

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Cornerstone Church of Alexandria MN

Pastor Darryl Knappen

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Message Title: The New Heavens, the New Earth and the New Jerusalem, Part Three

Today's Passage: Revelation 22:1-5

Introduction

Verses One and Two

[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 [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

- The description of our new future home by the Apostle John includes a vision of a river flowing from the throne of God called "The River of the Water of Life". Here are features of that river and suggestions about its function:
- This vision tells us that God seems to be restoring what was once lost in the Garden of Eden. In that garden was a flowing river that supplied water not only to the garden but to other lands outside the garden:

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. (Genesis 2:10 ESV)

- The fact that it flows from the throne of God indicates it will never run dry and will always be pure.
- Many scholars suggest this river is symbolic and has only a symbolic function which is to continually remind us of the abundance of life which God and the Lamb provide for us in the eternal city.
- Others take the river more literally and give it a function. Randy Alcorn suggests that the river continually quenches the thirsts of fully physical residents who enjoy its refreshing qualities from the main source itself or from one of its many tributaries. This seems to square with our understanding of what our new glorified bodies will be like since Jesus Himself ate the food He prepared for the disciples in John 22 ("When **they** had finished breakfast) we can conclude that our glorified bodies will also eat and drink. See also Luke 22:18. Randy Alcorn: "*Can you picture people talking and laughing beside this river, sticking their hands and faces down into the water and drinking?*"¹)
- Randy Alcorn also suggests that because the river flows down from the throne of God and the Lamb that the throne is itself elevated at the top of the city and all one has to do is follow the main artery along the main street and one will find the throne of God.
- The river flows down the center of Main Street but just because only one street is mentioned does not mean that there is only one street in heaven. It is likely that the

¹ Heaven, by Randy Alcorn, page 256, Tyndale House Publishers

- o eternal city has many streets all leading to the main street in heaven.
- o This raises a question. If the river is for quenching thirst, does it mean that if we do not drink from it we will eventually die of thirst? No, since there is no death in heaven. Therefore the river must be for enjoyment and pleasure only, not a necessity to keep our physical bodies alive.

A bigger question in these verses is “What is the purpose of the Tree of Life?”

- o The Tree of Life was present in the Garden of Eden and had to be removed or hidden and protected by cherubim in case Adam and Eve, who were now cursed with sin, would eat from it and continue to live and be immortal. **(Genesis 3:22-24 ESV) Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.**
- o Now that tree is located in the eternal city and is available for all to eat from.
- o Scholars say that the Greek does not require us to say the tree is singular but it could be many trees of the same variety, so, there could be many trees of life which would explain why the trees are on both sides of the river.
- o Again, many scholars teach that the tree and its leaves and its fruit are all symbolic of the eternal life Jesus purchased for us at the cross and eating of its fruit is a testimony of thanksgiving to Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit for giving us eternal life.
- o Others take the tree more literally as the passage in Genesis seems to imply. There it is implied that if Adam and Eve had access to the Tree of Life that they would live forever despite the curse of death brought about by their sin. Here is Randy Alcorn's take on the Tree of Life: *“John tells us that ‘the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations’ . . . Nations will not be eliminated but healed. But since we won't experience pain or disease in Heaven, what's the point of leaves for healing? Perhaps they, like the tree's fruit will have life-sustaining or life-enhancing properties that will help maintain health and energy. Our physical life and health, even our healing, comes not from our intrinsic immortal nature but from partaking of God's gracious provision in the fruit and leaves of the tree of life. Hence our well-being is not granted once-for-all but will be forever sustained and renewed as we depend on him and draw from his provision.”*²
- o The tree also produced 12 kinds of fruit and we assume that the fruit also has supernatural powers of immortality just as the leaves do and perhaps they will produce a different kind of fruit for each month of the year and that will be our only well to tell time!

Verse Three

[3] 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.

- The original actually reads like this: “And all the curse shall no longer be”. This translation implies that the curse brought about by Adam's sin upon man and nature are forever removed. Imagine no tornados, no damaging hail and winds in a thunderstorm, no hurricanes, earthquakes, radiation poisoning, (no weeds in my garden Genesis 3:18). Imagine no pollution, no disease, no aches and pains.
- The second error in this translation (if I may be so bold) is the use of the word worship (although that is definitely implied as one activity among many). The actual word is serve. This implies that the billions of residents of Heaven will be

² Heaven, by Randy Alcorn, page 258, Tyndale House Publishers

busy doing service projects for the Lord and for the Father being empowered as always by the Holy Spirit. The theology behind this is that man was created to work prior to sin (**Genesis 2:15 ESV**) **The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.** Therefore work itself is not the curse, just toil and frustration in work is the curse (Genesis 3:17-19). And,

- God Himself is a worker and continues to be actively working. (**John 5:17 ESV**) **But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."** Therefore since it is God's nature and our nature to work, we can assume from this verse that we will be busy in heaven using the talents and skills God gave us on earth to work on projects in Heaven for the glory of God. Randy Alcorn puts it this way (but don't limit your activities to this list): *Maybe you will build a cabinet with Joseph of Nazareth. Or with Jesus. Maybe you will tend sheep with David, discuss medicine with Luke, sew with Dorcas, make clothes with Lydia, design a new tent with Paul or Priscilla and Aquilla, write a song with Isaac Watts, ride horses with John Wesley, or sing with Keith Green. Maybe you will write a theology of the Trinity, bouncing your thoughts off of Paul, John, Polycarp, Cyprian, Augustine, Calvin, Wesley and . . . even Jesus.*³

Verse Four

[4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

- What does it mean to see the face of God? This is what David longed for. **One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4 ESV)**
 - This is what Moses was not allowed to do. **Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." (Exodus 33:18-20 ESV)**
 - This means that we will be completely sinless when we look into the face of God. Hebrews 12:14 **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**
 - Our faces are the expressions of our emotions, will, desires, joy. So it is with the Father and with the Son. Therefore we are not looking for facial features of them as much as we are looking for facial expressions. We will be looking into the face of Jesus and seeing in his face the fullness and beauty of God's holiness, grace, mercy, love, compassion, tenderness, kindness. This should be our primary joy now, and it will be our primary joy then. As Randy Alcorn says, *"Not only will we see His face and live, but we will likely wonder if we ever lived before we saw his face!"*⁴

Verse Five

[5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

- The saints will reign forever! We knew this about the millennial kingdom of a

³ Heaven, by Randy Alcorn, pages 332-333, Tyndale House Publishers

⁴ Heaven, by Randy Alcorn, pages 172, Tyndale House Publishers

thousand years, but this says forever. Consider these passages:

(Daniel 7:18 ESV) But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.' (Daniel 7:27 ESV)

- How we will reign and over whom we will reign are not specified here. Evidently it is not necessary that we know the details, only that we be strongly encouraged by the fact that we will be victorious over our persecutors and someday be given the greatest honor in all the universe – to reign as co-monarchs with Jesus Himself!!!