

“Heaven: Perfection in Paradise, Part II”

Liturgical Date: Easter 7 (C)

Primary Texts: Revelation 22

Christ is Risen!

He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Seventh and final Sunday of Easter, is the Epistle Lesson, which is the very last chapter of the Bible—Revelation 22. The sermon for today is the conclusion of this two-part sermon “Heaven: Perfection in Paradise”. GOD GIVES ST. JOHN A VISION OF WHAT IS TO COME SO THAT WE MAY GAIN A GLIMPSE OF THE PERFECT FELLOWSHIP AND LIFE THAT AWAITS CHRISTIANS IN HEAVEN.

Last Sunday we looked at several aspects of Revelation 21. I also told you that some of the themes in Chapter 21 are repeated in 22, so we want to look at some of those today as well as some specific characteristics of the last chapter. We learned that every question that we may have about heaven cannot be answered, at least on this side of eternity. However, God tells us what we need to know about heaven, and specifically in these chapters God is showing St. John a vision of the new heaven and new earth to come. To recap: the greatest thing about what *is* in heaven is that God is there in perfect fellowship with His people and the best things that are *not* there are the pain, suffering, and death brought on by sin. As far as its appearance, God gives us some information about the New Jerusalem in these chapters—

but it will be even more beautiful and wonderful than we can even imagine. Heaven is perfection in paradise.

A story is told a woman who died and went to heaven and upon her arrival, an angel began to give her a tour...(tell joke about different rooms with denominations in them, ending with Lutherans).

Now, there is a point to this joke that as in our fallen world we do have divisions, including in the body of Christ, the Church. I preached about this a couple of weeks ago in terms of Jesus' command to "love on another." In this world, we will never have perfect unity in the church. But in heaven, one of the blessings we have to look forward to is perfect unity in the body of Christ. What we see here in these chapters of Revelation is that all of those who have saving faith in Jesus Christ will be together in the same heaven. Verse 3 speaks of the throne of God and His servants serving Him. We see elsewhere in Revelation that the angels and saints of God worship around the throne. All believers are together enjoying the fruits of the tree of life. Debates over Calvinism vs. Arminianism, infant vs. adult baptism, contemporary vs. traditional worship, live vs. silk flowers, and many others that we could list are over. There will be no question over what the pure Word of God teaches because God is right there in purity and truth. This is a beautiful picture, something to look forward to.

If you would permit me to share one other humorous story with you...(share joke about what type of transportation we get based on faithfulness to our spouse.)

Now there are passages that speak of certain rewards that are given to faithful believers. I don't want to delve into that specific topic today, but I do want to note that these rewards will cause no jealousy or division in perfect paradise.

It has also caused some people some undue stress in terms of what Jesus said in St. Matthew 22:30, *“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”* Especially people who have had a beloved and or long-term spouse on earth, this can be concerning. I remember one believer shared with me that he asked his pastor after his wife of many years died, “Pastor, I read in the Bible that there is no marriage in heaven, but can at least live next door?” Please note that the Bible never says that we will not recognize other people in heaven and it does not say we will not be able to have fellowship with others. The reason there is no marriage in an earthly sense in heaven is the same reason as we heard last week why there is no temple—there is no need for it. We have perfect fellowship with all our fellow believers in Christ without any worry of hurting others or breaking vows of faithfulness. Even in lacking marriage there is no reason to believe that you will not be able to fellowship with your spouse, it is that our relationship with our Christian loved ones will be even better than it is on earth.

There is one division that is clearly brought forth in Revelation 21 and 22, though. And that is the division of who is in heaven and who is not. The New Jerusalem is a holy city and all who enter it must be holy. Chapter 21, verses 7-8 clearly contrasted and gave a list including murders, the sexually immoral, and liars that will not be there, their final destination is the lake of fire. Verse 27 makes this contrast again, saying only those whose names are in the Book of Life enter in. Verses 11-15 of Revelation 22 reinforced this contrast today.

This is not teaching that we must work our way into heaven. If anyone who told a lie, had a sexually impure thought, or didn't put God first in every instance of their life were not allowed into the New Jerusalem, it

would be a ghost town! We must be pure, holy, and righteous to enter, but how does this happen? It happens through Jesus. We are declared righteous by faith in Christ, because His righteousness becomes ours. The wicked that are excluded are the unbelievers, those who have stubbornly refused to repent of their sins and receive the forgiveness-the living water of the Gospel. They had rejected the work of God for their own works. And if you think about, if someone is not a lover of God and His people heaven would be a most miserable place for them. Admission to heaven is based on the work of God. Hear the words of verse 17, *“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”*

We heard last week from the reading and I spoke in the sermon of how the New Jerusalem is described with its immense size and awe-striking appearance. Jesus says in John 14 that He goes to prepare a place for us, and think about what He did in six days and how much longer God has had to prepare our heavenly home! And now let's back up to the first few verses of Chapter 22 as this portion of what was shown to St. John hones in on the central part of the new heaven. While there is no need for a temple, God has a throne. And we see that there is *“a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”* (v1) Among the streets of gold, there is a river that flows with an encompassing tree of life. And it says that no candle nor sun is needed for light, *“for the Lord God giveth them light.”* (v5)

Now if you are astute in your Bible knowledge, you see that much of this relates back to when God created the world perfect, without sin. In many ways, the new heavens and earth can be seen as the Garden of Eden 2.0. What had been lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God has been

restored. Evolutionists often scoff at the order in the days of creation because there was light before the sun. However, they miss the point. God is light, Jesus is the light of the world (John 1 and 8). God's light exists even without the sun. If there is a beautiful sky with the sun, moon, and other heavenly features in heaven it will just be for our enjoyment-it is not needed.

We also read in the Bible that there were rivers in the Garden of Eden. We see a river here in the new creation as well. Water is essential to physical life and God's living water is essential to our eternal life. Let me give you a few examples of water and life being connected in the Bible: *"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life"* (Proverbs 13:4) *"Fountains of Living Water"* (Jeremiah 17:3) Isaiah 55:1 gives an invitation to come into God's presence and drink *"A fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord."* (Joel 3:18) *"Living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem"* (Zechariah 14:8) Ezekiel's vision of heaven in Chapter 47 speaks of water flowing from the temple of God. And of course Jesus identifies Himself as the "Living Water" to the woman at the well of whom if anyone should drink they will never thirst again. And of course, what did God choose as the visible element in Holy Baptism that brings us into relationship with God? Water. So we see all of this teaching from the Bible coming together before the throne of God in the last chapter of the Bible.

One other thing that we see here that we also see in the Garden of Eden is the Tree of Life. Revelation 22 tells us that it bears fruit continually and its leaves provide healing. Genesis 2:9 tells us that the Tree of Life was in the Garden of Eden. So the new creation is very similar to the first in that it is perfectly free of sin and death, God and people have fellowship with one another, and all of creation is working and living together in harmony.

But the new heaven and earth are even better than the original Garden of Eden. Martin Luther said, *“The future glory will be far greater than was the glory of Adam in Paradise before the fall.”* Why? Because something is missing here in Revelation 22 that was part of the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:9 tells us that there were two trees, Revelation 22 only one. Absent in the New Jerusalem is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And thanks be to God that this tree is missing! Because the one rule, which Adam and Eve broke, was to not eat of that tree. So while they were given a perfect environment, they had the potential to mess it up by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And mess it up they did, royally. So in the New Jerusalem there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil, only the tree of life. This means that there is not even the temptation to sin nor any potential for this perfect paradise to end. Remember we heard last week that sin, death, and the devil himself are gone-cast into the lake of fire. God has completed all things and created a paradise that is truly eternal with no risk of our sinful flesh getting in the way.

Now there is a lot more in this chapter that we could delve into of course, and probably a lot more questions that you have about heaven. We will have to save some of those for a later time. But I do want to bring this home by focusing on another aspect of this concluding book of the Bible that is very important.

While John was given this vision of eternal bliss to come, these are ultimately not his words and certainly not his imagination. These things were shown to him by God Himself, by an angel and Jesus Himself (see verse 16). All Scripture is inspired by God. As is stated on more than one occasion the testimony here is faithful and true (v7). Chapter 22 contains both blessings for those who listen to and heed the prophecy of this book

and a curse for those that would ignore, add, or take away from it. We do not treat lightly any part of God's Word. This warning was also given through Moses in Deuteronomy.

The angel tells St. John in verse 10, "*Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand.*" This Word of the Lord is for immediate release. Verse 20 stated, "*Surely I come quickly.*" Now remember God's timetable is different than our impatience. St. Peter says a thousand years are like a day to the Lord. People need to know the message of Revelation, as it is ultimately a book about Jesus. Jesus is the Savior from sin. Without Him they cannot enter into heaven. Martin Luther said, "*I can drive no one to heaven or beat him into it with clubs.*" And that is not our job, God does the saving. But He has called us to do is share the message of His Word. As with John, we now have a view of the New Jerusalem and we desire that others would share this eternal heavenly home as well. While we know not the day nor the hour of Jesus' return, we know it is closer today than it was yesterday.

I pray that these sermons have been enlightening and encouraging to you. We look forward to the glorious day of perfect fellowship with God and all His people. We look forward to being completely free of pain, suffering, and death. And this is all because of what God has done for us. Because Jesus has risen to life from the grave, we too will rise to new life and live eternally with Him.

For this last Sunday of Easter, we joyfully proclaim one more time,
Christ is Risen!

He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

I leave you with the same benediction with which God Himself closes the last book of the Bible, His Holy Word, to us: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

Amen.