

THE RIVER AND THE TREE

THE STORY
OF HEAVEN

DATE

December 19 & 20

WEEK

3 of 3

OVERVIEW

Revelation 22

KEY VERSE

Revelation 22:1

SETTING THE STAGE

We were introduced to the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, in chapter 21. All things are made new as the original heaven and earth pass away. Life in new Jerusalem is very different, beyond just the enormity of its size. There are no more tears, dying, mourning, crying, pain, thirst, wickedness, temple, night, closed gates, and curses. While we have grown accustomed to those things here on earth, the good news of eternity is that none of those things will be in our heavenly home.

But God will be there, in His splendor and glory. Jesus will be with Him victoriously as the Lamb. In fact, because of the presence of God and Jesus, there will be no need for a temple or light.

REVELATION 21:22-25 *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed;*

What God created on day four, as recorded in Genesis, is no longer needed in the new Holy City. There is no need for the sun or moon, both of which are sources of light for us on earth. The glory of God illuminates heaven by His mere presence. *Continued on page 102 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The River
2. The Tree
3. The Life

THINGS TO KNOW

- The last two chapters of Revelation give us more information about heaven than anywhere else in the Bible.
- Revelation 22 is the last chapter of the entire Bible and reminds us that Jesus has not only prepared a place for us but is coming again.

THE RIVER AND THE TREE

Setting the Stage, continued > His glory, reaching all within heaven, abounds freely. Jesus the Lamb, who referred to Himself in John 8, as the “Light of the World,” will now be the lamp of heaven, shining brightly for all eternity.

Not only does the light of the glory of God flow in this new heavenly home, so does the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, with the tree of life close by. These will be the focus of our lesson today.

Introduction

There are only a few more days until Christmas morning. It is a season of anticipation. It is the time of year where kids are dreaming about presents under the tree on Christmas morning. As a child, I remember picturing in my mind’s eye what was in each wrapped present under the tree. Then once I found the presents with my name, I would pick them up when my parents were not looking to feel and hear if they were heavy or noisy. Admittedly I would also count the number of presents for me and then count the number of presents with my brother’s name on them, usually the exact same amount (smart parents).

Many times, on Christmas morning, I could guess what was under the wrapping before I ever took the bow off. However, there were other times when I could not guess based on the size, shape, or weight of the package. Occasionally, I would take the bow off, unwrap the gift and find a box with a picture of something on it, and then inside the box was a different item. It was a complete surprise.

This month we have looked at the Story of Heaven with great anticipation. The Apostle John received a vision of heaven, the description of which is beyond anything we have ever seen on earth. The unwrapping of heaven, as presented to John, was spectacular as the old things passed away, and all things were made new. The colors, the size, the purpose behind every item was described in enough detail to excite us and mystify us to some extent. But the truth of heaven is it will be our eternal home where we dwell with God and Jesus. It will be a place that surpasses anything we can dream of or understand based on the description. As we celebrate the birth of Christ in a manger, let us remember to celebrate the unwrapping of heaven in this last chapter of the Bible, showing us the true home of Jesus in all its glory.

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1. THE RIVER

REVELATION 22:1-2A *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street.*

John had been told that heaven and earth would pass away, and there would be a new heaven and earth. John had seen the beauty, majesty, and mystery of new Jerusalem. The Holy City came down from heaven adorned as a bride. John had seen the foundations, the walls, the street of gold, the gemstones, and the 12 gates, each made from a single pearl. John was also told in Chapter 21



that there would not be a sea in this new city (Revelation 21:1). But that did not mean there would not be any source of water.

In the first verse of the last chapter of the Bible, we are told in this new city, there is a *river of the water of life*. Rivers have always been significant in cities. In fact, cities tend to be built around rivers. The Ohio river joins two other rivers in Pittsburgh, which has the nickname, Three Rivers. The Ohio River also goes through Cincinnati, Louisville, and empties into the Mississippi River.

The Mississippi River reaches from North Minnesota all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, going through or bordering ten states along the way. The Colorado river goes through to the Grand Canyon. The Rio Grande becomes a border between two countries. Rivers have always been a source of life for cities, our economy, and stories about the people that live near them. Consider the history of the Amazon and Nile rivers as well as the Euphrates.

Rivers go all the way back to the beginning of creation in the Garden of Eden.

GENESIS 2:10-14 *Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² The gold of that land is good; the bdellium (Myrrh) and the onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

Adam and Eve had one river that divided into four rivers, two of which are still in existence. ¹ The description in Genesis shows these rivers were a source of life, nutrition, and economic impact. From one source, the water flowed freely, expanding and covering more geography, increasing in impact downstream.

God has always used rivers for life lessons, obstacles, barriers, borders, and hope.

JOSHUA 24:3 *Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the river, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.*

ISAIAH 43:20B *Because I have given waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, To give drink to My chosen people.*

Jesus understood the purpose and power of rivers, as well as the symbolism.

JOHN 7:37-38 *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"*

The Holy City, new Jerusalem, will have a river unlike anything ever seen or experienced on earth. This river will flow through the middle of the city and be as clear as crystal. It is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden but notice the source of this river. This river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In Eden, a life-giving river had nourished the garden; now, a life-giving river nourishes new Jerusalem. ²

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The centrality of this river is important in that it is in the middle of Main Street. There is free and intentional access to this river. Since it comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb,

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, OT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 20.

² *Holman New Testament Commentary, Revelation*; Holman Reference; Nashville, TN; 19918; p. 414.

it is the purest of rivers, clear as crystal. There is no contamination of any sort, no dirt, moss, or algae. Its pure, unpolluted, unobstructed flow symbolizes the constant flow of everlasting life from God's throne to God's people. ³

This purest of rivers is the water of life. Jesus would speak of such water to a Samaritan woman at a well at noon one day in John 4:14, *"but 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."* In heaven, there will be a constant reminder of the flowing of God's grace and salvation. And on either side of the river was the tree of life.

2. THE TREE

REVELATION 22:2B *On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

Though we are not given dimensions of this tree of life (singular), we know that it must be enormous if it is on either side of the river; perhaps the river runs through the tree or divides to surround the tree. In Tulare County, California lives a giant sequoia named General Sherman. Not only is it the largest living tree in the world, but the largest living organism, by volume, on the planet; 2100 years old, weighing in at 2.7 million pounds, 275 feet tall, and 100 feet wide at its trunk. ⁴ However, that is just on planet earth; which will have passed away by the time we see the tree of life in new Jerusalem. The tree of life is the celestial counterpart to the tree of life in Eden, and this tree provides for those who are immortal. ⁵

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This tree of life bears twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. In Revelation 2:7, Jesus says to the church in Ephesus, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God."* This tree is the fulfillment, symbolizing the complete undoing of the curse in the garden. ⁶ The blessings of this tree are perpetual, never seasonal. The fruit is such that it continues to provide nourishment for the citizens of heaven each day, each week, each month, each year, with no end.

Beyond the nourishment of the fruit of the tree of life, there is healing from the leaves. However, was John not told that there would be no pain or death in heaven (Revelation 21:4)? If people are not sick, why would there need to be healing for the nations (people)? It might help to understand the Greek word that is translated as "healing." The word in Greek is, *"Therapeia"* which literally means, "service rendered by one to another." ⁷ The Greek word translated "healing" is the source of the modern English word "therapeutic." ⁸

Think about the purpose of therapy as a medical service; its purpose is to be "life-giving." The leaves of the tree are similar to supernatural vitamins taken not to treat illness, but to promote general

³ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 2000, p. 286.

⁴ www.visitsequoia.com

⁵ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; p. 286.

⁶ *Holman New Testament Commentary, Revelation*; Holman Reference; Nashville, TN; 19918; p. 415.

⁷ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁸ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*; Ariel Ministries Publishers; 2004; p. 531.

health.⁹ The beauty of the fruit or leaves is not described, but it is evident they are for the good of those in heaven. God will continue to show His grace, mercy, and provision in the new Jerusalem.

Both the river of the water of life and the tree of life focus on one commonality: life. There is life in heaven. We talk about eternal life and life after death, but sometimes forget that we are in the land of the dying and heaven is the land of the living (Psalm 27:13). The life we will experience in heaven will be beyond anything we have anticipated.

3. THE LIFE

REVELATION 22:3-9 *There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.*

⁶ *And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. ⁷ "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."*

⁸ *I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹ But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."*

The life we live in heaven will be free of any curse, a complete turnaround of what was established in Genesis 3:14-19. Because of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world along with curses. The curses described in Genesis are threefold; physical, relational, and geological. There would be pain in childbirth, relational conflict between husband and wives, and the land would no longer grow items freely on its own without effort. There would be work involved in toiling the land to get it to produce food. All of these curses and more will no longer exist. There will be freedom in heaven that will eclipse anything we have known on earth. Freedom from any and all curses.

Though there is no curse, there is blessing. Notice the threefold blessings of heaven. The first is to be servants, the second is to see God face to face, and the third is to be authentically associated with God.

Firstly, as servants, we will not be hindered by anything; we will be able to perfectly serve our perfect God in the perfect environment. Secondly, we will also be able to see God up close and personal. 1 John 3:2, says, *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* (NKJV) It is difficult to imagine seeing God face to face in all His glory, not even Moses was allowed to see His glory because of its magnificence and power. But in heaven, we shall behold Him completely.

Thirdly, we will be authentically associated with God having His name on our foreheads. Throughout the book of Revelation, foreheads with a sign or a mark have figured prominently. To bear God's name

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⁹ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 2000, p. 287.*

was a privilege, but it also provides protection. The seal or name of God on someone authenticates that person as genuine, guarantees God's protection, and is a token of His reward to the overcomers.¹⁰ We will be identified with Him for all eternity, part of the family of God in our heavenly home.

Life will also be different in that there will be no night. Insomnia will be a thing of the past. As we live in this temporary home of earth, we get tired and sleepy, even exhausted. However, in heaven, it appears that we will be energized, focused, and productive without weariness. The light will no longer come from the sun, but rather God and His Son will illuminate heaven (Revelation 21:22-23; 22:5). The Shechinah Glory will provide all the light that will be necessary, and all the inhabitants will be able to walk in that light.¹¹

Heaven is going to be wonderful, peaceful, beautiful, absolutely perfect in every way. And our response to the wonder, peace, beauty, and perfection will be to worship God.

We anticipate what heaven will be like; we perhaps even dream about what we will see when we get there. Regardless of how unbelievably beautiful and immense it may sound, the words recorded by John are *faithful and true* (Revelation 22:6). And Jesus gives both a promise and a blessing. The promise is that He is coming quickly. The blessing is for those who heed the words of the prophecy in this book.

At the end of verse 9 are the two words that show us how to live, not just in heaven but also on earth. Ultimately, the book of Revelation is all about these two words. **Worship God.** Heaven is going to be wonderful, peaceful, beautiful, absolutely perfect in every way. And our response to the wonder, peace, beauty, and perfection will be to worship God. Worship in heaven will be spontaneous, genuine, and exhilarating.

Praise will not be something we will be assigned or commanded to do; it will be natural.¹² Worship will be effortless in the presence of God and Jesus on the throne, seeing them face to face in the splendor of our new home, heaven.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

From Genesis to Revelation, God had a plan that included a river, a tree, and life. It is by the grace of God that when the created rebelled against the Creator, He provided redemption. For generations, redemption came through the sacrifice of an unblemished, pure, innocent lamb at Passover. But then God's love came down from heaven to a manger in Bethlehem in the form of a baby. Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to take away the sins of the world.

The birth of Christ was God's plan for each of us. God came to this world in the flesh to dwell among us. We celebrate that reality and remember in this season of Christmas. As the Christ child grew up without sin, pure and innocent, as the Lamb of God, He was slain, but not defeated. The Lamb of God conquered sin and the grave, resurrected, and is now in Heaven next to His Heavenly Father. *Continued on page 107 >*

¹⁰ Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights, Revelation*; p. 301.

¹¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*; Ariel Ministries Publishers; 2004; p. 620.

¹² Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven Your Real Home*; Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI; 1995, p. 64.

God's plan was to provide a new earth and a new heaven, a new home for all those who believe in the baby that was born in Bethlehem. Just as the Magi gathered to celebrate and worship the birth of a king, may we do the same this season in preparation for that which awaits us in heaven.

God's plan is heaven; our purpose is to worship, coming together as the faithful, joyful, and triumphant to adore the King, the Lamb, the Son, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, our Lord. What better way to start preparing for that eternal time than in this season of Christmas?

O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels!

O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord ¹³

¹³ www.hymnary.org