

In Our Greatest Gift, Henri Nouwen tells a parable about believing in heaven. He imagines twins—a brother and a sister—talking to each other in their mother's womb:

The sister said to the brother, "*I believe there is life after birth.*"

Her brother protested vehemently, "*No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us.*"

The little girl insisted, "*There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move.*" Still, she could not convince her twin brother.

After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, "*I have something else to say, and I'm afraid you won't believe that, either, but I think there is a mother.*"

Her brother became furious. "*A mother!*" he shouted. "*What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all. We have all we need, so let's be content.*"

The sister was quite overwhelmed by her brother's response and for a while didn't dare say anything more. But she couldn't let go of her thoughts, and since she had only her twin brother to speak to, she finally said, "*Don't you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They're quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful.*"

"Yes," he answered. "*What's special about that?*"

"Well," the sister said, "*I think that these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face-to-face. Don't you think that's exciting?*"

The brother didn't answer. He was fed up with the foolish talk of his sister and felt that the best thing would be simply to ignore her and hope that she would leave him alone.

Belief in an after-life provokes us... and stirs our enthusiasm.

Before we open our passage in Revelation 22 this morning... let me state very clearly what the point of it is... It is the point of the last two chapters of Revelation (Revelation 21 and 22) **Heaven is more than a destination... .. It is a motivation!**

Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now. ... The vision of the heavenly city motivated the patriarchs as they walked with God and served Him...

Hebrews 11:10-16 (ESV)

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Knowing that He was returning to the Father in heaven also encouraged Jesus Christ as He faced the cross...

Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So... as we examine the assurance of heaven for the believer this morning... do not allow it to lull you into complacency or carelessness... (“*Boy! I’m so glad that I have ‘fire insurance’*”)... but instead... let it spur you to fulfill your spiritual duties.

Today... we are in the very last chapter of the Bible. ... The Bible opens and closes with basically the same type of setting. ... In the first two chapters of Genesis we encounter God's description of creation... and the heaven-like conditions on the earth that He prepared for man. The last two chapters of Revelation... describe the eternal Heaven that God will re-establish for man. ... In Genesis... man was in a garden but he will end up in a beautiful city if he is saved.

This section describes what could be called the “new Eden.” What the first Garden of Eden was supposed to be is fulfilled here. What Adam and Eve would have had (if they had not fallen)... is what is given to God’s people.

In Genesis... man loses paradise... but Revelation shows that redeemed man will get paradise back.

The last time we were together in Revelation... we studied chapter 21. There we were given a description of the new paradise God has prepared for us... (the “New Jerusalem”)... it’s dimensions... building materials... and what it looked like from the outside. It’s appearance will be as dazzling as the most fabulous jewelry store anyone has ever seen. It will be constructed out of 12 precious stones... through which the light of God will come shining through. ... But all of this may seem a little hard. It is a rich... but hard beauty. Will there be any grass to sit on... shade trees... rivers to enjoy...?

This morning... in Revelation 22:1-5... we move *inside* the city to discover the rich softness of the city... that it is like a beautiful garden... reminiscent of... (but better than)... the Garden of Eden.

Revelation 22:1-5

The first thing mentioned in reading this chapter is the "**water of life.**" Water has always been essential to human life. ... Settlers to new areas always search out water before beginning any type of building and putting down roots. ... This was especially so in John's day... as most of the people did not have a 7-11 to go and buy their Evion or Densani Bottled water. Water would be their first priority.

This river in New Jerusalem will represent that which is refreshing... It pictures the fullness of life with God... and the only thing that can satisfy a spiritual thirst. - The river symbolizes the Holy Spirit. ... Jesus said on one occasion of those who believe in him,

John 7:38 (ESV)

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

Then John explains with the very next verse...

John 7:39 (ESV)

Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive...

Although this water will have symbolic meaning for us... I believe it will be literal water... and the tree of life will be literal... just as they were in the Garden of Eden.

In the midst of the city will be the throne of God and of the Lamb. ... Out of the throne flows a river of life... and beside the river... is the tree of life.

Since Adam was driven out of Eden we lost sight of that tree. ... You will recall that there were many trees in the garden... but two are mentioned in particular... the tree of knowledge of good and evil... and the tree of life.

After Adam sinned by eating of the first... God drove him out lest he eat also of the tree life and live forever in his sinful lost estate. ... When sin is gone and the redeemed are all at home... the tree of life will again appear. Actual literal fruit grows on this tree—twelve kinds and one at a time.

The leaves of the tree of life have healing qualities to them. ... But wait a minute !!! ... The curse is gone... Heaven has no illnesses... Why would the nations need to be healed if all evil is gone...?

I did a lot of reading this week... to see if people (much smarter than I) had an answer for this. What I found are three possibilities. Possibility #1... is that we will refresh ourselves from this river... and we will eat the fruit from the tree and use its leaves. This is HOW we stay alive forever... and not have any illness.

But possibility #1... here... denies that the curse is gone. If there is still illness that needs healing... the curse still exists. The effects of sin have not been completely reversed. Look again at Revelation 22:3 – *“No longer will there be anything accursed...”* Possibility #1 denies this verse... so I cannot accept this option.

Possibility #2 is that these are memorials. Throughout the Old Testament... God used art and symbols as memorials of Spiritual truth. The Temple (for example) had specific decorum that God detailed to communicate His truths. Today we have the same thing. We have the cross that symbolizes how Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. And God has given us instructions to regularly celebrate communion and to baptize new believers. ... During the Millennium... God will have a new Temple constructed and sacrifices will be done there – pointing BACK – as memorials of what Christ did.

Possibility #2 is more viable... because symbolism plays such a vital role in the Old Testament era... and in the New Testament era... and it will during the Millennium. ... Therefore... it should not be very hard to believe that the river and the tree are beautiful reminders of what got us into “New Jerusalem”... and that the Holy Spirit... (symbolized by the River of Life)... produces life and healing... wherever it flows. We have a continual prompting to offer our praise and thanksgiving. Life used to be hard and was often unpleasant. But the River and the Tree will permanently remind us that God Himself gave us life and undeserved blessings.

Possibility #3... is... that... although we will live inside this beautiful New Jerusalem... there will be earth dwellers. Remember... in Revelation 21 we read that there will be a new earth... without any oceans. Why...? Maybe because there will be earth dwellers who will use the 12 gates of New Jerusalem to come and go – and they will need the nourishment and healing from the river and the tree of life. McGee believes this. He wrote: *“The bodies of the earth dwellers may need renewing from time to time.*

This may be the reason that they come up to the New Jerusalem -- not only to worship, but also to be renewed physically and spiritually. At least the prevention is there."

We don't know for sure. Perhaps it will be a combination of the last two possibilities. ... But Let's return to verse 3 for just a moment...

Revelation 22:3

Is this the way that you think about Heaven? ... If you found out that God and Jesus weren't going to be in Heaven... but the street would still be gold and the gates pearl and the walls jasper... and the living water... and the tree's leaves healing... and all your dearly departed there - but Jesus and the Father would not be there... would you still want to go?

If you hesitate at all... then you do not know the Christ of Scriptures as well as you should. ... If we truly know Him... there would be nothing more attractive and desirable. ... Do you need to know Him better? May this year – be a dedicated time of studying His Word and gaining a love-inflamed desire to see Him face-to-face! ... But until then... know this: Heaven without Jesus and the Father would be nothing less than a gold-plated Hell. Jesus and the Father are Heaven.

Do you think heaven is going to be boring? ... No... boredom is a sign of selfishness. ... When you are bored... it is because you are selfish. ... You want someone to do something for you... you want some excitement to minister to you. ... But all selfishness will be ended then... and therefore

there will be no boredom in heaven. ... There is continual excitement... discovery... anticipation - and constant gratitude and praise.

Here is what Warren Wiersbe has written:

What will we do in heaven for all eternity? Certainly, we shall praise the Lord, but we shall also serve Him. "His servants shall serve Him" (Rev. 22:3) is a great encouragement to us, for in heaven our service will be perfect. As we seek to serve the Lord here on earth, we are constantly handicapped by sin and weakness; but all hindrances will be gone when we get to glory. Perfect service in a perfect environment!

What will this service be? We are not told, nor do we need to know now. It is sufficient that we know what God wants us to do today. Our faithfulness in life prepares us for higher service in heaven. In fact, some students think that we shall have access to the vast universe and perhaps be sent on special missions to other places. But it is useless to speculate, because God has not seen fit to fill in the details.

Not only shall we be servants in heaven, but we shall also be kings. We shall reign forever and ever! This speaks of sharing Christ's authority in glory. As believers, we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies today (Eph. 2:1-10); but in the eternal state, we shall reign as kings over the new heavens and earth. What an honor! What grace!

Revelation 22:4

The face of God had not been seen by anyone since Adam and Eve sinned. Even Moses, the great lawgiver who went up on the mountain to meet with God, had only been able to see God from the back (Exodus 33:20). ... Here in heaven... however... God's people will see him face-to-face. ... To be able to see God's face suggests intimate personal relationship.

And to have His name written on our foreheads was another special indicator of intimacy. The day will come when those of all ages for whom the Lamb died will have the name of God written on their foreheads... much as the high priest did in the Old Testament. ... It is a sign of belonging and dependency... and also of close relationship. ... His claim to our soul will be evidenced by His name in our forehead. Jesus promised He would put His name upon us.

As we proudly display school... or team logos... we will proudly wear His name on our forehead. ... I can almost wear my Seattle Seahawk cap as proudly as Derek wears his Chicago Cubs cap. ... I like to identify myself with my team. But God will so identify with us – that He will permanently give us His logo. ... What a joy to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ! The name we will wear (then) will be far better than “Cubs” or “Seahawks.”

Revelation 22:5

This light will be the Shechinah glory. ... When Moses caught a glimpse of it... as God allowed him to see His back... Moses glowed for weeks. It is so strong that Moses reflected it for quite a while afterward. ... This will be our light for eternity. We won't need the sun. We will have perpetual day-like light... and no night-time darkness.

Time... as we know it... is measured by day and night. Will time cease to exist...? ... No... Verse two said the Tree of Life will bear a different fruit each month. And it says there will be **12** different fruits. So we will still have 12 distinct months... which is a year. ... But there will be no day and night to measure them... so it will be a different system.

The rest of the book is simply an epilogue. As the book began with a prologue... so it ends with an epilogue. ... It consists mostly of assurances. Many people neglect the book of Revelation. They distrust it and do not understand it. They need reassurance that it comes from God and speaks the truth. So the epilogue that we move to now... is made up of assurances.

Revelation 22:6-7

Once again John is assured of the honesty and integrity of this report. Note the words: "*These words are trustworthy and true...*" This revelation, which John has been given for the churches, is to be taken seriously to heart. In Revelation 19:11 Jesus is shown coming from heaven on a white horse and in the same verse He's given a name—"*Faithful and True.*" This is the same phrase found here in verse six! It would seem that "*... these words...*" are being backed by the very person and character of the Son of God Himself. In verse seven is an exciting promise in the words of Christ: "*... and behold, I am coming soon...*" There is no doubt about our Lord's coming. He is coming! Therefore, the question is not will He come, but are we prepared for His coming? If Jesus were to appear today, would you go to be with Him?

"I am coming soon" in verse 7... actually means "rapidly." Once the events described in Revelation start their course... when we get to this period... it will all happen rapidly. ... The time to prepare for it is NOW!

If the governor of your state sent you an email that he was going to drop by your home, would you mow the lawn, tidy up the house, and have

refreshments ready for his arrival? What if the President of the United States sent his chief of staff to your city, who then sent a member of the Secret Service to your home to tell you that the President himself was coming soon? This book of Revelation is far more important and eventful than any email, and the book of Revelation was communicated to one whose testimony is more to be trusted than that of the President's chief of staff. It was also sent through an angel whose powers are far superior to that of a Secret Service agent. And the one who is to come is unspeakably greater than some governor or president. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He has given his word to us. Our allegiance is to him.

Heed the words of this book. Worship God. Get this blessing for yourself. Be a student of the Bible. Read it. Memorize it. Hide it in your heart. Meditate on it. Do not let it depart from your mouth.

The exclamation *Behold, I am coming soon!* is a call to action.

Revelation 22:8-9

Personally I do not believe that John made the same mistake twice. I think here he is referring back to what he did in Chapter 19. He is reminding us how he reacted when he heard all these things. He says, in effect, "*When I had heard them and seen them I was so confused, so uncertain, and so overwhelmed that I fell down to worship at the angel's feet.*" He is recounting his most embarrassing moment, and reminding us that it was quite the wrong reaction. .. "*Let it lead you, rather, to worship God. When you read this book, open your heart and praise the God of glory who gives us such a fantastic future as that described here...*"

Worship is a major emphasis in Revelation. The first step toward meaningful worship is a desire to know God. If we thirst for him, the Bible promises that he will provide for us and satisfy our needs. Would you like your worship to be completely transformed? Confess any sins that might be hindering your fellowship with God. Then ask God to stir your heart, to instill within you an unquenchable thirst to know him. Meditate upon how God has revealed himself in the Bible, and ask him to reveal himself to you again. When you see God in a new way, worship will be your only fitting response.

Revelation 22:10

Daniel the prophet, who lived two thousand five hundred years ago, was given a number of prophecies concerning the end -times. After receiving the prophecies he was then told to "*seal the book.*" Daniel 12:4 states,

Daniel 12:4 (ESV)

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Daniel was told to "*seal the book.*" The question arises, how long will it be sealed? The answer is, "until the time of the end." How will we know when that time is? ... Again, the answer is given, "*many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*" ... In light of these two signs involving increased travel and knowledge, it is easy to conclude that the time for Christ to appear is drawing near. ... Travel and knowledge have exploded in the 20th Century – with air travel and computers. Daniel was commanded to seal his book until travel and knowledge increase... but John was given an opposite command... not to "seal" the prophecy of this

book: "for the time is at hand." Daniel's prophecy was not for his own time. There was too much in it that his generation... and many generations after his... that they could not possibly comprehend. But looking back at World Civilization... and at the prophecies we have been studying in Revelation... we can know what it means.

Revelation 22:11

Reality has been made known, and now in light of reality, people are commanded to do *what they want to do* on the basis of *who they are*.

Evil people want to do evil. Filthy people want to be filthy. In the same way, righteous people want to do right, and holy people want to be holy. So in this book of Revelation, the way that God will save and judge is made known, and then it is as though the angel says to the audience, do what you want to do!

Are you an unbeliever? Have you decided that you are going to do it your way? Are you thinking that you don't want to repent of your sins, don't want to be identified as a Christian, and don't want to be in church to hear the Bible taught on a regular basis? The first two commands of 22:11 are for you—you are "evil" and "filthy," and you are commanded to keep right on doing evil and filth. Why would the Bible command you to do that?

I think these commands are given here to scare us into changing our ways. This book shows that God is going to judge evil people and exclude them from his presence because they are filthy, and now the evil and filthy are commanded to keep right on doing what they want to do. But this command

is meant to force us to realize that if we are vile, evil, filthy, and unrepentant, God is going to display the glory of his justice upon us. This command is given to us to force us to recognize what awaits us and to push us to repent.

God wants you to repent. If you will look at your life, you will see a lot of evidence that God has been wooing you to himself. If you are an unbeliever, you are unbelieving precisely because you have been refusing to repent of your sin and trust in Jesus.

Revelation 22:12

Jesus will come quickly; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The coming of Christ will be so sudden that mankind will not have a chance to change any part of his lifestyle! "*Let the evil doer still do evil: and the filthy still be filthy: and the righteous still do right: and the holy, still be holy.*" When Christ appears, it will be too late to repent; too late to accept Christ; too late for heaven.

Although all God's people will be saved... and will enjoy the reward of eternity with him... a number of rewards seem to be given to individuals... according to what they have done. ... It may be that a quiet saint praying daily beside her bed... will receive even greater reward than a flamboyant... well-known preacher. ... It may be that the woman who used her gifts to the fullest extent... will be rewarded more greatly than the one who believed... but was too afraid to reach her potential. ... Each believer's job is to serve God to his or her fullest potential with a heart that is right before Him.

Revelation 22:13

Whatever God starts... He will finish... because He is Alpha and Omega!

Revelation 22:14

“Blessed are those who wash their robes.” This picture symbolizes those who seek to purify themselves every day from a sinful way of life. ... The verb is present tense... indicating continuous action. (“Blessed are those who continuously wash their robes...”) This verse is a call to the believers to strive daily to remain faithful and ready for Christ’s return. They do not need to be saved over and over... but they should continue to “wash their robes” and so remain clean and ready.

The "robes" are the way we have clothed ourselves by our actions. Even though we have been saved by Christ... we get our robes dirty. We do what is evil and filthy. ... Those who have clean robes... are those who wash their robes in the blood of Jesus... every day! ... How do you wash your robe in the blood of Jesus? - Trust him. ... Turn away from all the things you have done that are filthy and put your hope in Jesus. ... He is mighty to save. He can make your robe clean.

Revelation 22:15

These people are called "dogs" because they act like dogs. They roll in filth, they stink, and they cannot cleanse themselves. Rather than submit to God and serve him, they try to control the world through sorcery. Rather than relish the pure joys of marital intimacy, they are "sexually immoral." Rather than love people, they are "murderers." Rather than worship God alone, they are "idolaters." Rather than live in accordance with and speak

the truth, they "love and practice falsehood." Rather than drink deeply of the water of life, they slurp the slime of death.

Which outcome will be yours? Will you wallow in filth and stench? Or will you go to Christ for cleansing? Will you have the curse of being banished from God's presence outside the gates of the city? Or will you have the blessing of a clean robe that you can wear as you enter the city by the gates to feast on the fruit of the tree of life in the presence of the King?

Revelation 22:16

Jesus sends the messenger with a specific message and the message is about Jesus. Don't miss the primary lesson of the book of Revelation. It is all about Jesus. Who is He? We are reminded again of His titles.

Our Lord's titles in Revelation 22:16 are most interesting. The "root" is buried in the ground where no one can see it, but the "star" is in the heavens where everyone can see it. In "the Root and Offspring of David" we have Jesus' Jewish, national name, but in "the Bright and Morning Star" we have His universal name. One speaks of humility, the other of majesty and glory. Both the deity and the humanity of Jesus are evident here.

Revelation 22:17

"The Spirit and the Bride say 'come'". Here in the final verses of the Bible... we are once again told what the very nature of the church is. Just like Christ's final words to His disciples as recorded in Matthew 28... and at His ascension in Acts 1... we are told what our primary role is. It is missions and evangelism.

The primary ministry of the church of Christ during the entire church age is to tell men about the Savior. All Christians everywhere should be engaged in saying to men, "Let whoever is thirsty, come. Come and drink the water of life freely." Jesus Christ, of course, is the water of life.

Missions and evangelism is not just for a few people in the church. It is not reserved for the super-spiritual. It is our PRIMARY task!

Revelation 22:18-19

This warning is given to anyone who might purposefully distort the message in this book. Moses gave a similar warning (Deuteronomy 4:1-4). People must handle the Bible with care and great respect, so that its message is not distorted. No human explanation or interpretation of God's word should be elevated to the same authority as the text itself.

It would not be wise to be among those who are always picking the Bible apart rather than simply trying to live by its teachings. "I like this... I don't like that... I will follow this... I'll ignore that..."

Because the Book of Revelation was the last book of Scripture to be written... as the inspired Word of God... no other book written after it (like the Book of Mormon) is to be considered true and authoritative. This is the Bible's warning against such books... and false teachings.

Revelation 22:20

"Come, Lord" translates the *Marana tha* ...a common greeting of the 1st Century church. If you were alive and a Christian back in the 1970's – you will remember that was a common greeting we gave each other at that time as well. We re-lived it.

Not everyone can say Maranatha and truly mean it. It is good news to those who trust Him... but a terrible message for those who have rejected Him and stand under judgment.

I have enjoyed our study in Revelation...

Revelation is, above all, a book of hope. ... Maybe you are worried about expanding government control and rising taxes. Maybe you are worried about the loss of religious liberty in this country. ... Let me encourage you. Revelation has shown us that no matter what happens on earth... God is in control. ... It promises that evil will not last forever. ... And it depicts the wonderful reward that is waiting for all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Do you want to drink from that river? ... Do you want to eat of that tree? ... Do you want the healing of its leaves? You can't earn it. There is nothing you could ever do to merit access to this fruit. You've already blown it... and there's no undoing what you've done to disqualify yourself from the presence of God. He's holy—you're not. You can't undo the ways you've been unholy. Your only hope is Jesus. When he died, he took the penalty for your unholy deeds. If you trust him, his righteous life will count for you. If you trust Jesus, the river and the tree will be yours to enjoy.

May you know Him in His saving and judging glory... in His awful wrath that highlights His tender mercy. ... May you abide in this Revelation... and (VERSE 21... the final verse of the Bible...) may "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen"