**Revelation 22:1-5** November 13, 2016

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 *Revelation 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

Dear Saints, soon-to-be, but-not-yet Triumphant,

**Paradise Restored**

**I. The Lost Book of the Bible**

 If you have ever been in my study—and if you have not, please feel free to stop in any time, because pastors’ studies are different from other offices. If you make a habit of stopping by a friend’s place of work while she’s on the clock, and you take a chair, and idle away the afternoon – well, you and probably your friend too, will find yourselves escorted to the doors. But a pastor’s study is different. That office, that pastor’s study, exists for you who step into it. You are always welcome. Please don’t ever think, “Oh, I shouldn’t go in there because pastor has so much work to get done.” You are the reason that that office, the pastor’s study, exists. It’s different from the offices you are used to.

 Anyway, where were we… If you should step into my study, I wonder what you would notice. I would be most pleased if the cross on the wall catches your eye. It is a beautiful gift someone once gave me, a cross befitting a pastor’s office – or a Christian’s living room. Or maybe you will notice a family picture, or the wood carving of a bicyclist – one of few impulse buys in my life. But more likely, you will notice (and I say this with a little shame) a desk that, while not a disaster, isn’t tidy either. Or else you might notice the books. Shelves of books. Yes, come to my study and see the dinosaurs, not the petrified remains of giant lizards, but things becoming almost as extinct: books. Many of those books I cannot brag about buying. They became mine one summer back in the late 80’s. I went out to California to work for a wine bottler. I stayed with my great aunt, the widow of a Lutheran pastor. Her great joy that summer was to pass on her deceased husband’s theological books to a future pastor. In those pre-digital days, that was quite a gift. Main problem was that I was limited by the size of my Ford Escort which was also carrying a bicycle, a passenger and a summer worth of luggage 2,500 miles back home. But I took several boxes, and she was so happy.

 Among those books is a series of annual sermon books, eighteen years’ worth. Sermons for every Sunday of the year and more. Do you know how many sermons on Revelation are in those eighteen volumes of sermons? In more than 1,500 sermons, there is not one sermon on the book of Revelation!

 And it wasn’t just the Lutheran church of the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s. It happens today too. Once in a while I ask people if they read the last book of the Bible, Revelation. I don’t ask that question of just anyone. I usually ask people that question if I know that they read their Bible regularly. And even those people who read their Bibles regularly, many of them say that they *avoid* Revelation.

 People shy away from Revelation because it is a different sort of book. Most of it a vision from God. And just like you would expect in a vision from God, it has fantastic things. You can find dragons, stars falling from the heavens, and much more. Yet Revelation is not a book of fiction. It is a book of truth. But it isn’t written like a history book either. It’s different, and that makes it a tough to understand.

 Which is just why people avoid this book of the Bible. Most of us want things that are easy to understand. We are a nation of the sound bite. We are a people used to camera angles that change every 1.3 seconds. We are a nation of busy people. So we have no patience for people who take a while to get around to the point. And we have no patience for authors who write sentences that have to be read a second time to be understood. And we have no patience for preachers who go more than 18½ minutes.

 And there is another thing—and this is a more sincere reason for avoiding Revelation—to be quite honest, there are a number of nut jobs out there who get excited about the weirdness of Revelation. And we sincere Christians get put off by people who spend most of their time talking about the weirdness, while they spend almost no time talking about our Savior Jesus. They really don’t seem too concerned about evangelizing the world, or secondarily about being a positive influence in the world—i.e. being the salt and light of the world. And since discussion on the book of Revelation is largely inhabited by people who seem spiritually unbalanced, we gravitate toward the clearer parts of Scripture. Which is well and good and understandable. But not a single sermon in 18 years?

 Here is my personal feeling about this book of the Bible: For me, after the four Gospels and Psalms, Revelation is the most comforting, most confidence inspiring book of the Bible.

 A wise man once said, “When you have learned to interpret Jesus’ parables, then you are ready to understand the book of Revelation.” (Becker, *Revelation*) The message is not locked up in the details, but in the overall message. We will usually benefit from Revelation if we take a step back, and look at the big picture.

 So what is the big picture around our short reading from Revelation 22? Revelation 22 is the end of a story. In the previous chapters, the world was in chaos. In the middle of it all, the Lord Jesus burst into the chaos, brought history to an end, and judged the living and the dead. Those who opposed him were thrown into the fires of hell. His people took possession of the New Jerusalem in a new heaven and a new earth. Chapter 21 described this New Jerusalem as *“coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”* (21:2). Do you husbands remember that special day – the day your bride to be was not seen by you until she appeared at the back of the church, the most beautiful you had ever seen her? I do. That was the beauty of the New Jerusalem. And now chapter 22 changes perspectives. Chapter 21 was looking at the New Jerusalem from the outside; chapter 22 is a look inside.

 ***“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”*** What a beautiful place! But some are not impressed.

**II. People Who Have Lost, Feel It Most**

 It is said that back in the 3rd century AD the Persians captured a certain Roman Emperor (Valerian) in battle. His captors wanted to completely humiliate him, so they made him to be a living footstool for their own king whenever he mounted his horse. How humiliating! One can feel how much worse it would be for the emperor, than a servant, to be converted into a living footstool. There are some curses you feel much more keenly when you have lost much in the process.

 Take the millionaire who falls into poverty. Will he not feel hunger, cold, and want much more than one who has been without for an entire life?

 And don’t we marvel at the strength of people who have been sickly since youth, and how they manage to put on a smile every morning? But a strapping, strong man without a sick day in his life – how he aches under the common cold!

 And who do you think felt the sting of sin’s curse more than Adam and Eve? All we have ever known for our entire lives is a sinful world, from the pain of our own entrance into this world, through all the insults and worries of life, to the last gasp for oxygen before our demise, we suffer. Oh, sure, we have many good blessings. But no one can deny that this world has many difficulties. But that is all we have ever known. Adam and Eve on the other hand… They had known immortality. They had known perfection of mind and body: never forgetting the keys, never stubbing their toes, never burning their fingers on the stove. They had known the joy of working without sweating, contentment as everything turning out as planned. And then they lost paradise. Worse than losing paradise, was the memory of paradise lost. What a curse, a curse beyond what any of us must bear, for we have never known perfection. Paradise lost!

**III. A “Just Enough” Promise**

 But people like us who have only lived in suffering and squalor compared to God’s original intention, perhaps we have difficulty appreciating what God offers in his gift of heaven.

 People on earth think they know what they want and don’t want. Look at how we cling to every breath, spending their kids’ inheritance for an extra three months in a hospital bed. Look at how we risk addictions so that the pain of a surgery can be lessened. Look at how we bite and scratch and lie and cheat to get a few extra dollars or the office cubicle with the higher walls or the key to the executive washroom. Look at how we buy and get Christmas gifts, so certain that they will bring happiness. But ask what we got for Christmas last year, and likely as not we can’t name more than one of the gifts – if even that. Sure, you know what will make you happy! We are so certain that we *know* what will make us happy that when the Bible begins to describe heaven, do you know what we do? We start complaining!

 When God tells us humans about his gift of heaven through dependence on his son Jesus Christ, how many don’t, in total ignorance, sing along with that Billy Joel song of 40 years ago, “I’d rather laugh with the sinners than cry like the saints?” As if some punk song-writer obsessed with sex is going to get to determine what heaven or hell is like! And when we hear about heaven, we ask how much fun it is going to be to sit on a cloud playing a harp. Or we nitpik, “Am I going to get my dog up in heaven? ’Cuz if there are no dogs in heaven, I don’t want to go.” Or, “Will my ex be in heaven – he was a mean old cuss and now he claims he’s a Christian – I don’t want heaven if he’s going to be there.” And the complaints about heaven pile to the skies, because we want heaven on our terms, because we think we know what makes us happy.

 Maybe that is why God gives us so little information about heaven. Because as soon as he, our smiling heavenly Father, opens his mouth to tell us about the greatest gift he could ever give us, we start to gripe and complain. “I want it this way. I want it that way. I only want heaven if you let me do what I want on this earth.” And so our heavenly Father, who has a lot more patience than I do, simply says, “Just wait. You will see. Trust me.” Like Dad in the driver’s seat on the first day of vacation.

 Sure he tells us a couple things, but not much. God knows what a bunch of malcontents we are. Revelation 22 is God giving us just enough so that we know he has a plan, a good plan.

 And now look at Adam and Eve, the only people who ever knew what it was to lose paradise, watch them as they enter the gates of heaven. They look at the tree of life. “Yes, this is what it was like.” And they look at the river of living water and with a tear in their eyes they say, “I thought I would never see it again.” And they look at God himself among them (that’s in verse 4 if you were wondering) and they say, “Yes, we remember those walks in the garden with our God. How we ached for those days!” With smiles they say, “Keep your plastic toys, your earth-bound arguments, your cats, your dogs, your cars, your houses. This is what we remember. No, don’t keep them, drop them. Come with us. Go with Jesus.”

 And the only people who ever knew what it was to lose heaven, with the first real smiles in their long lives since that day when they chose to disobey God and ate the forbidden fruit, those people entering the gates of heaven turn around and wave their hands, “Come on” but they don’t stop walking, they keep going through the gates because they know that though they once lost paradise, paradise has been restored. Not a feeble two-dimensional black-and-white imagination of heaven, but the restoration of what might have been, which we catch just a whisper of the finest moments of life on earth. ***“The Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”***

 It sure is a shame to go 1,500 sermons without hearing from the book of Revelation. And I hope that now you know why we need to look at this book of the Bible more often. For here we see, Paradise Restored. Amen.