

It's been a few weeks since our last sermon on the book of Revelation. We have spent some time on chapter 21 which mostly speaks about the blessedness of the final state in terms of the new Jerusalem or the final temple. This evening we will hear the Word of God to us from Revelation 22:1-5. These verses mostly speak of the blessedness of the final state in terms that are drawn from the garden of Eden.

Near the beginning of the Bible, we have Adam and Eve dwelling with God in the garden of Eden. And now near the end of the Bible we have the people of God dwelling with God in a garden that recalls Eden but goes far beyond it. Near the beginning of the Bible, Adam and Eve, representing all of humanity, sin, and are driven from the presence of God in the garden of Eden. Near the end of the Bible we find saved humanity living with God in a final and more glorious garden. And the story of the Bible is about how God overcame sin and the curse so that God's original purpose in creating could finally be realized. Jesus Christ is at the heart of that story.

This is where all of history is heading. This is where we are heading if we are people of God. And the Bible describes this to us so that we might live in hope as we live our lives with all their blessings and hardships. Whenever the Bible tells us about the glorious future of the people of God, the purpose is to encourage us to endure in the spiritual battle as we look forward to a fullness of life that is far beyond any blessedness we have known in this life.

The passage begins with the "river of the water of life." Verse 1, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city." Again, we see how the symbolic language of Revelation is not to be taken literally. A river "flowing through the middle of the street of the city" is not a picture that makes a lot of sense, but that is not a problem in this kind of literature as we have seen many times in these sermons on the book of Revelation.

There was a river in the garden of Eden. Genesis 2:10 says, "A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers." The river watering the garden is a symbol for that which gives life and refreshment. Water and life are closely related in Scripture. The river in the end-time garden is called the "river of the water of life." In both the original Eden and the end-time Eden, the water of life flows from the place where God and man are living together in harmony and fellowship.

Jesus makes use of this symbolism as he is revealed in John's gospel. To the Samaritan woman Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14). Then in John 7:37-39 Jesus says of those who believe in him, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." And John identifies the living water with the Holy Spirit.

So, the phrase "rivers of living water" refers to the eternal life that the Holy Spirit gives to those who believe in Jesus. And here in the end-time Eden we see "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the

throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.” The fact that the river with its water is “bright as crystal” refers to its purity and that fact that the river flows through the middle of the street of the city refers to the eternal life of the people of God for the city is a symbol of the people of God in glory.

The water flows “from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Life comes from the one who rules the universe and from the Lamb who shares that throne. This life flows from God to his people in the place where God and his people dwell together. It comes from the Lamb who died for the sins of his people and rose again to everlasting life which he shares with his people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

So, all this symbolism is about the life that God gives on the basis of Christ’s saving work through the power of the Holy Spirit. It begins in this life. But it reaches its fullness in paradise. Fullness of life is life in the presence of God, in fellowship with God. It is life that comes from God. Gregory Beale writes, “the water metaphor primarily represents the life of eternal fellowship with God and Christ.” (p. 497).

This point has a very important application for us. Life is about our relationship with God. To live apart from God is death. Those who believe in Jesus receive eternal life. That begins in the here and now. It is at the heart of the blessedness of paradise – the end-time Eden. What that means is that if we are alive in the Spirit, fellowship with God will be precious to us. Hearing him speak to us. Speaking to him. Worshipping him. Being build up by his love. Seeking to please him. Getting to know him better through time spent with him. This is true life in the here and now and it will be life in its fullness in paradise.

And it is good to ask ourselves whether we enjoy something of that fellowship in the here and now and if we long for the perfection of it in paradise. If this is not part of our experience now, we will not experience it in the hereafter unless we are born again. But if we enjoy fellowship with God now, we can look forward to enjoying it in a much fuller way in paradise. This is what this passage is promising us.

The second part of verse 2 speaks about the tree of life. The tree of life first appears in the garden of Eden. One of the reasons that Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of Eden was “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” But now in the end-time Eden we read of the tree of life and that tree of life is accessible – its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The tree of life yields twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.

The meaning of the tree of life is not that different from the river of the water of life. It is about life and life is about living in the presence of God - in fellowship with God. The twelve kinds of fruit suggest that the blessings of life with God are many and varied. Twelve is the number of fullness or completeness. The fullness of life in the end-time Eden will be rich in its variety. There will be many blessings to savor. Life in fellowship with God is not just one kind of blessing. It is many different kinds of blessing. Just as life with God in the original Eden included many different blessings because it included the richness of living with God in God’s

beautiful and fruitful world, so life in the end-time Eden will include a great variety of delightful blessings. If the trees of the original garden were “pleasant to the sight and good for food” how much more will the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruits be a source of a vast variety of delights as we live life in the presence of God.

The tree of life also as leaves and the leaves “were for the healing of the nations.” The term “nations” makes the point that God’s saving purposes embrace all the nations of the world. The great promise that God made to Abram that set apart Abram and his offspring for a special role in God’s plan of salvation included the promise “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” This begins to be fulfilled in a big way with the Great Commission which was Jesus’ command to bring the gospel to all the nations. The healing of the nations refers to salvation in Jesus Christ. The ESV Study Bible says, “The healing of the nations will have been completed in the destruction of death.” All sickness and brokenness and death is the result of sin and the ultimate healing is being delivered from the curse of sin and death.

There is great comfort in the idea of healing here. We can think of being healed from the sicknesses we have struggled with in this life. We can think of being healed from the breakdown of our bodies as we move through time to the day of our death. We can think of the healing of the psychological and spiritual brokenness that we experience in this life. We can think of healing as being delivered from all the results of sin and death – all through what Jesus has done for us.

Verse 3 tells us, “No longer will there be anything accursed....” This thought is also related to the garden of Eden, namely, the curse that was pronounced there because of the sin of Adam and Eve. We looked at that curse this morning. It is the curse that God pronounced on the serpent and Adam and Eve and the whole creation. That curse results in all the hardship and suffering and death that belongs to life in this world.

Paul refers to this state of affairs in Romans 8:19-23. He says that that the whole creation “was subjected to futility.” He describes the current creation as being “in bondage to corruption.” He says that the “whole creation has been groaning” and that believers “groan” along with the rest the creation.

We sing of the mission of Jesus to remove this curse in Isaac Watt’s hymn, “Joy to the World.” “No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make this blessings flow far as the curse is found, for as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.” That is the meaning of our text when it says, “No longer will there be anything accursed.”

Here is how one author puts it: “In response to Adam and Eve’s sin, creation would no longer be the pure stage of God’s glory. Instead, creation would be both the context of our judgment and at times an agent of God’s wrath against us. Far from being an ever-expanding garden of Eden, the world became a place of weeds and thorns, toil and frustration.... The world is not the way it’s supposed to be. God created it to be a place of joy; instead we know it to be a source of constant frustration. God created it to be a habitat of life; we know it

to be a crucible of death. God created it to be our home; we know it to be our graveyard.” (*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, p. 125-126)

All of this is overturned in the end-time Eden. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the curse has been removed. That begins in this life with the blessings of salvation, but we still experience its effects in our lives as we deal with frustration and disappointments and suffering and death. But all of that is gone in the end-time Eden and what is experienced instead is the blessedness that God intended for humanity from the very beginning.

It is edifying to think of how much joy and pleasure and satisfaction God gives us even amidst the suffering of this life as we enjoy the blessings of created life in fellowship with him. Then imagine what that would have been like before the fall into sin and then imagine all of that ramped up exponentially in the end-time Eden.

One of the wonderful aspects of the glory of God is his desire and his ability to give joy and pleasure and delight and fulfillment both as we enjoy his love and presence directly, but also as we thankfully delight in his gifts of beauty and relationships and taste and meaningful accomplishments. We will experience that in a far greater way than we have ever known it on this earth when we experience it in the end-time Eden when the curse has been completely removed and there will be nothing standing in the way for God’s infinite creativity to create a garden of delights for us to enjoy as we live in relationship with him.

But God himself is always the ultimate delight. Verse 3 says “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.” From the beginning of the Bible to the end, the greatest blessing of all is the presence of God with his people. After the fall, Adam and Eve were driven from the presence of God. But he did continue to be with them in a less intimate way as they lived as his people. The great blessing of Israel being the people chosen by God to be his people is that he dwelt with them. The incarnation of Jesus meant that God was with us. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

This blessing comes to its climax and ultimate expression in the end-time Eden. “But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it....” There will be nothing accursed. There will be the throne of God and of the Lamb. God will continue to be God. He will still be the ruler. God and the Lamb sit on the throne. The people of God will be his servants.

And his servants will worship him. One of the things that we often say about the final state – is that it will not be one endless worship service. Worship in the Bible includes direct worship but also service. It is living all of life to the glory of God. Revelation 7:15 describes the saints in heaven: “Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple....”

Richard Philips writes, “The Greek word *latreuo* can mean both “serve” and “worship.” Of courses, the two go together in the eternal city. Just as Adam was called to “work and keep” the original garden (2:15) ... so also

will the redeemed pick up the work of spreading God's glory through the universe for all eternity. Here is the answer to those who worry that eternity will be a never-ending version of boring worship services they may have endured on earth. Just as the presence of God in his Word makes worship enlivening now, so will his presence make our eternal service an exercise in glory."

No doubt there will be opportunities for corporate worship. But that worship will be anything but boring. The saints on earth treasure corporate worship even though they are imperfect, and it is imperfect. Think of the sentiment expressed in Psalm 84:1-2, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God." Here on earth, we experience this longing to some extent. We do not experience as fully as we should. But in eternity we will experience its satisfaction. We will know to a degree that we have never known here our "heart and flesh sing[ing] for joy to the living God."

Verse 4, "They will see his face...." The Bible describes the people of God has longing to see their God face to face. Think of Moses in the story when he asked God to show him his glory. Psalm 11:7 says, "the upright shall behold his face." Psalm 17:15 says, "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness." Matthew 5:8 promises "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." 1 John 3:2, "[B]ut we know that when he appears, we shall see him as he is." Revelation 22:4 "They will see his face...."

This is sometimes referred to as the beatific vision. One dictionary defines this as "A term denoting the blessed state of the glorified saints in heaven, where they behold the glory of the Lord and enjoy perfect and sinless communion with Him." Here are a few quotations from another dictionary. "When they experience seeing God, the faithful will find complete satisfaction in God and enjoy the beauty of all God's perfections.... God is the consummation of all that is beautiful and the summation of all that the faithful desire." And here is one more. "Its particular climax lies in face to face meeting. A face sums up a whole history of a relationship. God face will not only be splendiferous and overwhelming in majesty and holiness, but also, through God in Christ, welcoming."

Clearly seeing God's face is something to look forward to. Think of how much a human face expresses the personality of a person. Think of how importance faces are in communications and relationships. Think of how faces express love and delight. The fact that the delight of the end-time Eden is expressed as seeing God's face means that seeing and delighting in the glory of God is not simply about God in some abstract way, but God as he is facing us. We do not delight in God as an object, but as a person whose face is shining upon us.

And that relates to the next thing in our text. "They shall see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." There are a couple of things that are implied here. God's name on their foreheads implies that they belong to God. But it also implies that they reflect the character of God. It is the counter-symbol to the mark of the beast on the wicked. The mark of the beast is his evil reflected in their lives. And having God's

name on our foreheads indicates that we reflect God's holiness in our lives through the salvation that he has accomplished in us. That ties in with 1 John 3:2 which says that the result of seeing God as he is, is that we will be like him.

And so, seeing God's face and being face to face with God implies a perfect harmony that comes from perfectly reflecting his image. When God looks at us, he will see his own name on our foreheads, and he will delight in seeing his own perfections reflected in us.

There are two more thoughts to consider from this paragraph. First, paradise will be illuminated by God himself. Verse 5, "And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light." About this, Gregory Beale writes, "The language in v. 5 is figurative, and the main point is that nothing from the old world will be able to hinder God's glorious presence from completely filling the new cosmos or the saints from unceasing access to that divine presence." This is a glorious fulfillment of the prophecy of Habakkuk 2:14, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." The light of the glory of God will fill the end-time Eden. There will be no need for any other illumination.

Darkness is often a symbol for evil. In John's gospel, Jesus is the light of the world and he overcomes the darkness. In 1 John 1, John says of God that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." Those who follow Jesus walk in the light and they are rescued from the darkness of what is false and what is evil. Well here is the ultimate fulfillment of walking in the light. The end-time Eden will be completely illuminated by the glory of God and the redeemed will live their lives in that light.

And finally, the servants of the Lord will reign forever and ever. This is the ultimate fulfillment of the cultural mandate. In Genesis 1-2 God gave mankind the task to have dominion over the earth. He was to keep and till the garden. The task of human beings was to manage the creation to the glory of God. That was to involve cultivation. It was to involve learning to harness the potential that God had built into the creation to enrich life to the glory of God. The fulfillment of this his human culture – what human beings have done with the creation. In this fallen world this includes both good culture and it involves bad culture. But even in this fallen world mankind having dominion over the earth has yielded an incredibly rich and interesting and satisfying experience for human beings.

In the end-time Eden – the new creation – humanity will be given the same task to reign – to have dominion – to produce culture for God's glory and for human enrichment. The best hint of what life will be like on a day to day basis in the end-time Eden is found in the original Eden – the vision that God implemented for mankind to live as part of the creation in fellowship with him. The promise that the servants of God will reign in the end-time Eden is a promise that is rooted in the original task given to mankind at the beginning to have dominion over the earth. We will be tasked with having dominion over the new earth and we will do that in perfect harmony with God – truly doing all things to the glory of God.

So, we have this wonderful description of the end-time Eden – of paradise in these verses – the river of the water of life, the tree of life with its leaves for the healing of the nations, the curse completely gone, the presence of God and the joy of service and worship. Seeing his face. having his name on our forehead, living in the light of the glory of God and reigning over the new creation forever and ever.

What a God our God is to devise such a glorious future for his people! And that for people who have rebelled against him and deserve only eternal punishment. It is amazing to think of the desire of God to bless a people through having a relationship with them, and enabling them to live for his glory in all kinds of ways that bring joy and delight. When we think of the delightful things mentioned in this passage, we are confronted anew with the goodness and generosity of our God.

And that is our hope. It is that glorious future that encourages us as we travel through this life with its ups and its downs. Paul says that the suffering of this present time is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. But it is also true that the richest blessings of this time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. They are hints of what we will experience in a far greater way in the end-time garden of Eden. May God use his word to stir up our desires to experience the delights of what God has in store for us.