

23. The River of the Water of Life (Revelation 22:1-5)

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Jesus used this imagery during his earthly ministry, where he presented it as a promise to those who followed him. In John 4:10-14, Jesus encountered the woman at the well and during the conversation John recorded, "10 Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'" The woman asked a question that focuses on the origin of living water,

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Therefore, the river of the water of life is the metaphoric equivalent to eternal life. Jesus spoke once again on the subject in John 7:37-38, "37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.'" The metaphor not only confirms eternal life but also makes the water of eternal life flow from within the true believers. John concluded in verse 39: "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." The very spirit of God flows from within Christians.

That the river flows down the middle of the great street of the city illustrates centrality of eternal life to the very nature of the Holy City. On each side of the river grows the tree of life, a metaphor for eternal life from the beginning where Moses recorded in Genesis 2:9, "9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The tree was lost and eternal life with it when man sinned. Genesis 3:22-24 records:

22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

The story of man has come full circle; the tree and with it eternal life are his once more. In writing to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:7, the Lord called the tree of life, the paradise of God, "7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who

overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." God has restored the paradise of the Garden of Eden in the Holy City, the bride, the wife, the church of the Lord.

The tree bears fruit continuously, making it always available. The leaves heal the wounds of the nations. No longer will be any curse refers to the curse placed on man and woman when they sinned Genesis 3:16-23:

16 To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

The servants of God will serve him before his throne in the city. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. God will give them light. And they will reign with him for ever and ever.

With these words of the angel, what the angel came for was complete. The words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophecy had sent his angel to provide the revelation. The completion of the revelation of God must soon take place. This verse reiterates the statement of Revelation 1:1-2 and signifies that when John is finished there will be no other revelation:

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The last episode of John's revelation is the Lord's promise to come again.

The Coming of Jesus (Revelation 22:7-16)

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. 11 Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to 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, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

Great controversy surrounds this passage. Some say it is the Lord coming to reign a thousand years on this physical earth; some say it is speaking of his coming at the destruction of Jerusalem. These notes have resisted these notions in favor of dealing straightforwardly with the text and the context. There is not energy enough, nor time enough, to deal with contrary points of view.

As Jesus speaks, he begins with the exclamatory, "Behold!" The Lord repeats the statement in verse 12. This passage begins a predictive prophecy of his return. Up to this point, the revelation has been speaking forth to reveal God's mystery, hidden from the foundation of the world. However, in many cases, the disciples and later Christians struggled to understand the when and how of the Lord's return. In all cases, it is impending, and it remains so to all who live this short life on earth—a life described in James 4:14, "14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

The Lord's disciples raised the question of when he would come in Matthew 21:2, "After visiting the temple the Lord said, 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'" In response, they asked two questions, "'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" Matthew 24:3. Christ answered the first question about the destruction of the temple, and then in verse 30 began the answer to the second question, "What will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?" In answer to this second question that described the event in verses 30-31:

30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

In verse 36-37, he described the uncertain but impending nature of his coming, "36 No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In verses 42-44, he made this impending nature of his coming eminent for all who should ever live:

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

In this context, it does not seem unusual that the Lord said at the end of the revelation, "Behold! I am coming soon!" A central theme of the revelation is to have your garments clean and be ready. Other passages that deal with the second coming are just as urgent. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, Paul wrote:

15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Paul again portrayed the Lord's coming in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 with an unmistakable suddenness that makes it eminent to all:

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

If the Lord is coming soon, how much more so ought we to keep the words of the prophecy in this book.

Once again, John is so startled that he falls down to worship the angel (See notes on Revelation 19:10). Again, John is told that the angel is a like-servant with John, his brothers, and the prophets. Worship God!

The angel told John that he was not to seal up the words of the prophecy of the book even though the revelation is complete because the time is near. The condition of man is to continue until the Lord comes, as illustrated by the statement, "11 Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

The Lord exclaims for the second time, "Behold! I am coming soon!" When the Lord does come, his reward is with him, and all will receive according to what they have done. Paul had written almost these same words in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." His power to judge is certain for he is Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and End. These are all phrases that he used of himself in the first three chapters of the Revelation.

Those that have washed their clothes will have the right to the tree of life and entrance through the gates of the city. Clean clothes have stood for righteous acts of the saints. Others, outside the city are dogs. They are those "who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

Jesus concludes with a statement of his authenticity and genealogy. He is the root of David, the bright and morning star. His testimony is for the churches.

The Invitation and Warning (Revelation 22:17-21)

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him 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, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen

The spirit and the bride extend the invitation. The spirit with the word of God, his sword and the bride, the church, with her testimony of Jesus say, "Come!" Let those who hear the gospel say, "Come!" Let whoever is thirsty take the free gift of the water of life. This fitting conclusion to Christ's invitation reflects Paul's inspired truth written in Romans 6:20-23:

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The warning in verses 18 and 19 may be only of this book, commonly thought of as John's Revelation, or they may be of the entire revelation of God from the beginning to the end. The context favors John's book. However, the Bible is replete with warnings against adding to or taking away from any of the scriptures. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:7-9:

Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

If anyone adds, to him will be added the plagues of this book. If anyone takes away, God will take away his share of the tree of life and in the holy city.

John's revelation ends with the most awe-inspiring and elegant words imaginable.

"Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.