

Come

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[0 : 00] Well, would you turn back with me, please, to the passage that we read in Revelation 22. Revelation 22. I'm reading again verses 1 to 5.

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. 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. 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads, 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. This is a passage that is full of encouragement. It's a passage that is full of promise. And just for a few moments this evening, I want to look with you at this little glimpse of heaven.

[1 : 10] It's not a complete picture of heaven, but it is a glimpse of heaven. And we're going to divide the passage under two headings, the provision of life and the presence of God.

The two central aspects of heaven, the provision of life and the presence of God. First we have the provision of life in verses 1 to 3.

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, 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. No longer will there be anything accursed. And in these verses, John sees the life that is provided in the new heaven and new earth. John sees the life that is provided in the new heaven and new earth. Let's just consider what's happened to this man, John. He's living in the Roman penal colony of Patmos.

[2 : 12] It was very much a first century concentration camp. And on the Lord's Day, on the first day of the week, the risen and ascended Jesus appears to John and speaks with John.

And I often think that is so important, that it wasn't any day of the week that the Lord met with John. It was on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, Sunday, that Jesus met with John.

And Jesus reminds John of who it is that is on the throne of history. You see it in chapter 1. It is the God who is the Alpha and the Omega. The one who is the beginning and the end.

The one who is and who was and who is to come. The Almighty. The one who says, I am the one who died but I'm alive. And I have the keys of death and Hades.

I have conquered death. I have conquered the devil. I have conquered sin for my people. And Jesus goes on to give John a tiny glimpse of God's unfolding plan for history.

[3 : 11] John may be suffering the violent persecution. And you may be seeing the other churches around about him suffering violent persecution by the Roman Empire. But Jesus is saying to him, Creation is not in chaos, John.

The Lord is in control. And that is such a relevant message for us tonight, isn't it? The world is not in chaos. Whatever you see on the news, the world is not in chaos.

Your life is not in chaos. The Lord is in control. The Lord is on the throne. And in Revelation chapter 21, we see this glorious vision that Jesus, through his angel, gives to John.

He sees a new heaven and a new earth where God has wiped away every tear. And there is no mourning. There is no crying. There is no pain. Because the old order of things has passed away. And Jesus, who is sitting on the throne, says, Behold, I am making all things new. John then sees a renewed and restored Jerusalem. God's redeemed community.

[4 : 16] God's faithful and perfected bride. And the chapter closes by saying that this environment is dazzling with the brightness of the glory of God. And nothing unclean, nothing detestable, nothing

impure will ever be able to enter or invade or spoil this environment.

And yet, there is still more to see. Because in verse 1 of Revelation 22, the angel shows John the river of life. Now, this image has its roots in the Old Testament.

In Joel chapter 3, we read about the new creation. And it has a spring of water that issues from God's house. In Ezekiel 47 that we read, Ezekiel describes a river that flows from God's temple. And it deepens and deepens. It's constantly expanding. Everything it touches is brought to life. Even the dead sea, that sea that nothing can live in, begins to teem with fish when this river of life touches it.

In Genesis 2, we read about rivers that flowed through the Garden of Eden and rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden. And now John says that he saw a river.

[5 : 29] And it's called the river of the water of life. In the hot, humid, drought-prone ancient Near East, water was acknowledged and appreciated as a life-giving commodity.

And here John doesn't see a wadi. He doesn't see a puddle. He doesn't see a pool. John sees an abundant and flowing river that refreshes, that revives, that renews, that restores a river that gives life.

And the river, we're told, is described as being bright as crystal. It's sparkling. It's shimmering. It's shining. It's free from any pollution. It's totally pure.

It reflects the very character, the very glory of God. And the river, we're told, is flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. God is the source of this life-giving water.

God is the giver of this life-giving water. And it draws our minds back, doesn't it, to John chapter 4, where Jesus meets with that moral train wreck of a Samaritan woman.

[6 : 30] And he says to her, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

I will give water, Jesus says. I will give life. And here the Lord is providing life, providing water for his people. And we're told that the river is flowing through the middle of the streets of the city.

Isn't that a wonderful image? It's easily found. It's easily accessible. It's not a hidden stream. It's not a protected stream. There's no fencing around the stream.

Anyone has access to the river of the water of life. Then in verse 2, John goes on to describe the tree of life.

And again, this image has an Old Testament background. In Ezekiel 47, we read about the trees of life that grew beside the river of life. And they had an abundance of fruit.

[7 : 29] And they had healing leaves. In Genesis 2, we read about the tree of life that stood in the center of the Garden of Eden. And now John says that in this new creation, he saw the tree of life.

And he says that this tree of life grew on either side of the river of the water of life. And he speaks about the fruit that is growing on the tree. And he says it's growing 12 kinds of fruit each month, every month of the year.

The picture here is of superabundance. There's no barren season. There's no bare branches. This tree is groaning with the life-giving fruit that it provides.

But we're also told that it has healing leaves. In the ancient world, leaves had healing properties. They had medicinal properties. And now John describes this tree as having leaves that will bring healing for the nations.

And isn't that a wonderful truth? That Jesus came into this world not to give rules. He came into this world to bring healing that rules could never give.

[8 : 37] That is the truth of the gospel. That is the beauty of the gospel. Jesus says, I have not come to give you burdens. I have come to lift your burdens. And I have come to heal you and restore you and bring you rest.

But it also, we're told here in verse 3, there is an absence of any curse. And again, that has an Old Testament background.

In Zechariah chapter 14, Zechariah sees the world being restored after the victory of God's promised Messiah. God's promised King. The Shepherd who is pierced for his people.

And there is this wonderful declaration in Zechariah 14 verse 11. That after the victory of the Messiah, after the victory of the shepherd, after the victory of God's King, there is no more curse. The curse of death that God placed on his creation in Genesis 3 after the fall has been removed. And now John says here in Revelation 22, there is no curse in the new heaven and new earth.

[9 : 41] Sin and its curse has been removed as far as east is from the west. And it has been removed through the blood sacrifice of the Lamb who is enthroned.

We see that in Revelation chapter 1 verse 5. He has freed us from our sin by his blood. We see it in Revelation 5 verse 9 where the chorus of the heavenly multitude sing, You were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God.

The Lamb is the absolute security for his people because the Lamb has purchased the redemption for his people. All the curse is removed through the blood of the Lamb.

So the picture we have before us really in Revelation 22 is that of a restored Eden. As John speaks about rivers of life, trees of life, no more curse he is envisaging, a return to the garden, a return to Eden, a return to the days before sin ever invaded the world.

And one of the key characteristics of Eden, you remember, was that there was no death. Death was absent. So here is John and he sees the life that is provided in the new heaven and the new earth.

[10 : 56] The emphasis of these verses is on life. You know, every day we are reminded, aren't we, that death is never far away. It might be a tragedy on the news.

It might be a funeral notice in the supermarket. It might even be death's visitation to your own home. And there is so much of us that recoils from this.

We shrink back from this thing called death. I was hearing about a celebrity recently who said that he's going to spend the next year trying to find a way to increase his life.

He can't face the prospect of dying and that is it. So he's giving up a year of his life to find out how he can extend his life. You know, it's very ironic, I would say, that you actually give up a year of your life to try and find out how to live longer.

But that's what this man is doing. But in verses 1 to 3 of Revelation 22, God gives this wonderful promise. He promises to sovereignly dispense eternal life on the basis of the accomplishment of Jesus.

[11 : 58] Jesus is the sacrificial lamb. He is the slaughtered lamb. He is God's provision for our salvation and eternal life. And all we are called to do is receive him by faith and rest on him.

That is all we can do. There is nothing else you are asked to do. There is nothing else you are expected to do. There is nothing else you are called to do. But receive and rest on Jesus.

And he simply invites us, doesn't he, to come to him. He's so inviting. In Song of Songs chapter 2, he approaches his bride at the end of the winter of life and he says, arise and come with me.

In Isaiah 55, he looks at his ruined people sitting in the rubbish and the rubble of sin and he says, come and eat. Come and drink. He says, I have bread that satisfies.

I have wine that will bring you joy. I have milk that will strengthen you. I have water that will refresh you. Come. In Matthew 11, he addresses his weary people and he says, come to me, all you who are weeded and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[13 : 16] And then we are given this glorious and emphatic declaration and invitation at the end of Revelation 22, where we read in verse 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.

Come. Come. Tonight, these verses are calling each and every one of us to trust in Jesus.

They are calling on each and every one of us to take Jesus. They are calling on each and every one of us to treasure Jesus. They are calling on each and every one of us to receive Jesus as he has offered to us in the gospel.

And in doing so, his glorious and unsurpassing provision of life will be ours. Not because of anything we have done, but merely because we have come to the one who is our only hope, the one who died for our sins, taking the death we should have died, and enduring the curse we should have endured.

All we're expected to do in return is come. That's the provision of life. But this brings us second in the passage to the presence of God, verses 3 down to 5.

[14 : 33] That the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads, 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.

And here John sees the God who is present in the new heaven and new earth. John has given us this wonderful description in verses 1 to 3. He has seen the river of life.

He has seen the tree of life. He has seen an absence of any curse. He has seen this great return to Eden. That is the great future hope. That is my hope. That is your hope. If you are a Christian tonight, the return to Eden.

But as it was at the wedding at Cana in John chapter 2, the best is kept until last. In verse 3, John says, We will serve God. We are told that the throne of God and of the Lamb is at the very centre. This is what dominates this new environment of life, the throne of God. And God's people will worship him. We are told they will serve him. You know, sometimes we can wonder, can't we, what will life in heaven be like?

[15:45] What will life in the new creation be like? And some people think that it will involve sitting in the clouds, plucking on harps. Other people might think of it as one long communion season or one long church service or one long Kessick convention.

Others see it as one long eternal holiday where they'll play golf to perfection, they'll eat as much as they want, and they'll put on no weight. I had a friend in the Thurso congregation and she absolutely hated thinking of concepts such as eating and working in the new creation.

She said, that's far too earthy here. We'll do something far more spiritual than eating and working in the new creation. But Revelation tells us we will not be idle.

We will not be passive. We will not be lounging around. We will not be simply indulging our pleasures in this new creation. Verse 3 tells us that God's people will worship Him.

The word is actually better translated, serve Him. It is a profoundly important word. Everything that God's people do in this new environment will be a priestly expression of worship.

[16:57] That's how it was for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They were to, you remember, work the garden and keep the garden. It was a priestly activity. It was an expression of worship.

And that is how it will be for us. We will plant and we will build and we will discover and we will eat and we will drink and all of it will be an expression of worship.

All of it will be an expression of service to God. It will be very much like this life but glorified. The glory and the praise in this new environment will all go back to God because we will know that all of these blessings come from the nail pierced hands of the Son of God.

Every overflowing cup of blessing that we drink from in this new environment we know will come from the hand of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us.

We will engage in activities in this environment and the whole ethos surrounding this environment will be the confession from Him, through Him, to Him be.

[18:01] All the glory now and forever and ever. Doesn't that excite you? That you're not simply going to be sitting back in this new creation. You are going to be serving God in this creation and glorifying Him perfectly in this creation.

But John goes further in verses 4 and 5 to say that we will not simply serve God. We will actually see God. We're told His face will be seen by His people.

And you know that was a privilege that was denied even to someone such as Moses. Moses, you remember in Exodus, longed to look just on the face of God and God said, you may only see my back parts because no man may see my face and live.

But now John is told that the inhabitants of this new environment will have access to God and intimacy with God, a relationship with God beyond our wildest dreams.

The believer will see Jesus in a way that they have never seen Him before. They will see Him in all of His majesty, all of His splendor, all of His glory, all of His holiness.

[19:08] They will survey the whole panorama of the perfections of Jesus. Even Peter and James and John who enjoyed such closeness and proximity to Jesus will find Him to be entirely breathtaking and captivating in this new environment.

Do you remember how John sees Jesus in Revelation chapter 1? He sees the glorified Jesus and He falls down as though dead. This is the same Jesus who in His earthly life, John said, give me the highest place, give me the highest honour in your kingdom.

But when he sees Jesus, glorified all he can do is fall down and worship. There's a scene at the close of the Lord of the Rings trilogy where Gerard Tolkien writes of the returning king Aragorn who has just been crowned after his victory over the evil forces of Mordor.

And Tolkien gives this lovely description, all that beheld him gazed in silence for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the very first time. Tall he stood above all that were near, ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood.

And wisdom sat upon his brow and strength and healing were in his hands and a light was about him. Then went up the cry, behold the king.

[20 : 32] And that is how it will be when we see the face of Jesus. And we will be able to say without the slightest trace of hesitation or hypocrisy or half-heartedness, I have found him in whom my soul delights.

He is chief among ten thousand and he is altogether lovely. And you know, I can say those things today, I can preach on those things today, but I can be half-hearted as I say them.

I long to be able to say it with every fibre of my being, but there are those moments that I'm not whole-hearted because challenges come my way and I long for that day when I will be able to say without any hypocrisy, any half-heartedness, he is chief among ten thousand, he is altogether lovely and I have found him in whom my soul delights.

And maybe that's your longing tonight as well. That one day you will see Jesus and praise him as you really should. But we're also told that his name will be on our foreheads.

This is an indicator that we are God's possession. Whenever I read this, I think of the children's film and if you've got children or grandchildren, you might think of it too, the film Toy Story.

[21 : 50] And in that film, the little boy Andy writes the name of his toys, his own name on each of his toys to show that they belong to him. It's a mark of pride, it's a mark of joy for the toys when they look at their feet and know that they belong to Andy.

And here we're being told that we will belong to the lamb-like lion and the lion-like lamb. And what a comfort that is to those of us who have perhaps felt like we never belonged.

We never fitted in. We were never accepted. We never matched up. We never really mattered. We never really had someone who knew us or loved us.

God, on that great day, will publicly and emphatically show and declare that we are his and we are loved by him. He will say of us on that day, they are mine and they have captivated my heart.

But it's also an indicator, isn't it, that we are God's priests because you remember in the Old Testament, Aaron and his sons wore turbans with holy to the Lord written on them.

[22 : 59] They had been set apart by God. They had been called to serve God and now those who are called to serve God and worship God in the renewed Eden have his name placed on their foreheads.

But John goes even further and he tells us that the darkness will no longer exist. Night, darkness, is a Johannine image for sin, shame, impurity, wickedness, death, unpleasant experiences.

It is an image that conveys negativity in John chapter 3. We read that men love darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. We read in John chapter 13 that Judas went out to betray Jesus and then we read these very solemn words and it was night.

But now the night is no more. The darkness is no more. There is no need for a lamp or the sun because the Lord whose face shines on his people will be the light for his people forever and ever. Does that comfort you this evening? Does that console you tonight? Perhaps much of your earthly pilgrimage has involved or will involve struggling and stumbling through the darkness.

[24 : 18] You can't live this life without going through painful seasons where it seems like the darkness is the closest and maybe the only friend that you have.

will have to go through the valley of deepest darkness. We will have to go through the valley of the shadow of death and yet Jesus has come to give us a glimmer of light in the darkest of valleys and one day when we have crossed through them all perhaps crawled through them perhaps cried through them we will find that he has carried us and he has brought us into his harbour into his haven of peace where there are no more dark valleys.

The winter is over the spring and the singing has come and we will only know the glorious light that comes from his shining smiling face.

the darkness will not be forever. And finally John says that God's people will reign with him sharing in his glory and his splendour and his beauty.

I think that's incredible. It would be enough for the Lord to give me a place in his kingdom. It would be enough for the Lord to simply open the entrance for me to come into his kingdom.

[25 : 46] But he says you will reign forever and ever with me. So John sees here the God who is present in the new heaven and new earth.

Now many people would like a heaven without God. They may not say it but John Piper asks in his book God is the Gospel if you could have heaven with no sickness and with all the friends you ever

had on earth and all the food you ever liked and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed and all the natural beauties you ever saw all the physical pleasures you ever tasted and no human conflict or any natural disasters could you would you be satisfied with heaven if Christ were not there. And perhaps even some professing Christians might say well yes I think I could be happy there. I think I could survive in that environment.

But such an environment isn't paradise. Paradise isn't the polygamist harem of Islam. Paradise isn't the deification of self of humanism. Paradise isn't the annihilation of self of Buddhism.

Paradise isn't the streets of gold and the enjoyment of leisure of liberal Christianity. The paradises that have no room for Jesus are simply gold-plated hells. That's the bottom line of the bottom line.

[27 : 14] A paradise without Jesus is a gold-plated hell. Paradise is about satisfaction in Jesus where we don't simply get more of Jesus we get all of Jesus and Paul calls that gain and he says that it is far better to be with this Jesus and that is one of the most astounding facts isn't it that we see in the New Testament that dying isn't simply about going to heaven dying is about being with Jesus.

I love Ray Ortlund's description where he says if you belong to Jesus however much you have suffered or sinned he will let you cling to him as long as you want to and his presence and his touch and his healing will heal every wound and every regret and every shame and the ancient prophecies sorrow and sign will flee away will be fulfilled.

That's what it means to know and experience the presence of Jesus. having Jesus and knowing his fullness is the ultimate enjoyment and blessing of heaven.

So tonight as we find ourselves being given this tiny glimpse of heaven we find ourselves really being called to live in the light of these glorious truths.

these verses are encouraging us to persevere lest we fall away from this. You see many people have their own ideas about the book of Revelation and they think that the central message the central thrust of the book of Revelation is what will happen at the end of time.

[28 : 57] That's not really why Revelation was given. Revelation was given to encourage Christians who were struggling to keep on keeping on to actually keep on keeping on.

They were being encouraged that when they were finding it toughest not to let go of that so great salvation. They were not given this book to simply wonder what it all meant.

They were given this book to remind them that Jesus was in control. Jesus was going to bring all things up back to a natural consummation and that they should not let go of this so great salvation.

This message is very much persevere. Keep on keeping on. Don't let go of this. Not only that these verses encourage us don't they to worship because of what the lamb has done to provide this.

And I would go so far this evening as to say that if we have no desire to worship the lamb with his people in this life what gives us any reason to think that we will want to worship him with his people in the life to come.

[30 : 03] These verses are encouraging us us to worship Jesus. And these verses encourage us to live with expectancy and anticipation of the coming of the lamb and his new creation.

So many people worry, so many Christians worry about the return of Jesus. They're fearful about that day. But revelation is given to say the best is still to come.

You don't need to be afraid about this day. You should look forward to this day. The best is yet to come. So don't be afraid.

May God use these truths to persuade us and encourage us to embrace and love and give our every breath to this God and his lamb whose face we will one day see.

Let's close our time of worship by singing to God's praise. In the words of Psalm 107, Psalm 107 and singing verses 23 down to 30.

[31 : 11] It's on page 384, the Scottish Psalter version. who go to sea and ships and in great waters trading be. Within the deep these men God's works and his great wonders see.

For he commands and forth in haste the stormy tempest flies, which makes the sea with rolling waves, aloft to swell and rise. we'll stand to sing Psalm 107 verses 23 to 30 on page 384 to God's praise.

Let's go to sea and change as in bring water in thee with in the deep he paid those works and his great wonder see.

For he commands and force in haste the stormy tempest lies, which make the teeth with rolling ways, the hope to swell and rise.

They mount to him then to the depths, they do go to the plucks and with babe pale with Through God and Take all the pain and help our ways with hate hurt hard and with pain.

[33 : 20] With pain They reveal on soccer like one drum, how there would end they be, then they to go in trouble cry, who them from streets of free.

The storm is changed into a calm, a discomandant will, so that the ways which I will reach before now quiet are and still.

Then are they God's because a dress and quiet now they be, so to the heaven he them brings, which they desire to see.

Let's pray. Our Lord and our God, we give you praise and we give you thanks that the promise is held out in your word, that one day the storm will be changed into a calm and you will bring your people safely into the haven and the harbour, your heavenly home.

We praise and thank you that that is a promise that we are told we will enjoy rest, we will enjoy gladness, we will enjoy the blessing of life, but we will also enjoy the blessing of your presence.

[35 : 43] We ask and pray that the words that we have focused on this evening would encourage us, that they would encourage us to indeed persevere, to keep on keeping on with you, that they would encourage us to worship, that we would want to magnify you because we know what you have promised us and what you have done to secure those promises.

And we pray that the words that we have focused would encourage us to remember that the best is still to come, that we have this great future hope, this glorious prospect, and that it's not something to dread or fear when we are the Lord's people.

Go with every person gathered here tonight and all those that we know and love, and may we truly know the reality of coming to Jesus in our own experience and finding the life that is found in his name.

Forgive us now for all our sin and go with us into the night as we pray in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen.