

## **Incentive as We Approach This New Year**

***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth has disappeared. (Rev. 21:1)***

My family started off the new year of 2020 at a Toronto Raptor's 905 game in Mississauga. Coral's basketball team was invited to play for 5 minutes on the court during half time. Prior to going on the court, the girls were given a chance to have their picture taken with one of the Raptor's championship rings. As they were about to go on the court, they got to high-five some of the players as they were coming off it. Then it was their time to take center court and not only be cheered on by family members but close to 5,000 fans in attendance. It was an incredible experience for these girls and once it was over, they had their picture taken with the Raptors' mascot at half court. What a way to start off 2020. For these girls they were looking forward to so many other exciting things in 2020 such as:

- Four more months of games as a team ending with the Ontario Basketball Championship weekend in April,
- Year-end class trips that are full of lasting memories,
- Purchasing dresses for their Grade 8 graduation ceremonies,
- Celebrating their achievements at graduations,
- Conversations about becoming high school students in the fall and playing on their school basketball teams.

The team got to play some games in January and February during the time when our world was just beginning to hear about a virus. I remember being at a basketball practice the night when we heard the first case of COVID-19 was now in Canada. We were still being told at that time it was no threat to us and we should keep on with our normal routines. The start of 2020 that began with such excitement for this team of young basketball women soon turned to disappointment by mid-March and continued throughout the year:

- Schools were closed,
- Basketball and sports were cancelled,
- They could not visit with their friends and hang out,
- Malls and stores were closed,
- Trips and March Break plans were cancelled,
- Graduations were cancelled,

- High school sports and events did not start up in the fall,
- They had to start high school in a quadmester type of learning environment,
- Fall basketball with various teams and organizations has not started up.

These were just some of the disappointments in 2020 for this group of young women. A year that started off so well did not stay that way. Whether we play basketball or not, whether we are young or old, or whether we are male or female, we have all experienced our share of losses and disappointments like this group of young basketball players have due to COVID-19. The first two and a half months of 2020 were pretty good. The last 9 or more months have not been so good. As we enter 2021, we do so under lockdown just like we were back in March. This is not the way any of us wants to enter 2021, but this is our reality.

There is hope in 2021 though, with the approval of two new vaccines by Health Canada and the hopes of more to come. Our Prime Minister has told us that if all goes well, a majority of Canadians should be vaccinated by September 2021. If this timeline can be achieved, then we are told life can return to some form of normal. September 2021 is still 9 months away. Until then we still must cope in this new year with the same conditions and restrictions COVID-19 has placed upon us since March.

In order to make it through these next nine months we need something to encourage us. I think we can find our encouragement from what Jesus did as He faced the 18 months of His life journeying toward the cross – an encouraging reminder of heaven and His true home.

At the halfway point of Jesus' three-year ministry, He was about to switch focus in the course of His mission. For the first 18 months, He ministered in and around Galilee, preaching the Good News and telling people the Kingdom of God had now entered into creation. Jesus continued this message over the next 18 months, but then He was also making the journey toward the cross to die for our sins. In order to find encouragement and strength for this journey toward the cross, Jesus climbed up a mountain to pray and draw close to His Father. As He prayed, we are told He was transfigured into His true divine self. Once this happened, He began to talk with Moses and Elijah who would have offered words of support and strength to Him based on their experiences of journeying through trials and difficulties

on earth. Experiencing this incredible moment on that mountain top as His true divine self reminded Jesus of His eternal home in heaven uplifting Him as He journeyed the next 18 months toward Jerusalem and the cross.

As we begin 2021, we have at least eight months to persevere through as we await enough vaccines to have been administered to return our society back to some form of normal. Our glimpse of heaven and our true eternal home, like Jesus experienced transfigured on that mountain, is provided to us by the Apostle John in his vision from Revelation 21:1

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In the next few verses John tells us some of the ways life will be different from what we experience here on earth:

- God's home will now be among us,
- We will live as His people,
- There will be no more death or sorrow or sin or crying or pain as these things will be gone forever.

This glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth that John provides for us is a reminder to us of everything we have to look forward to when we get to heaven. For Jesus, the reminder up on that mountain was what He needed for strength and encouragement journeying toward the cross. As we journey into 2021, may we find strength by envisioning ourselves in God's new heaven and earth one day. May this visualization strengthen us as we realize the pain, tears, and loss that we have experienced are temporary when it comes to eternity. For now, we must bear the cross and sacrifices brought on by the pandemic but may the HOPE and POWER of Jesus' cross give us the strength and endurance to keep moving forward knowing that better times and eternity lie ahead.

Just remember when 2020 becomes 2021 on Friday, this new year brings us closer to experiencing God's new heaven and new earth. Doesn't this reminder give us the encouragement we need.

Keep Safe & God Bless

*Rev. Dean Adlam*