

Revelation 22:1-6
Ezekiel 47
Psalm 1

“From the Garden to the City”

February 2, 2020

Ezekiel’s vision begins with a trickle of water.

But this trickle begins to get deeper.

After a thousand cubits (about a quarter mile),
the water is ankle deep.

After another thousand cubits (another quarter mile),
the water is knee deep.

After another thousand cubits (another quarter mile),
the water is waist deep.

After another thousand cubits – now we are a mile from the temple –
the water has become a river that could not be forded.

And along this river are trees on both sides of the river.

What should we make of this?

First, we should not be surprised to find water in the temple!
Solomon’s temple had a large sea in it – a huge basin of water.
And not only that, but Solomon’s temple had “water chariots”
smaller basins with carved wheels that pointed in an easterly direction.

There is a minor geographical problem with this account.

All water from Jerusalem flows *west* toward the Mediterranean!
But Ezekiel’s vision (like the temple itself) is not about physical geography –
but spiritual geography!

When the water reaches the sea – the Dead Sea –
this water will make the Dead Sea alive!

The Dead Sea is 10 times saltier than the ocean –
so salty that no fish could possibly survive there today –
but Ezekiel says that the water that flows from this temple could make the Dead Sea live.

(Note the importance of salt, however!
Ezekiel insists that the swamps and marshes will be left for salt!)

Also, we should see the connection between a flowing stream and trees!

The trees that grow on the banks of this river of life
will also be life-giving –
there will be all kinds of trees for food –
“Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail,

but they will bear fresh fruit every month,
because the water for them flows from the sanctuary.
Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

Our Psalm of response blends the same images:

Psalm 1 speaks of the blessed man
as one who is like a tree planted by streams of water,
who bears fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither.

The blessed man becomes a tree of life – planted by streams of living water.
That is who Jesus is!
And *in him* it becomes true of us as well...

Sing Psalm 1
Read Revelation 22

Earlier we sang Psalm 46.

Psalm 46 says,
“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.”

There is a river in the city of God!

This is a curious thing to say –
because there *is* no river in Jerusalem!

Indeed, the main problem with Jerusalem in times of siege
was that there was no water supply that could “gladden” the city of God.

A city without water cannot survive,
and so King Hezekiah went to great lengths –
very great lengths!! –
to dig a 1600 foot tunnel through solid rock
in order to connect the Gihon Spring with the Pool of Siloam.

But the Gihon Spring is hardly a river!
Nonetheless, the Gihon Spring points us in the direction of the answer.

Why is it named *Gihon*?

In Genesis 2 there is a river that flows out of the Garden –
out of the sanctuary in Eden –
it divides into four rivers, and waters the whole earth.

One of those four rivers was named “Gihon.”

The Gihon Spring seems to have been named after the river Gihon from Genesis 2 –
the river that flowed around the whole land of Cush.

Why does Psalm 46 speak of a *river* that makes glad the city of God?

Because Psalm 46 (like Ezekiel 47) looks forward to the eschatological city –
the heavenly temple –
and the river of living water that will make glad the city of God.

That little spring outside Jerusalem –

the one that Hezekiah had to spend *years* tunneling through solid rock to reach! –
helps us understand what John is seeing here!

There *is* a river that makes glad the city of God!

After all – think about what John is saying about this river of the water of life!

Revelation 22 speaks of the river of the water of life.

Plainly this is a future river – in a future city – right?

And yet!

Verse 17 says “let the one who is thirsty come;
let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

This is a future river with a present reality!

The heavenly river is already flowing –

the water of life already streams forth from Jesus Christ –
in the middle of the heavenly temple!

It is a present reality because Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father.

And so therefore we partake of this living water by faith –
though not yet by sight!

But how?

How can we partake of this living water?

Think back to Ezekiel’s trickle!

It started as a trickle but becomes a torrent (God often starts small!)

Zechariah 4:10 reminds us “do not despise the day of small things”!
Small beginnings are often precisely how God accomplishes his purposes.
(Remember this as we encourage Pastor Joel and Heart City!)

But then think about how this river flows through the Gospel of John.

It starts with Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink –
and telling her that the water he gives will become a spring of water

welling up to eternal life (John 4:14)

But then at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus says to the Jews in Jerusalem,
that if they are thirsty they should come and drink from him,
promising that streams of living water will flow from within him –

by which, John says, “he meant the Spirit” (7:38-39)

Perhaps not accidentally, it is in John’s Gospel that Jesus spits on a man’s eyes –
the living water that flows through Jesus gives sight to the blind.

And in John’s Gospel Jesus says, “I thirst” –
as the living water dries up!

And most powerfully, in John’s Gospel, when they pierce his side,
blood and water flow.

Jesus had said, from his heart will flow streams of living water!
And indeed, that is what happens!

From the heart of Jesus a river of living water flows.

And that is what we see in Revelation 22.

1. The River of the Water of Life (v1)

Then the angel^[a] showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city;

A river of living water flowing from the heart of Jesus –
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb –
flowing through the middle of the street of the city.

Remember that this city is large enough to stretch from Rome to Babylon!
So it only adds to the remarkable character of this city to find
that there is a river flowing down the middle of the street!

This is not your typical city!

Indeed, this city looks almost like a garden!
Because not only is there a river running down the middle of the street –
also:

2. The Tree of Life (v2)

also, on either side of the river, the tree of life^[b] with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.

The tree of life!

There had been a tree of life in the garden of Eden!
Adam and Eve were permitted to eat of the tree of life.

They were only forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The tree of life is *not* a magical tree.

The tree of life is a sacramental tree.

What does that mean?

Well, think back to what God says in Genesis 3.

When Adam and Eve have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
God drives them out of the garden – *lest* they eat of the tree of life
and live forever.

Some people have thought that this means that *one bite* of the tree of life
would confer eternal life.

That would be a magical tree!

(If a mosquito sucked on a magical fruit –
would the mosquito live forever?!)

But that's not what these trees are about!

How did the tree of the knowledge of good and evil work?

Did it *magically* communicate knowledge?

No.

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
their eyes were opened – not magically –
but because they listened to the voice of the serpent –
they refused to listen to the voice of God!

Sacraments are always connected to the *word*.

In the garden of Eden, the trees were sacramental trees.

They communicated the things they represented –

not magically – but by means of the blessing of Christ.

(“The sacraments become effectual means of salvation,
not from any virtue *in them* or in him that does administer them,
but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit
in them that by faith receive them.” SC)

The tree of life did not convey eternal life by “one bite” –

but by the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit by faith.

And so if Adam and Eve had partaken of the tree of life *after* their sin –
they would have been eating and drinking *judgment* to themselves –
like the one who partakes of the Lord's Supper apart from faith.

Here, in Revelation 22, we see the twelve kinds of fruit from the tree of life!

There are twelve fruits – one for each month.

If there is no sun or moon – then how do you calculate months?

Commentators really struggle with this –

because they are trying to figure out how this works in a new creation!

But John's point about the new creation is not particularly worried about
"how all this will work *someday*."

John's point is that the tree of life is bearing fruit in the heavenly city.

The heavenly city has *not yet* come down to earth.

But the tree of life is bearing fruit in the heavenly city!

Every month there is a new crop.

As Jesus will say shortly – in verse 14 –

"Blessed are those who wash their robes,
so that they may have the right to the tree of life
and that they may enter the city by the gates."

Even now – by faith – you can begin to partake of the tree of life!

That's what we do when we come to the Lord's Table!

Because Jesus *is* the tree of life!

And what is more:

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Adam and Eve had dressed themselves in fig leaves – to cover their nakedness.

Now God says, "I have better leaves than that!"

The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations!

Ezekiel had spoken of this –

Ezekiel spoke of how the living water flowing from the temple
would cleanse the Dead Sea – and restore the dead to life.

The Dead Sea is a curious place.

It is over a thousand feet below sea level.

The water of the Jordan River flows into Dead Sea – where everything dies!

No fish can survive in the Dead Sea.

But Ezekiel had said that the water that flows from the new temple

would heal the waters of the Dead Sea!

Now John sees clearly what that signifies!

The Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth.
In that respect, you could say that the Dead Sea
is as close to Hell as you can get on earth!
(Remember that Sodom and Gomorrah were on the east side of the Dead Sea!)

But now, the river of living water is flowing from the heart of Jesus to the nations!
The tree of life is budding!
Even its leaves bring healing to the nations!

Think for just a minute.

Where are the nations?
We have seen a “new heavens and a new earth” –
but what have we seen in this new heavens and new earth?

We have seen a city the size of the known world of John’s time!

We have heard that there is no light of sun or moon –
and we have not heard about any stars or planets...
All we have seen is this massive city!

We’ll hear next time about those who are “outside” –
“the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters,
and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

John says that he sees the new heavens and the new earth –
but all he describes is the heavenly city! [cf. Beale, 1109]

This makes sense because the temple was designed as a microcosm –
a small picture of the world the way it was supposed to be!
Josephus describes the temple as signifying “the earth [=outer court]
and the sea [=inner court], since these...are accessible to all,
but the third portion [the holy of holies] he reserved for God alone,
because heaven also is inaccessible to men.” [in Beale, 1109]

The Garden in Eden was the first microcosm –
the first sanctuary where God dwelt with man.
Adam was called to guard the Garden – the sanctuary –
just like the priests were to guard the tabernacle and the temple.
But Adam failed – Adam allowed the serpent – the Dragon –
to invade the sanctuary – and take over the world.

Adam was called to subdue the earth and have dominion over it.
In other words, Adam was called to make the whole of creation
into a dwelling place for God.

And what Adam failed to do – the Second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, has done.

Indeed, that is at the heart of verse 3:

3. No More Curse (v3)

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.*

There will no longer be a curse.

The phrase is taken from Zechariah 14:11 –

where the Hebrew word is *herem* – meaning “to devote to destruction.”

When something in the OT is *herem* it is to be utterly destroyed.

Think of the fire from heaven that destroyed Sodom –
or the utter destruction of the Canaanites.

Or – for that matter – think of God’s decree against Jerusalem,
when he sent Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the temple and the city!

Zechariah had promised that the day was coming

when Jerusalem would be restored –

“they will live in it, and there will be no more curse,
for Jerusalem will dwell in security.” (14:11)

There will be no more curse.

Why?

Because the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it.

It is because of what the Lamb has done!

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!

Why didn’t God just “fix things” long ago?!

Because the only way to “fix things”

was for God himself to come in our form –
for the Word to become flesh and dwell among us –
for the one who knew no sin to become sin for us!

Sometimes you hear people say –

“Why doesn’t God just fix everything now!??”

Job asked that question.

God’s response was to say,

“Do you want to take over?”

“Do you have the power and the wisdom
to take over running the universe?”

We are remarkable critters.

We tell the Creator of the universe that he's not doing his job very well!

Now John tells us that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the city.

The temple and the throne – heaven and earth –
God and man – finally come together!

4. They Will See His Face (v4)

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

The high priest had always worn a turban with the words “Holy to the LORD” inscribed upon a plate on his forehead.

Josephus and Philo both tell us that in the first century this was understood to mean simply the name “Yahweh” was written on his forehead.

We have heard many times in Revelation (chapters 2, 3, 7, 14) –

about a new name that will given to the one who overcomes –
to the one who makes it – the one who perseveres until the end.

Jesus had said in chapter 3 –

“I will write the name of my God and the name of the city of my God...
and my new name” on the one who overcomes.

God created man in his own image –

in the image of God he created him –
male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

God had placed his name on Adam and Eve in the beginning –
and he blessed them.

Now – there will be no more curse!

And they will see his face – and his name will be upon their foreheads.

5. No More Night (v5)

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.

Night will be no more.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night –

because he was afraid of the Jews. (John 3:2, 7:50, 19:39)

Jesus also commented in John 11:10 that “if a man walk in the night, he stumbles,
because there is no light in him”

Which is why John noted as Judas went out from the last supper to betray Jesus –
“and it was night.” (13:30)

At the cross darkness fell.

In the grave, night fell.

But in the resurrection dawned a light that will never be put out!
In the face of Jesus shines the everlasting light illumines the whole world!

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

There will be no more night – because there will be no more curse!
The Last Adam has repaired the first Adam’s fault!

That is also why it says that they will reign forever and ever.
You might wonder – what will they reign over?!

We are so used to thinking of “reigning” as something that kings do
that we forget that in the beginning God gave to Adam *dominion*.

At this point my high schoolers’ ears perk up –
because back in the 17th century they had a big debate over the question,
“Did Adam have a world monarchy?!”
(It was called the English Civil War –
where Parliament wound up executing the king for treason!).

But – as many pointed out back then –
God never gave Adam dominion over *men*.
(except insofar as a father may govern his children).
Adam’s rule was over *creation* – not over his fellow men.

What will we be doing for all eternity?
According to Revelation 22 –
we will be worshiping (v3) and reigning (v5).
We will be praising God and exercising dominion.

What will that look like in the new creation?
Well, given all that we have so far in Revelation,
I can only say that if you take the finest experience of worship you’ve ever had,
that is but the tiniest glimpse of the worship that John is seeing.
And if you take the moment of your life
when you were most satisfied in the work of your hands –
that moment when your project turned out *exactly* like you hoped –
when your teacher – your boss –
praised your work *more than you expected* –
that is also but a faint foreshadowing
of the satisfaction that we will take in reigning with Christ.

Because when the face of God shines upon us – we find peace.

Remember the great Aaronic benediction?
“The LORD bless you and keep you.
The LORD make *his face to shine upon you*, and be gracious to you.
The LORD lift up his countenance upon you – and give you peace.”

What is John doing here?

John wants you to see the glory and beauty of the heavenly city!
He showed you the hideous monstrosity that is Babylon – the whore –
so that you would long for and delight in the heavenly Jerusalem – our Mother!

He is writing to churches who live in the middle of Babylon –
and (as we saw in chapters 2-3)
five out of the seven churches were in serious danger of falling away.

John wants you to see the new covenant, the new temple, the new Jerusalem, the new creation –
not just for their own sake –
but so that *you might remain faithful to Jesus!*

“Hold on – hold fast – because Jesus has promised!”

6. What Must Soon Take Place (v6)

⁶ *And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”*

It can be tempting to think that God is taking his sweet time about this!
2,000 years later and we still haven’t reached “soon...”

But if you think about it –
pretty much everything in the book has been happening for the last 2,000 years!
Even the heavenly Jerusalem has been here for 2,000 years.

No – not on earth.
She hasn’t come down from heaven yet.
But the stream of living water is already flowing from the heart of Jesus!
The curse has already been broken in the resurrection of Jesus!
The light of the world shines in the face of Jesus!

The tribulation...

Are you suffering?!
Ok – we’ve got tribulation covered!

The kingdom...

Do you believe in Jesus?!
Way out here in the wilds of northern Indiana?!
Ok – the kingdom of God keeps growing and flourishing
(more or less in spite of how poorly we do at building it!)

The patient endurance that is in Jesus...
No – we are not what we should be –
 but *Jesus* is!
And we come to him.