

Third Sunday of End Time: Saints Triumphant; November 13, 2022

Revelation 22:1-5

The Lamb Restores Paradise

The angel showed me the river of the water of life, which was as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. In the middle of the city's streets and on each side of the river was a tree of life that yielded twelve kinds of fruit. The tree yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of nations.

There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him. They will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads. There will no longer be any night or any need for lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

The Lord gave them paradise. There was no sin; there was no death; there was no pain; there was work, but only the satisfaction of it, not the frustration. More than anything, there was the Lord himself. Because they were perfect, the Lord walked with them and talked to them and they saw him face to face.

The Lord also gave them the opportunity to worship him. In this paradise he placed two trees, one called Life and the other called Knowledge of Good Evil. He pointed to the Tree of Knowledge and told them to obey. He told them to obey him in a very simple way: just don't eat the fruit of that Tree of Knowledge. For the paradise I've given you, worship me in this one simple way.

But then it wasn't so simple. Because the Father of Lies entered paradise and started doing what he does. He tempted with half-truths. And he got them. They failed in their worship. They sinned against the Lord, who gave them paradise. Paradise was lost.

Suddenly, there was pain. There was sorrow. There was work as we know work: frustration and fatigue and precious little satisfaction. Soon there would be death. And now, when the Lord came to be with them in the Garden, they ran and hid from him. Sin wrecked their relationship with the Lord. Paradise was gone.

It seems apparent that if Adam and Eve had worshipped God by following his command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, one day he would have told them to eat from the Tree of Life. And then they would have lived forever in paradise, unable to sin. But because they did sin, God drove them away from that Tree of Life. He drove them away from the Tree of Life because he loved them. He didn't want them to eat from it and then live forever in that lost paradise, the paradise they had destroyed with sin.

But before he drove them out, he showed love for them in an even more important way. He called them back to him. He went walking in the Garden again, and although now they hid because of their sin, he sought them out. Because he loved them. And he had something to tell them. The paradise they had just plunged into sin, he would restore.

He did not promise it in so many words. He promised an offspring of the woman who would come to crush the Tempter's head, while the Tempter would also cause him to suffer. Adam and Eve listened. But this time, not to the Tempter. They listened to the Lord and his promise. They believed. They longed for this offspring to come and save them from their sin, from death, and from the Father of Lies.

They showed their faith by having children. You sometimes hear married couples say they don't want to have kids because the world is such a dark and ugly place, and who could ever bring a child into a world like this? If there was ever a couple in history who could have thought that way, it was Adam and Eve. Because they had experienced the perfection of that paradise! And now they could contrast that perfection with life in sinful and fallen world! But they believed God's promise of a saving offspring. So they had children.

It seems they thought their first child was that Savior. If so, they were off by some thousands of years. But they were right that God would keep his promise to send a Savior. And during those thousands of years, as God repeated the promise of a coming Savior, he used one image for that Savior more than any other: a Lamb. The Savior would be the Lamb of God. So when that Savior arrived, his forerunner John the Baptist pointed to him and said, "**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**"

And Jesus did just that. He was a holy Lamb, without the least little blemish of sin. He was also the sacrificial Lamb, who died for the sins of the world. He lived and died to deliver the world from the clutches of Satan. He crushed Satan's head, and as he did, Satan's hand released us. The Lamb lived and died to deliver us from the sin that wrecked God's paradise. And he rose in victory to reign forever and ever.

All the evil things that wrecked God's paradise, he came to conquer. And he succeeded.

And so, now, paradise is restored in the kingdom of heaven. I can't wait to tell you all about it, based on five amazing verses from St. John's Revelation. But before I do, just a little word of warning. In most sermons, you will hear something (sometimes a lot of somethings) about how God wants you to live. You hear that (normally) for a couple of reasons: so you'll realize that you're a sinner, too, and you need Jesus to save you; and so that, once you know you are saved by Christ, you'll know how to thank God with a life that pleases him.

There isn't much of that today. There really isn't anything about how to live your life. Except to know this: when Adam and Eve lost paradise, you lost it too. When they brought sin and pain and death on themselves, they brought it on you. When they ran away from God in fear, so did you. When the Lord drove them away from the Tree of Life, he drove you away, too.

And everything Jesus did to restore paradise, he did for you, too. He lived to bring paradise back to you by removing your sin. He died to crush Satan's head for you and rescue you from his power. And he rose so that you will rise and live. So, here is the simple application for the way you live your life: live it in joy, peace, and confidence, knowing that Jesus has restored paradise, and it's waiting for you. Live your life in joy, peace, and confidence knowing that everyone you love who died with faith Jesus is enjoying this restored paradise right now:

St. John's angelic tour guide shows him paradise restored in heaven: **The angel showed me the river of the water of life, which was as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.** Spiritual life flows from God. While we are here, God gives life to our souls through Word and Sacrament. He does this in love. Because we are sinful, we would die if he did not hide his glory behind a book, water, bread and wine. But in paradise, our holiness is fully restored. So there God no longer wears masks when he delivers life. Instead, he sends life directly from his throne: the throne of God and Lamb, who earned this life in paradise.

In the middle of the city's street and on each side of the river was a tree of life that yielded twelve kinds of fruit. The tree yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of nations. Unlike the first paradise, there is now only one tree. There is no more option to sin, to rebel against our loving Lord. The saints in heaven are confirmed in their righteousness forever. Now there is only a tree of life. Are you noticing a theme here? Water of life. Tree of life. In this paradise there is life to no end.

There is only life for all who trust in Jesus. The tree yields twelve kinds of fruit. Twelve is the Bible's number for the Church, for all who from every nation who trust in Christ. There is eternal healing and life for them all, from every nation.

And so: **There will no longer be any curse.** When paradise was lost, there came the curse of death, pain, suffering, and grueling labor. The whole curse is gone. Paradise restored is paradise complete and permanent.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him. They will see his face. Again we see God dwelling directly among his people. Where there is sin God must hide his full glory from his people. But not one little beam of his glory is hidden from them anymore, because all their sin is gone. They look at God, in all his glory, face to face. And everything they do is a perfect act of worship for their God, and for the Lamb who lived and died for them.

His name will be on their foreheads. Last week we heard a vision from the book of Ezekiel. And this a wonderful example of the unity of Scripture, how the Old and New Testaments bind together and support each other in every teaching. Ezekiel saw a scribe running through the city before the Day of Judgment, drawing a cross on the forehead of every believer. And every believer with the cross on their forehead lived. Here the Lamb of God has his name on the foreheads of his saints. But there really is no difference between the name of the Christ and his cross. A name is not just a title, a name is all we know about someone. And we know this about Christ: he is our Lamb who restores paradise with his cross, and he has written his name, his cross, on us through faith.

There will no longer be any night or any need for lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord their God will shine on them. Even though we live in paradise lost, we certainly still see shades of the glory of God's creation. When you stand outside on a beautiful, bright, still day, God's glory shines. But, in this world, we always know that sooner or later night will come. A beautiful day will end, and so will our lives. In this world, night always comes. But not in the paradise of heaven. No more night. No more death. No more darkness at all.

And they will reign forever and ever. They will, because the Lamb who died for them rose victorious over death. And he ascended to his throne. All his saints – all who trust in him – reign with him forever in the paradise he restored for them.

That paradise is where you're heading. It is where all the saints who died in Christ are reigning victorious now.

As long as we live here, we must remember this every day. Whenever we remember a person we love who has reached paradise, we must not only be sad that we miss them, but smile because they have the paradise that the Lamb of God won for them. We must also remember this every day we struggle with illness, or with frustration. Paradise restored waits for us, even as we struggle here in paradise lost. The victory is ours, too.

We must also remember this when we reach death: it is a door to paradise restored. The victory of the Lamb over sin, death, and the devil is already ours. Paradise is promised to us. We must only wait for it, trusting in the Lamb to the end. Trusting that when the end does come, it will be the beginning of your eternal reign with the Lamb, in the paradise he restored for us. Amen.