's new way is always opposed to our old way. So to help us love here on earth, today God lets us look into heaven. He wants us to consider which is really better—old or new.

I love how the apostle John describes heaven. *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."* I hope you noticed which word God repeats—"new." Just that thought can give us great peace. A new heaven and a new earth. Earthquakes and floods, like we've seen this week—that's old. Zika virus and cancer—that's old. Car accidents and winter—that's old. One day, God is going to take you to a place where everything is new.

And in that new heavens and new earth, John saw something else new. *"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."* John sees what he calls a city, prepared to be Jesus' bride. Who's he talking about? You! In a different place, the Bible says, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy"* (Ephesians 5:25). That new city in heaven is you and me and every other believer in Jesus. Think of the newness of a bride in her wedding dress. That's you. God's made you new too. If you feel separated from God—that's old. If you feel dirty because of your sins—that's old. Here's the reality: Because Jesus died for you, you are to God as beautiful as a bride is on her wedding day to her husband! You're new!

Here's what it's like to be married to God: *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."* Maybe you're thinking, "But God is with us now. How is it going to be different then?" It's true that God is with us now. Absolutely. Every minute of every day. But how many of you can see God? How many of you can feel God? And that leads to some of our greatest doubts, right? Believing what you can't see—that's part of the old world here. Here's something new about heaven: You will see what you believe! You will see God and his presence and his love.

When you do, *"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."* You see, if heaven is new, then there are just some things that aren't going to be allowed up there. *"The old order of things has passed away."* Death is old. Mourning is old. Pain is old. It's hard to imagine the new, isn't it? There is this new place where you will have a new relationship with God where God will be with you every day where all the old, sad stuff will be gone.

Because here is God's promise: *"I am making everything new!"* I hope you realize what that means for you. If there's something in your life that we haven't mentioned yet, that doesn't work the way it's supposed to work, it's going to be new too. Conflict within