

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part thirty

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HEAVEN - WHAT IT WILL BE LIKE AND HOW TO GET THERE (Part 3)

Revelation 22:1-21 - "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [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. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [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. [6] And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. " [7] "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps 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 them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, [9] but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." [10] And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

[remember the 7 seals earlier in this letter] [11] Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." [12] "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." [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. [15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." [16] "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches [letter to the 7 churches in 2 & 3]. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." [17] 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 desires take the water of life without price. [18] I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, [19] and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. [20] He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! [21] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

What you will see in this closing chapter of the Bible is the way in which the triumph of God, through the work of Christ, is revealed. In a very striking way, we are taken back across the millennia to the very first chapters of the creation story. The dominant idea of Revelation 22 is the final unfolding of the **fulfillment** of God's plan for His people - the **undoing** of all that has been lost and marred by sin. So we see paradise **lost**, and then paradise **regained**. The theme of the whole Bible in miniature - **creation - de-creation - redemption - new creation**. This is the final victory of God.

1) THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE

Revelation 22:1 - "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...."

All through the Scriptures we find this repetition of the imagery of rivers and waters and streams as pictures of the life-giving nature of the presence and Spirit of God: **Psalm 46:4** - "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High."

Once again, we need to remind ourselves that John, in his vision, is still describing this "**city of God**" coming down out of heaven (**Revelation 21:2, 10**). Like the Psalmist's description, John sees this picture of a central river - picturing the life flowing out of the reign of God. The reign of God will be the exact opposite of all that would **dry up life**. Jesus reminded us all it's the **thief** who comes to **"kill"**.

Jesus spoke of the richness of the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts in the very same terms as he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well: **John 4:13-14** - "Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

How these words tie in with John's final vision! Just as Jesus, in speaking to the Samaritan woman, separates Himself from all other options in terms of satisfying the deepest longings of the soul, so John describes this picture of a great river that flows **"...from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1)**. John is not describing a literal river any more than Jesus was talking about literal water. He's seeing, in picture form, the truth revealed that **only God is the eternal source of life**. Only He can **originate** it and only He can **sustain** it. It comes from **His** throne, and only through the work of the **Lamb**.

2) THE EFFECTS OF THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE FROM THE THRONE OF GOD

Revelation 22:2 - **"...through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."**

This is a rather unfortunate place for a verse break. The thought that John began in verse one is actually completed in the first part of verse two. The words describe the **central location** of the river of the water of life - **"...through the middle of the street of the city."** In other words, **life** is the central feature of the city of God, in contrast to the first result of the Fall being mortality and death.

The rest of this second verse is a picture of the **effect** of the life of God on all those who dwell around His throne. Of special importance is the reference to the **"tree of life."** John, totally unconcerned about the literal impossibility of a tree growing on **both** sides of a river, clearly sees this tree of life as a theological link with the Fall of man in Genesis 1 through 3.

Genesis 2:7-9 - **"...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. [8] And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. [9] And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."**

In their disobedience to the LORD Adam and Eve lost the right to the close presence of this tree of life. In words that are very difficult to fully explain, God Himself banishes them from partaking of the tree of life and the potential for some kind of immortality in a fallen state:

Genesis 3:22-24 - **"Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" [23] therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. [24] He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."**

So, in very simple terms, in his sinful condition, eternal life may be what man longs for, but it is the one thing he cannot have. Jesus Christ then came, God incarnate, to restore what was lost through sin. The single feature of His work was the bestowing of **eternal life**:

John 3:16 - **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

John 3:36 - **"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."**

John 6:54 - **"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."**

John 20:31 - **"...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

Countless references could be piled up to show the nature of Christ's mission. It wasn't just to teach or perform miracles. It was to **undo the curse**. It was to bring **eternal life** back to men and women. But here's the important point. What we receive and experience in **this** present age of eternal life is only its **initial** manifestations. We are forgiven and, through faith in Jesus Christ, given precious **hope of the age to come**. But we all still die. Death is the **last** enemy to be destroyed - **1 Corinthians 15:26** - **"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."**

This is where John's vision shines for us in anticipation. He sees the river of the **water of life**. He sees the **tree of life**. And then he sees the **effect** of these things. He describes, in picture form, the **uninterrupted fruitfulness** of the fruit and leaves of this tree. It doesn't experience the cycles and seasons we know all too well here on earth. It's life is **limitless** and **unending**.

Life in the city of God will know nothing of the frustration we all experience of simply **running out of time**. No relationship will ever **terminate** or **grow cold and empty**. **Boredom** will never set in. **Strength** will never lag behind our best intentions. We will never **run out** of anything we need for our satisfaction and well-being. In other words, life will have been purged of its earthly **barrenness**.

Such is the result of the eternal life God gives. We don't experience all of this right now - **2 Corinthians 5:4** - "**For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened--not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.**"

"Swallowed up by life!" What a great phrase. We will find all our present limitations **consumed - devoured - beaten back** by the overwhelming life of God Himself.

3) **THE UNDIMINISHED PRESENCE OF GOD**

Revelation 22:3-5 - "**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. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [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.**"

With these verses John states explicitly what he has only implied to this point about the relationship between the city of God and the removal of the curse of the fall - "**No longer will there be anything accursed....**" (23a).

The most striking feature of the heavenly city is the vision of the **face of God**. All through revealed history the presence of God has been a **mediated** presence. In some way, which we can't fully grasp, or probably even **endure** right now, life in the city of God will be marked by a degree of immediacy with God that our very best times of spiritual blessing right now can only reflect in pale, colorless ways.

Earlier on, while the church was being persecuted, the people of God were **marked** on their foreheads (**Revelation 7:3** - "**Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.**"). Now John sees more than just a mark of protection, he sees the **name of God Himself** on their foreheads. The redeemed shall come to a point of being **perfectly possessed by God**. All the influences of sin and finiteness will be totally removed.