

## **Chapter 22**

**V.1-5 The Water of Life, the Tree of Life, and the Presence of God** In these verses we can imagine the restored Garden of Eden. In Chapter 21 we saw the beauty of the New Jerusalem and eternity and in this chapter, we see the pleasure that is intended in our eternal paradise. There is water to drink, fruit to eat, a beautiful garden to enjoy, and a God to fellowship with. There is no greater pleasure than the pleasure of heaven. In our Western culture we chase after beauty and pleasure and the ironic thing is that the new earth will be more beautiful and more pleasurable than any earthly substitute. And not only that but many will miss the eternal beauty and pleasure of heaven in order to receive some semblance of their significance in this life. It is sadly tragic that there are those who will give up the beauty and pleasures of eternity for a temporary fix in this life.

The center of the scene is the Throne of God. We saw in the last chapter that there is no temple on the New Earth, but there is a throne. We are reminded that we are truly in a new dispensation of time. There is no further need for physical or spiritual sacrifices and every reminder of their significance is removed from sight, but there is need for a King! The story of mankind will be transformed from sin, sacrifice, and forgiveness to a King with a kingdom. This is the reason that we see the throne at the center of the scene and why we see a temple no longer. In the book of Ezekiel, we see both a temple and a river (Ezekiel 47:1-12) but John makes it clear that it will be the throne and not the temple for all of eternity. As beautiful and wonderful as the river of life and the tree of life are - the throne is the most significant piece of the eternal garden because that is where God is reigning. It is unclear for us whether there was a throne in the original garden or not but there is one in paradise where God will dwell with man and they will see His face!

The river of the water of life is described as clear as crystal and more beautiful than any river you have ever seen. This water emanates from the throne of God! We are reminded of Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well where He offers her living water in John 4. We receive that living water in part through our salvation and the reception of the Holy Spirit, but we will know it fully in the restored garden. God is a god of life and He never had any intention of sin, or death, or hell in His original creation. Jesus came to bring life and it is the devil who came to steal, kill, and destroy. Spiritual life is born through faith in Jesus and grows through His Word and Spirit, but comes to its ultimate fulfillment when the unhindered waters of life flow directly from the throne for all in paradise to partake.

The tree of life is first mentioned for us back in Genesis at the original garden. We are only told the identity of two trees in Eden - the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the eternal paradise there is only one tree that is mentioned and it is the Tree of Life. We are not told if it is the same tree that God has been preserving since the original creation or if this is a brand-new tree, but we recognize its significance by its reappearance and that it is mentioned three times in this chapter (v.2,14,19). This is no ordinary tree and the impression that we get from the book of Genesis is that eating from it is tantamount to receiving eternal life. (Genesis 3:22-24) This leads to several questions though because the Tree of Life that we see in eternity is indicated as having twelve different fruits to provide food for each month. And its leaves are described as providing for the healing of the nations. We are told already though in Revelation 21 that there will be no more death, or disease, or sickness, or sorrow so why is the tree necessary? Maybe this is how God provides for eternal health and life, but we have no way

of knowing for sure. Regardless, it appears that according to this description by John that there will be both physical pleasure and physical benefit provided through this tree. The other interesting phenomenon that we see here in these verses is that there is a measurement of time that is mentioned in the production of the tree's fruits. It is apparent that there will be some measurement of time in eternity if there are fruits for each month. We don't know exactly what this will look like but we shouldn't assume that it will be an ethereal existence without feeling, space, or time. The consequences of this are crucial when you consider the state of eternity for those with faith and those without it.

The best thing about eternity which we also saw in the last chapter is that God will be present with us. Because God is present with us that means that there will be several positive consequences of this fact – no more curse, no more needs, no more sickness or death, and reigning forever. The result of sin was the curse. The curse affected humanity, the earth, and all of creation. Now with sin eradicated there is no more curse and only blessing and perfection. Because there is no more curse and no more sin all of God's servants will #1 See His face #2 Have His name on their foreheads #3 They will have no needs (specifically for light) #4 They will reign forever and ever. God cannot be in the presence of sin and because sin, death, and the devil have been permanently removed from humanity in the new creation God is free to dwell with His people.

**V.6-7 Behold, I Am Coming Soon** These next couple of verses affirm the message that John has been communicating and reiterate that Jesus is coming soon. "These words are trustworthy and true". There will be an everlasting kingdom for those who have faith in Jesus Christ. There will be an eternal paradise to enjoy for all time. Jesus is coming again. There will be a judgment of the living and the dead. Those without faith will be thrown into the lake of fire. He shall reign forever and ever. This is most certainly true. We have already discussed the most applicable understanding of the word "soon" to be associated with imminence. Although it appears that there will be time in heaven. God is not bound by it and He is not subject to it. We know that our concept of quickly is not the same as God's definition. The main point of Jesus reiteration of coming quickly though is that we are supposed to be ready. We do not know the day or the hour and our response to that is not apathy, but preparation. "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

The angel also tells John that he has been sent to "show his servants what must soon take place." Since we have defined the relativity of soon, we should not think because of its slowness that it is not coming. As Peter described for us – God is not slow in keeping his promises. He doesn't want anyone to perish. This means that what the angel is referring to is most likely the entire message of revelation that will come to completion and in God's economy it will be soon. As Louis Brighton indicates in his Revelation Commentary "The events described will certainly take place: human evil and the resulting sufferings under God's judgment, and the church of Christ completing her mission. It is necessary that these events take place—especially the completion of the witness of the church to Christ's redemption of the human race at his first advent and to his second coming in judgment. There is an urgency that the events prophesied be fulfilled, for the time of Christ's return is near, and the church only has so much time to complete her mission." (p.643)

**V.8-9 John's Humanity** In these verses we see John bowing down to another angel which we also witnessed in Chapter 19. This is either John worshiping another angel or

reminding us of his earlier mistake. Either way John is emphasizing for us that this is not appropriate behavior at any time or under any circumstance. We are also reminded that angels are closer to our brothers than our God. We are fellow servants with them and we keep the words of the book and they keep the words of His mouth. Of course, both are applicable to each group but it appears that this is the primary way that God has chosen to communicate with both of them.

**V.10-11 The Time Is Near** In these verses we are reminded that the book of Revelation is first and foremost a prophecy that has a future fulfillment. When the angel communicates that the time is near it is a clear indication that it hasn't transpired yet, but that there is some future fulfillment in mind. We may discuss when that fulfillment has or will occur but from the angel's and John's perspective this book is about future circumstances. He is also told not to seal up this message or hide it or put it away. This is in contrast to what we see communicated to Daniel about sealing up the scroll. (Daniel 8:26; Daniel 12:4,9-10) Previously what was shared with Daniel was not to be disclosed, but now we see the angel communicating to John let everyone know about this because the end could come at any time. Before Christ's death and resurrection, it was an impossibility for the end times to be fulfilled, but now that Christ has accomplished the victory it could be any day. That is why we see the first century church's preoccupation with Christ's return and that is why we should treat it as such as well. Revelation should not be ignored, or sealed, or forgotten, it should be the primary message of the church – Jesus is coming soon!

**V.12-13 Behold, I Am Coming Soon** This is the second time that Jesus repeats this phrase in just a few verses. The first time He says that everyone who keeps the words of the prophecy will be blessed and now He appears to indicate that the opposite is also true – if you don't keep the words of this prophecy then you will be repaid. As Christ followers we are not fearful of His return we are thrilled and excited, but there is a realization in these verses that He has all authority and power and that there will be a reckoning for everyone – “to repay each one for what he has done.” This should not alarm us but we should be aware that there will be a judgment and an evaluation of how well we stewarded over the talents that we were given. As we talked about in Chapter 20 there appear to be two different judgments that are referenced in Scripture even if they happen at the same time, they seem different in human terms. In God's economy it is probably one judgment with rewards or punishments but for our human minds it is clearer to understand that there will be a judgment to determine our eternal destination and there will be a judgment to determine our rewards or punishments. There will only be rewards for believers in Jesus Christ and there will only be punishments for unbelievers. According to these words and also the words from Revelation Chapter 20 we should not envision that anyone will escape judgment. Remember in this context that judgment specifically is not a negative consequence. It can mean that, but when we talk about the judgment of the living and the dead, we are not talking about hell for everyone. We are simply talking about judgment as an evaluation. To make a judgment about someone or something can be positive or negative and this is the judgment that we should expect for everyone – to stand before Christ and be evaluated. For believers there will be an immediate pardon because of the penalty that was poured out on God's Son. Then chronologically speaking there will be a determination about rewards. The same will occur for unbelievers without the pardon – gulp.

**V.14-15 Inside OR Outside** These verses summarize the distinction between those who are inside the gates of the New Jerusalem and those who are outside. Although we don't picture unsaved people on the outside of the city walls trying to get in (because the Bible tells us that they will be in the lake of fire) there is a marked difference between these two groups. The first group inside the city walls are God's people who are described as blessed because they have washed their robes and can eat of the tree of life. "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." The blessing of Christ's followers is described by the final of seven beatitudes that we see throughout the book of Revelation. Seven times John uses this phrase to describe the beneficial circumstances awaiting God's children – those who are blessed. Located below is the list of each of the seven verses and the blessings that are attached to each of them.

### The Seven Beatitudes of Revelation

Rev. 1:3 – "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near."

Rev. 14:13 – "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Rev. 16:15 – "Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!"

Rev. 19:9 – "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Rev. 20:6 – "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!"

Rev. 22:7 – "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Rev. 22:14 – "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."

**V.16 Jesus' Angel** In this verse Jesus tells us some interesting information because He indicates that He has an angel and that He has sent His angel to show John what will happen to the churches. This is likely the same angel that we see in Chapter 1 (Rev. 1:1) and the mighty angel that we see in Chapter 10 who resembles Jesus in some ways. The other thing that Jesus says is that He is the root and the descendant of David. He is both the ancestor and the descendant. He is the root and the fruit of David. How can this be? This is the same riddle that Jesus stumps the religious leaders with when He quotes Psalm 110 to ask them a question.

"Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? They said to him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?' If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.'" (Matthew 22:41-45)

The answer is because Jesus is David's Lord as the Son of God and He is David's son as the Son of Man who was born of the lineage of the House of David. In this statement Jesus affirms both His divinity and His humanity for all of eternity.

**V.17 Come** In this verse we see two groups that are included in the beckoning "to come". The first group is speaking to Jesus and asking Him to return. "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'. And let the one who hears say, 'Come'." If you are part of the Bride of Christ or you can resonate with hearing about the imminent return of Christ then you are encouraged to pray and ask Jesus to 'Come'. We have seen throughout Revelation that the prayers of the saints are integral in the actions of God and this is likely no different. As the end draws near and the time grows short and the persecution rises the cry of the church will be 'Come Lord Jesus.' The second group consists of those who are encouraged to come to Christ. For the Bride of Christ there is one end time message – 'Come'. One part is a prayer to the Messiah Jesus to return and the second is an evangelistic call to all those who need it – 'Come' to Jesus. We are told - let the one who is thirsty come and let the one who desires the water of life come. There are multitudes of people out there who desire the water of life and who are dying of thirst who need to hear the invitation to come to the well. These are the end time works of the church as described here – prayer and evangelism.

**V.18-21 One Final Warning** The final words of the book are a reminder about how seriously God takes His Word and also how important is this message of Revelation. Don't add to it, don't take away from it, don't distort it, don't deny it, and don't ignore it. Your eternal destiny and your right to the tree of life and the holy city are at stake. Jesus concludes with one final reminder "Surely, I am coming soon." Then we close with a prayer of grace for all. Amen.