

Written Copy: Revelation 21:21-27 “Living in Eternal Glory”

6th Sunday of Easter

Sunday, May 22nd, 2022

Text: Revelation 21:21-27

²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. ²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day---and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The text's intent

After seeing the eternal suffering that will be the future of the devil, his demons, and all unbelievers symbolically portrayed, the same angel shows him the wonder and glory that will belong to the Church, the resurrected believers of Jesus Christ. He takes a closer look using the symbolic description mentioned earlier of the New Jerusalem. We are described as such because the Lord Himself will locate His real unmitigated presence among us. Our resurrected bodies and souls will shine with His glory, sinless and pure. We will live in complete safety and security. The gate by which we entered is the faith of the OT church by which all were declared righteous. The foundation of this city is the teaching of the 12 Apostles which pointed to Jesus and His death and resurrection as the source of this gift of eternal life. We will live out our existence directed and led by God Himself, our source of light physically and spiritually. We will live in the safety of high walls, with no danger of the night marauders and no need to shut the gates because we are protected by God's real presence. The kings of the earth represent all humankind over all times will be welcomed. And finally nothing unclean ever entering it means that this restored Garden of Eden will never, unlike the first, fall into sin. It and we will remain perfect, sinless, and holy forever.

Focus Statement:

The LORD's eternal gift to us is one where all the evil things that trouble us now, scare us now will be gone. We enter into this paradise of eternal perfection by the faith of the OT Church by which they were declared righteous on earth and the Apostolic witness that points to Jesus and His death and resurrection as the source of our eternal inheritance. We will live in complete safety and security, all sources of evil forever banished, and only those made perfect by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection allowed in. And this perfect creation, unlike the first, will never fall into sin. This sinless perfection will last forever.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

While we might desire a description of how they new heavens and earth will look in the same way we might describe our perfect vacation spot, John instead is shown symbolically a vision of the beauty and the glory we will have resurrected body and soul to live in eternal perfection

What the hearer should do as a result:

See the pain, sorrow, and death of now as being only temporary. Remain in faith toward Christ which is the only way we can receive this eternal inheritance.

Subject Sentence: God's glory protects us and guides us eternally

Introduction: Your Happy Place

Have you ever, when facing something painful like a medical procedure, or a time of great emotional stress, had someone tell you to “Go to your happy place”? Now I don’t want to discuss the merits of whether that actually works or not; that’s a sermon for another day. What I want you to consider is what that place might be. Is it a place of natural beauty like the Grand Canyon, with the sun shining down on the sides of the canyon? Perhaps it’s the ocean in the morning as the waves peacefully roll in and the sun is shining across the waters. Or perhaps some place more local like Tahquamenon Falls in the Spring, when everything is new and green, it’s just you and your loved one, it’s quiet except for the sound of the water cascading down, the buzz of insects, the smell of wildflowers, and the sun shining down warming a cool spring morning.

For me, it would be a place in Canada that Susan and I used to visit before Seminary. It’s Lake Wakomata, and a cabin owned by some good friends of ours from my home Church. It’s located about two hours northeast of Sault St. Marie. It covers roughly 10 square miles with an average depth of 102 feet, and a maximum depth of 240 feet. And the water is exceptionally clear, as it sits in the middle of Canadian National Forest. Along its 25 miles of shoreline the only sign of habitation was two seasonal campgrounds, and five cabins, of which our friends was one. For several years in a row they invited us up there in August. Most times it was sunny and warm, but the lake remained cool, and made for great swimming in the heat of the summer. His cabin was located on a sandy beach that extended quite away out into the lake. The only way to get there was by boat, which meant we had the place all to ourselves. I would wake up early in the morning and sit down by the water’s edge and watch the sun rise up and shine across the water. The kids had a great time swimming and playing in the sand. My friend would take us on rides around the lake and pull us on innertubes behind his boat. The view out across the water to the shore far across was breathtaking, green forest as far as the eye could see. Except for the occasional fisherman passing by in boats the only sound you could hear was the insects buzzing, and the birds chirping. At night we would sit around the campfire and the sky was just filled with stars. You could see the haze of the Milky Way, and satellites traveling through the nighttime sky. Once we even saw the space station pass by. You could just sit and enjoy the sound and smell of a crackling fire, the smell of roasted hot dogs, enjoying smores and good conversation, or sometimes just quietly contemplating the beauty of it all.

This would probably be my happy place. But as beautiful and peaceful as Lake Wakomata is, and as beautiful and peaceful as your happy place might be, they all pale in comparison to the glory and beauty of the vision John is trying to describe in our Second Reading this morning. He is describing the happy place that beats all other happy places. It’s a place that is filled with a peace, a beauty, and glory that is beyond this world. He is describing a reality that has no equal and no real point of comparison on this earth. He is seeing a vision of us, the Church, the believers in Christ as we live in Eternal Life to come. And He is seeing a symbolic vision of what can’t be literally described and understood by us.

The Glory of the Resurrected Church: The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

The angel that is showing John this vision is one of the same ones who earlier had shown him another vision of a reality that is beyond our imagining, one that we wouldn't really ever want to imagine, the judgment of the devil, his demons, and all who followed him in unbelief right into the suffering of eternal hell. This same angel is about to show John the exact opposite future, that of all who are the Bride of Christ, members of His Church

Revelation 21:10-11 ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

As I mentioned last Sunday, John sees us, the Church, the believers in Christ, living out our eternal existence as the New Jerusalem. The old Jerusalem was the city where God chose to manifest His real yet cloaked presence, His glory which rested in the temple above the Ark of the Covenant. In eternal life His glorious presence will be located among us as we live out our lives in the new heaven and new earth. You will be resurrected into a new body and new soul, the gift not of this earth but from heaven, from God Himself. You will be glorified body and soul with the sinless perfection of God Himself. It's hard to imagine now because even on our best days we cannot escape our sinful heart and thoughts. But on that day, we will be forever cleansed of sin. We will shine with God's glory and beauty that John likens to a most rare jewel, clear without defect, shining in purity and perfectly reflecting the glory that is God's alone.

Revelation 21:12 It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed---

The high walls are a symbolic representation of the safety and security that you will live in, protected from all that harmed you in this life. Yet this vision has a feature that at first stands against a secure city fortress: 12 gates by which to enter the city. In John's day the more gates a city had the more points of entry one had to defend against attack. But these city gates are protected by God's powerful angels. Just as the city is a symbolic representation of you, the Church in eternal life, so too the gates are symbolic of how you entered into the Church: by the same faith that declared the Old Testament Church to be in right standing with God, their trust in all God's promises to come. And John is told that there are 12 foundations to this city, which stand for the 12 Apostles. The Church is established upon the Apostolic faith and witness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Revelation 21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

Once again John's vision emphasizing the beauty of your sinless perfection and sinless life lived out in the restored beauty of paradise lost. Because this is a symbolic vision of a reality beyond our imagining, we should not take the "streets of gold" as a literal description. But the beauty of our life lived out in eternity will be extraordinary. The description of the gates as pearls and the transparent aspect of the pure gold harkens back to one of John's earlier visions as He describes himself standing before the throne of the Father and of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. It is here we will forever bask in His glory.

Revelation 21:22-23 ²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

John now describes why the Church in eternal life is called the New Jerusalem, because the LORD God will dwell in the midst of us, not behind the curtain of the Holy of Holies in a temple where access is restricted. In Eternal Life there is no temple because His presence will be truly among us, just as you are present here with me today. Jesus Christ in His glorified resurrected body will be physically present among us, and with Him the Father and the Spirit. We will worship and praise Him in person through our singing, and through our obedient and perfect life lived out taking care of His creation once again.

Now we need to keep in mind John is not giving us a physical description of the new heaven and new earth. Remember from last week Paul described eternal life as the restoration of the perfection of the original creation which included a sun and moon. Here John is not saying there won't be such celestial bodies overhead in the sky. What he is saying is that we will have no need of them as light providers. If you remember from Genesis God's first words on the first day were: **(Genesis 1:3) And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.** But God didn't create the sun and the moon until 3 days later on the 4th day. The source of light before that was from God Himself. While He may use the new sun and moon to reflect His glory in a physical sense, in a spiritual sense He remains, just as He is today, the source of spiritual enlightenment and guidance.

Revelation 21:25 and its gates will never be shut by day---and there will be no night there.

Gates never shut and no night. Gates were closed, especially at night to protect from marauders and thieves from gaining access to steal and kill. Gates will not be necessary because the danger from evil people, and evil forces, as well as the danger from the devil will be gone forever. No more night is John's way of saying the power and influence of evil will be gone forever. You will never have to worry about the danger that stalks the night.

Revelation 21:27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Not only will there not be any need for security and self-protection, not only will the dangers of the night be a thing of the past, not only will evil men and the devil and his demons be banished forever, but nothing unclean will ever be found in eternal life.

“Unclean” refers to whatever would make a good Jew unworthy to worship in the temple. Here it refers to the contamination of sin. You and I are to this day contaminated by sin. The only reason we can be in the Lord’s Real presence here in worship is because our baptism continues to wash that sinful uncleanliness away. That has been our situation ever since Adam and Eve fell from grace. But the promise here is not just that there will be no more sin, that in itself would be awesome enough. But in the restored perfection of eternal life, there will never again be the opportunity for Adam and Eve, or you and me to ever fall into sin again. In this new creation that is the new heaven and earth, it will remain perfect and sinless forever, never to fall away from God’s glory ever again.

And who will be there? Those whose names are written in the Lambs Book of Life. What is that? Well, it’s not necessarily a book. It is God’s accounting of who is worthy to receive such a wonderful inheritance. And by our thoughts, words, and actions that is not you or me. But you have been made worthy by the blood of the Lamb. He purchased your entrance ticket and place in eternal life. He earned this inheritance for you by His suffering, death, and resurrection. And He gives you this as the gift of faith, by which you and I hold fast to the fact that just as Jesus rose again to glorious perfection on Easter morning, you and I will rise to the same kind of sinless perfection on resurrection morning, on the Last Day. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so will you. He wrote your name in His book of life with His precious blood by the pen of faith.

Conclusion

The Church in John’s day as it suffered through terrible persecution needed these words of hope, comfort, and strength. So do we in our day too as we see violence, war, disease, sickness, natural disasters, and suffering on the rise. I would love to tell you things are going to get better again, that we will return to the happy place that is the nostalgic days of our youth. But that’s not what God tells us is in store for the world or our lives. We might be able to find escape by traveling in our mind to our “happy place”, but that only brings temporary relief. The true answer is given to you through faith in Jesus Christ who sends His Spirit to comfort, strengthen, and guide you now through His word. Your Savior whose death and resurrection assures you that you have been made worthy of an eternity with Him, will make your happy place pale in comparison to His. He has in store for you an eternity where all that is wrong in this life is gone forever and forgotten forever. May you remain steadfast in your faith in Christ, who has overcome all that would stand against you, and makes you good enough to inherit that perfection of eternal life to come. Amen.