

Written Copy: Revelation 21:5 “Promises You Can Count On”

5th Sunday of Easter

Sunday, May 15th, 2022

Text: Revelation 21:5

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

The text's intent

Present symbolically the eternity to come in the new heaven and new earth, that are brought into existence by the same God who created the original heaven and earth. And His Church will descend from Him, made new and perfect body and soul to live in this restored Garden of Eden forever. The Triune God will Himself be really and truly present in and among us, with all the separation that is needed now, all the earthly means through which He must work because our sin gone. In His real and true presence all that is wrong, all the sinful affliction and danger, all the reason for sorrow and sadness will be gone and forgotten. He will make all things new and fresh, each day a new and fresh day. We will never be bored. And we can trust these words of promise because they come from the One who is the beginning and end of all communication, the One who existed before creation began and who is bringing about the consummation of all things, the author of life now and the provider of plentiful eternal life to come. All who conquer the enemies of this world: sin, death, and the devil, through the victory given to us by faith from Christ on the cross will inherit every one of these promises. But those who chose to give up faith to walk with the world, as well as those who refuse the victory Christ hands to all men through the Gospel, all these will inherit the eternal suffering that will be physical, emotional, and spiritual in eternal hell.

Focus Statement:

Our Triune God is the only One who can promise a better tomorrow and fulfill that promise. He promises a new heaven and new earth where all that is wrong with this one is gone forever. That's because He will live with us, His real presence, not cloaked in means but truly with us, spreading His presence over all of us. We will know by sight and senses, no longer by faith. The author of life will grant eternal life, and all these promises to those who have conquered sin, death, and the devil through Jesus' death and resurrection victory.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We see all that is wrong in the world, and we want change. We follow those who promise to make it better. While things do improve a little, things generally turn for the worse. All those who promise us a better tomorrow don't have the authority to make it happen. And all those who stake their faith in human beings will find themselves suffering for it eternally.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Hold fast by faith to these promises of a better tomorrow. Stop trying to make your heaven on earth and be the Church at work to bring the lost to eternal life through the Gospel.

Subject Sentence: Put your trust and hope in Jesus' promises to come

Introduction: Lot's of Promises Made, Not Kept

As we head into summer, you'll start to hear them: campaign promises made by politicians on both sides of the aisle, promising to make things better for you, the voter. Then there will be even more leading up to the presidential election in 2024. Think back to those promises that have been made to us in the past: to Make America Great Again, and to Build Back Better. Did either one of them come to fruition as promised? Now please hear me as I say this. I am NOT ENDORSING ONE PARTY OR POLITICIAN OVER ANOTHER! Politicians make promises, many with good intentions of following through, but fall short because they don't have the ability, the power and position, or the time in office to follow through. In reality, to get elected, it seems you have to make promises that you cannot keep. And not just the politicians. When COVID first hit we were promised that the vaccines would prevent people getting it and passing it on. But as time wore on, we woke up to the realization that while the vaccines prevented people from becoming seriously ill, many were going to end up getting it one way or another.

The promises presented to us in our Lesson from Revelation are different. They come from the One and Only Person that can make and keep all His promises. The LORD God has been making promises to mankind and fulfilling them since the beginning of the world. And we need to remember that because when we look at the condition of the world now, as well as what is going on in our lives, it often looks like He suffers from the same inability as our human leaders to make and keep promises. But when we take to heart and hold fast that His promises will one day come to pass, it makes the suffering and trouble in our lives int this world bearable. He promises His presence now and int the glory that is to come.

The Promises of Revelation 21:1-8

Revelation 21:5-6a ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ^{6a} And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

First of all, in order to judge whether any promises made to us are truly trustworthy and true, we need to know who it is that promises them. It is the One who is seated on the throne, ruling over all things. This is God the Father, directly speaking to the Apostle John. It is the LORD God who is the Alpha and the Omega, which is the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, a poetic way of saying He is the beginning and ending of all communication given to mankind. He creates what is true and speaks what is true. And He is the beginning and the end, or better yet He existed before the world began and is the author of its consummation. All of reality is under His control. And to Him, since the future is an absolute certainty because He lives outside of time and controls all time, all these words and what they promise are considered a "done deal", even though for us they have not all happened yet.

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

What are these trustworthy and true promises He is making to us? The first is the creation of the new heaven and new earth that replace the first heaven and earth that we occupy right now. John is seeing a vision of what is to come after Jesus Christ returns in all His glory and all people are resurrected from the dead. The One who is promising this will is the same One who brought the original creation into being: by the command of the Father through the work of the Word of God, who is the Son, in conjunction with the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is the God that said, "Let there be..." and it all came about, and it was all perfect.

It was supposed to remain a perfect creation with all things created to sustain the eternal life of the pinnacle of God's creation, those who were created in His own image, mankind. But mankind wasn't satisfied remaining in the creaturely status, they wanted to have God's status and knowledge and lost the battle to Satan who tempted them. They fell and so did all creation. We live in that brokenness today. It is caused by two things, our inability to manage God's creation for anything other than our own selfish purposes, ignoring the needs of others who are not like us, and so we horde, we misuse natural resources, we pollute, we continue to ruin what once was God's perfect creation.

Romans 8:18-23 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

The second reason our world is in a fallen state is explained by the Apostle Paul. When Adam and Eve fell into God cursed the ground so that it would produce thorns and thistles and weeds. What that means is that the perfect creation no longer could do what it was designed to do: support the life of mankind perfectly. God subjected it to futility in the hope of something better to come, this new heaven and new earth where perfection would once again be restored. And He wanted our time upon this fallen world to be akin to childbirth where we endure the pains of right now looking forward to the new life that is to come. Jesus told His disciples in our Gospel Lesson (**John 16:21-22**) **²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.** He wanted them to

know that the sorrow they would have at His death would be forgotten in the resurrection. So too our sorrow in this world now will be forgotten in the new heaven and new earth to come.

And since Paul says creation waits with eager longing, and that it will be set free from its bondage to corruption, he is telling us that this new heaven and new earth will actually be a restoration of the original perfection of creation before the Fall. That means there will be plants, animals, food, things to do like take care of the creation that once again works perfectly to support us. But if that's the case, what about Revelation 21:1 with the "sea was no more". Does that mean there will be no lakes, or rivers, or oceans? God's original creation had bodies of water filled with fish. Remember here John is speaking using highly symbolic language. In the earlier chapters of Revelation the sea is a torturous place where a satanic beast arises who takes control of all human institutions. Even in the Gospels the sea is a place of storms and waves that seek to capsize the boat. Here "the sea" symbolizes the sinful world's systematic hostility and threatening of the Church. That will have no place in the new heavens and new earth.

Revelation 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

You might be tempted to picture the actual city of Jerusalem descending from heaven. But right on the heels of that John gives us another symbolic visual of the bride of Christ adorned for her husband. Who is the bride of Christ? The Church, and our husband is Christ. This fits the reoccurring theme in the Gospels of Eternal Life being the wedding feast, of which our Lord's Supper is the foretaste. Why reference the Church as the Holy City of Jerusalem? That was the place where God chose in the original promised land for His temple to be, where He was to be worshiped, where His real presence was to be found in the Holy of Holies, and where He poured out His grace and mercy through the sacrificial system. For us today, that is the Church. It is when we gather as the Church that Christ promises to be really and truly present in Word and Sacrament to pour out His grace and mercy upon us. It is the gathering of His children to worship the Father in Heaven.

This is John symbolically describing the resurrection of the faithful on the Last Day, whose souls return with Jesus and are made new and pure and sinless. And He will raise our bodies to sinless perfection in which we will live out a glorious existence body and soul forever.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

And who do we get to live out this perfect existence with? Our Lord God Himself, really and truly present and dwelling with us. The literal translation of this verse is "God will tabernacle with men and set up His tent over them. The tabernacle was the Old Testament method of how God was truly present yet separated from His sinful people. He resided at the center of their camp as they wandered the wilderness, yet was separated from them by the Holy Place, and then within that the Holy of Holies, where His presence rested over the Ark of the Covenant. Only the priest could enter that place, and only one time each year with sacrificial blood. But in eternal life, that separation is gone. God's tent is symbolically set up in our midst and we are welcomed into it. There is no more need for separation because our Lamb of Sacrifice shed His blood on the cross to cover all the sin that would keep us apart from God. He rose again so that we might know that sacrifice was accepted by the Father. And all those who die in faith toward Jesus' death and resurrection will be made perfect body and soul so that they can live out their eternity in the real presence of the Triune God.

In a manner that is beyond our understanding we will intimately know and have a relationship with our Creator God through His Son, who will dwell among us in His resurrected body, along with the Father and the Spirit. The only way we can know God now is by faith through His Word. But on that day and for eternity we will no longer need faith to know Him, we will know Him by sight, by sense, and by the love He will continue to pour out upon us as He provides for every want and need.

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Living in the real presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ means that all those things which caused us pain and sorrow, all the former things of this world that politicians promise to save us from, all the sickness that doctors and scientists keep working to cure, all those will be gone and never remembered again. All the things that caused our tears to flow in this life will be gone and wiped away. That is the promise of the Triune God who sits on the throne from ages past through eternity to come.

Who are these promises for?

Revelation 21:8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Who will be the beneficiaries all these promises? Perhaps we should ask first who will not. The cowardly, meaning those who had faith in Christ but under the pressures of temptation by the world and their own sinful hearts turned away from repentance and gave up their faith. Those who due to their lack of participation in Bible Study and worship, where the Spirit works through the means of grace, let their faith just fade away. They will be joined by those who constantly refused God's gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ and therefore will suffer body and soul for all their sins in the eternal lake of fire: a place of torment that will be physical, emotional and spiritual

Revelation 21:7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

So who is it who will have this heritage? Who will receive the wonderful promises of the eternal inheritance that is a place in the new heaven and new earth? Who will get to live out their eternity in the real presence of the risen Christ? You! You will! You who have been declared in your baptism to be precious children of the Heavenly Father. You are all conquering the enemies that seek to keep you from enjoying this paradise; the enemies that are sin, death, and the devil. You conquer them by your faith in Jesus Christ. He defeated all of them on the cross and in the resurrection for you. And He gave you that victory by faith in your baptism. And He is at work even now to keep that faith alive, to keep you living in that victory now, so that you will fully enjoy it forever.

Conclusion

The promises presented by John at the end of Revelation are some of the greatest promises ever. They are far greater than any promise any leader today could make. They are promises that affect our today and our eternal tomorrow. Yet they can be trusted because they are made by LORD God who is the source of all truth. He created all things by His power, He sustains all things by His power, and on the Last Day He will re-create that original perfect paradise and place you in it, made perfect body and soul, to live with Him and us His Church forever. He has been keeping His promises to us since time began. We have the fulfillment of His salvation promise in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And through the gift of faith He gives to you, you can hold fast to all these words of promise until the Last Day when they all become reality. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.