12-31-23

Revelation 22:1-7

Being as we have already spent most of this last month on Revelation, I thought I would go ahead and close out the year with a brief study of the last chapter of the last book of the Bible. While this chapter still contains warnings, it mainly invites us to share in the eternal rewards of following Christ during our earthly lives. Revelation is a book of warning to those who refuse the gift of salvation offered by Jesus, but it is a book of hope for those who submit to Him and wait patiently for His glorious return.

These first six verses are the conclusion of a brief vision the apostle John has of the new heavens and new earth, and of the new Jerusalem. An angel has shown him around and explained a few things to him. Very prominent are the river of the water of life and the tree of life.

The river comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb, or Jesus. Is this a real river? Probably. At the same time we can see how appropriate it is that this river would come from our Father and our Saviour. We are reminded of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Jesus tells her, “*whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life*.” God is the source of all life, and so, the source of eternal life. How fitting that this river of life is shown to be coming from the throne of God for all eternity in the new earth.

Growing next to the river is the Tree of Life. Is this a real tree? Probably. Is this the same tree that was in the Garden of Eden? The Bible doesn’t tell us. I personally think it is. And I think so because there is only one Tree of Life and that is Jesus. So, although I believe this is a real tree, I also think it represents Jesus. Jesus is the only way to eternal life, be it through the fruit of a tree, living water, the true vine, or manna from heaven; all of these things point to Jesus.

The prophet Ezekiel also got to see a vision of heaven and in chapter 47 of his book, he experienced a similar river and a similar tree. While eating the fruit would only be implied in Revelation, in Ezekiel he tells us that the fruit is for eating. As Jesus is truly the One who sustains our life, so the fruit of the tree will sustain us in the new earth. We have to eat now; I see no reason for us not to eat in the next life. We are told of this wonderful fruit and we are all looking forward to that great banquet, the wedding supper of the Lamb.

God created us such that we need food, but it is also a gift. As long as we don’t let our desire for food become sinful and we eat with thanksgiving, food is enjoyable. Furthermore, it is often associated with fellowship and a joyful time with family. Picture how wonderful it will be when all the sinful enticements are gone and we can enjoy eating with the rest of God’s children; especially with Jesus.

Both Revelation and Ezekiel tell us that the leaves of the tree are for healing. In Ezekiel they are just for healing; in Revelation they are for the healing of the nations. There is debate about the specific meaning of these statements, but in general, Jesus is the healer. His primary miracle during His first advent was physically healing the sick. And we also have the verse in 1 Peter 2:24, “*and [Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*” Now this verse is sometimes misapplied to mean that if we have enough faith, we will be healed of any physical ailment. But this verse is talking about spiritual healing; being spiritually born again so our dead spirits are brought back to life in Christ.

By the way, I don’t mean to imply that Jesus won’t heal us physically now. He certainly will and does. Any time we recover from an illness or injury, we need to give thanks to Him because that is ultimately where the healing comes from.

We have mentioned several times that when Jesus comes back in the Parousia, He will rule with a rod of iron. This is actually healing also because He will put an end to sin and dispose of all those who have rebelled against God in unrepentance. We might call this “tough love”.

So it makes sense that Jesus will provide healing for all those who come into His Kingdom in the new earth; whether it be by leaves or simply by His word. All of us who have lived this life will come to heaven with scars and deep wounds. But He will heal them and wipe away every tear.

As a part of that healing, there will no longer be any curse; it will be gone. Remember back in Genesis 3:14, God spoke to the serpent whom satan used to entice Eve and He said:

*Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field*

It’s easy to see that the snake was cursed for his part in the fall of mankind. And certainly, no animal evokes more fear and hatred than a snake. But what I want to point out here are the words “more than”. Yes, the snake was cursed, but so was every other animal. And we can see that in the animal kingdom, whether domestic or wild, all live under the deteriorating effects of sin.

But we also have the well-known Genesis 3:17-18 where God told Adam:

*Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you.*

And the curse isn’t simply that the ground produces thorns. This curse brought about the deterioration of all creation. It brought about sickness and disease. It brought about death; not only for Adam and Eve, but for all people and all animals and even plants. All living things die and all inanimate creation tends toward falling apart. This is why so many things simply go wrong, even when it should be simple. This curse is far reaching; it leaves nothing untouched. As the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8: “*For the creation was subjected to futility*” and “*we know that the whole creation groans*.” The curse is real and it is terrible and it affects all of creation.

Don’t miss the importance of those few words at the beginning of verse 3 here in Revelation: *There will no longer be any curse.* Try to imagine what life will be like once Christ has removed the curse and God has made all things new. You won’t have any aches and pains when you get up in the morning. You can grow a garden without weeds, or bugs eating everything. Whatever work you have will be a joy. The weather will always be perfect. You won’t get sick and friends won’t die; you will no longer be in the valley of the shadow of death. You’ll be able to pet a lion or a wolf; you’ll even get to pick up snakes and admire how beautiful they are.

The throne of God and the throne of the Lamb will be there in the new earth. Where the throne is, they will be. The fellowship between God and His creation will be reestablished. Recall the relationship described between God and the people in the Garden of Eden. God brought animals to Adam to see what he would call them. He spoke with Adam directly. God walked through the garden in the cool of the evening looking for Adam and Eve; He intended to spend time with them.

All that was ruined by sin. Adam and Eve died spiritually immediately upon eating the forbidden fruit; in other words, their spirits were separated from God. God could no longer fellowship with them as He had done. Physical death followed later, separating their own spirits from their bodies. Death is a separation of the spirit.

But in the new creation, God will have made fellowship with Him possible again. He and Jesus will be there; and we will get to speak with them face to face. We will relate to them in deep reverence and awe; yet it will be with unbridled joy. The glory that comes from them will illuminate everything and we will be able to gaze upon it without harm. Somehow, someway, we will serve our Father and our Saviour in the new earth; and it will be a joy. Our service will be without the frustration that comes with tasks we do in this life. And we will greatly look forward to our acts of service because they will bring us into the very presence of God.

How many times in the Old Testament did people cry out in fear at the thought of seeing the face of God. In our sinful state, to see Him meant certain death. But that changes, through Jesus, in the new creation. This is how much God loves us and wants to be with us; He sent Jesus to take our place in the punishment of our sins. But again, it is a gift offered, and people can refuse to accept it. God wants to spend eternity with people who want to be with Him.

The angel who is speaking with John tells him, “*These words are faithful and true*.” Now that means all the words in this book. From the words of warning and encouragement to the seven churches of Asia minor; through all the acts of the wrath of God that are written of for the tribulation; and all this beautiful vision of heaven reserved for those who are redeemed by Jesus Christ.

What hope that gives us. We can really look forward to these wonderous things we have been reading about: The recreated earth that is no longer under a curse; the beautiful city of Jerusalem; the nations at peace; the presence of God our Father and the Lamb who has made it all possible. It is easy to dwell on the evil that is here and on how the wrath of God will come, but keep in mind the words of Paul in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*” All of the things we have mentioned about the new creation fit these categories; it is good and pleasing to God if we think on them.

If we jump down to verse 17 it tells us: *The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.* What an open invitation. The arms of Christ are open wide to receive any and all who will come to Him. All the joys that are mentioned in this book are there for the taking.

But also, there is a call for Jesus to come; and one day He will. When He does, the invitation will be closed for those who live on the earth. And Jesus promises He will be coming quickly.

Be sure you are one who heeds the prophecies of this book; who believes on Christ alone for salvation, confessing your own inability to save yourself. Be sure you are a child of God. And then, dwell on these things. These are the promises you will receive. And the Bible lets us know that these barely scratch the surface of the delights of heaven and being in the presence of God.

Prayer

Merciful God, Your goodness and lovingkindness are without limits. You reach out to we, Your undeserving creation, offering us redemption and pleasures forever, all by Your grace. What fools we would be to turn You down. And yet, it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that we will come to You. We have no room to boast; all the glory of salvation is Yours.

Thank You for the peek You give us of the wonders that await Your faithful people. And we know from Your word that these are just the beginning. You tell us: “*Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him*.” Thank You for preparing our hearts that we may love You, as You so richly deserve.

Now help us Lord, that we may think on these wonderful promises that are in Your word. We confess that our minds tend to the bad, but You give us these glimpses of what awaits us so that we will not despair. Great blessings are there for us; You have prepared a place for us. Come, Lord Jesus! We await Your glorious Kingdom.

For it is in Your name we pray

Amen