

Eternal Life, Unending Worship

(Sermon 30 – Rev. 22:1-5)

5.25.25

Steven Stout

Good morning, I invite you to turn with me in your Bible to Revelation 22:1-5.

I would dare say that most if not all of us have some sort of streaming service through which we take in entertainment. There are algorithms that find you shows or show that are similar to what you have previously watched. So when you end one show or movie you can start something that is similar in nature

Why is that? It is because those that control the streaming services know that people like the same genre of entertainment. I have another thought—I think it is because the show or the movie we were watching we don't want to end. Many of us have had the disappointment of ending one season only to learn that they have not even started filming season two yet. I often come to the end of a movie or show and think I wish there was more time left. Let the main character take on one more bad guy or the next adventure.

We just don't want good things to end. The party, the conversation, the meal, the vacation, whatever we find that is wholesome we don't want to end. But everything in this life does end. Our loved ones pass away, the vacation ends and we have to return to school or work.

As we look at the first few verses of chapter 22 our hero Jesus has no more enemies to defeat but allows us to join with Him in seeing and sharing in His reign and we are assured that eternity with Christ will never end.

With that let us read Revelation 22:1-5

(1) 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 (2) with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (3) 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. (4) They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (5) 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.

As we have been going through Revelation we know that the main point is the revealing of who Jesus is, what He has done, and how history is really "His

Story." But we also have learned that Jesus gave this revelation of Himself to increase the hearers' longing for God and to be assured and comforted during times of suffering and temptation.

PROP: For those who trust in Christ in this life, a glorious future awaits without end.

These 7 churches were going through various trials, or times of testing were about to come. Some in these churches lost their lives for Christ and some were looking at the material things of this world for fulfillment - these last chapters are meant to help keep our eyes focused not on the things of this world but to what is to come and with whom we will spend eternity.

What the angel directs John's eyes to is the concluding shot - highlights of the vivid imagery of the abundant life, sustenance and nourishment that the Lord graciously bestows upon His people. This leads us to our first point:

1. Our Unending Need - God's eternal provision

(1) 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 (2) with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (3) 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.

No doubt when the first hearers heard these verses about the river of water of life, there would have been several images that would have come to mind:

1. the Garden of Eden - Genesis 2:10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.
2. the last days temple in Ezekiel 47 - the prophet is shown a river coming from the temple in which it grows giving life to all it encounters.
3. Jesus' interaction with the woman at well in chapter 4 of John's Gospel.
(4:13-14) Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Something else that would have come up is their own physical need for water and especially the church in Laodicea, who had no water supply of their own but needed to have aqueducts built to bring water from other cities. In the ancient world depending upon a stream, river, or well could be a matter of life and death.

In this area of the country we don't think much about water in terms of supply. We always seem to have enough. But for the original hearers and for many around the world water, clean water is an important issue.

The river that John sees is "bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb." - not merely for survival - but an abundance of everlasting life.

Why this river of life? Because even in this new and better Eden we will be continually and utterly dependent upon Him. We are always going to depend upon His eternal life-giving source. In this life we can fool ourselves into thinking we can be self-made men and women, but in the new creation thankfully that delusion will be over.

I recently heard a young parent make the observation that their desire to have their child become independent is really opposite of our relationship with Jesus. The more we grow in Christ the more dependent we become. Our utter dependence will be realized.

This source we depend upon **"flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb."** Lest we be tempted to look for another source it is explicitly stated. Twice in these few verses John speaks about the "throne of God and of the Lamb." This is a picture of the Father and the Son united with the Holy Spirit. From the early stages of the church there have been those who wanted to come in and distort who Jesus truly is. His is light from light, true God from true God, of the same essence as the Father. (Nicene Creed)

From the beginning of Revelation through to the end, the Lamb is co-equal with God. We must remain faithful to who Jesus in all His fullness and who He's revealed Himself to be.

The throne of God and of the Lamb are in the city and if the throne is there, God is there! The throne symbolizes the absolute sovereignty of God and all the provisions that come from Him. What a valuable encouragement - that in the eternal presence of God, there will be no unmet need. But that encouragement is not just for eternity. It is also for your life now.

God has given us "everything for life and godliness." There is an abundant supply now for the situation that you are in! Are you in a spiritual battle? Are you

undergoing temptation? The same life-giving source is available for you now! While we do not yet visibly see the "throne of God and of the Lamb" we nevertheless have access to the throne of grace in time of need.

Not only does John see the river of the water of life and its ever ending life-giving source going down the middle of the street of the city, he also sees in verse 2,

"on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding it fruit each month. The leaves on the tree were for the healing of the nations."

So if chapter 21 didn't stretch your imagination last week referring to the jewels of the city and its dimensions and the river of the water of life, certainly now we have had our imagination stretched, with the tree of life having 12 different kinds of fruit and it yielding it each month.

All I have to say to that is "Yum!" and "Amen!"

If the hearers didn't catch the reference to Eden with the river of the water of life, they would have certainly done so with the "tree of life." Some of the original hearers of the letter would have remembered the eschatological promises given to the church at Ephesus. Remember it was the church at Ephesus that was enduring patiently, but they had lost their first love.

"To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7)

The tree of life in the Garden of Eden would have been a source of ongoing eternal life for Adam and Eve. Because of sin, God could no longer give them access to the tree of life for that would have made sin eternal. But Jesus came and died for our sin. Just as sin brought death, death ended sin. And now, in the perfect, sinless eternity with God, we are once again granted access to the tree of life, living eternally because we are living sinlessly with Christ.

This tree of life in the "paradise of God" is one of abundance and ample supply.

The description of life in the new Eden gets even better. Look with me at verse 3,

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.

The curse brought sin, death, destruction, and separation from God. But in the new creation the curse is gone. I don't know about you this morning but I will be

overjoyed that all the things that the curse brought will be gone and done away with. Sickness, death, shame, fear, guilt.

We are so accustomed to the curse. It affects all of our being, our mind, emotions, our work, our desires.

It is as if John is putting two completely contrasting things together. Why will there not be anything accursed? Because the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there! God's redemptive work is complete! And His redemptive work is so powerful that it crushes the curse.

One of the things that the curse brought into the world is fear and rightly so. When our first parents sinned in the garden they were rightly afraid of being in the presence of a holy God, they hid. All throughout the Bible there are times when God shows up on the scene and people are afraid. When the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt, God came down on the mountain, but the people asked that Moses speak for them. They didn't want God to speak to them directly.

This morning you may have your sins forgiven but in the back of your mind you are still weary or hesitant of getting close to God. Thinking, "I can only worship God from a distance." I want to tell you now that Jesus died and rose so that you can in this life be free from fear; not the respectful awe that we should have of God but the fear that cause us to hide. God's grace beckons us towards Him this morning.

The curse brought shame and guilt. Things we still struggle with in this life will be gone never again to accuse or bring separation from God.

Look at the end of verse 3 **"and his servants will worship him."**

What else can we do but worship! The use of the word "servants" here is a reminder of the OT priest. In the OT there were a limited few who had the privilege to serve God in an official sense in the tabernacle or temple. You had to be from a specific family line. Praise God, because of Christ, now and even more on that day all the saints will have the realization of being a kingdom of priests, serving and worshiping God, without hinderance.

But we want to begin now serving God. I want to commend you this morning! You are a faithfully serving church! While it is still day, we can keep on serving! But on that day our serving will be transformed.

Now, there is a lot of speculation as to what we will do in the new creation.

Unfortunately, we don't have the time to unpack or speculate. But one thing I think we can derive from Scripture is that whatever we are doing, it will be worship towards God. All our conversations, our tasks, our eating, and our enjoyment of the provisions which He graciously provides will be done for His glory and in worship and praise to Him!

While we await that day, let us strive with all the strength that He provides to serve Him with everything we have.

With the curse being destroyed forever, so is our feeling of the fruitlessness of our toil. We all know what it's like to spend the day cleaning the house. Or working on a project only to see little results. In the new creation everything we put our hand towards will be successful and worship to God.

We have already heard some of the songs throughout the book that will be sung to God. I know that I'm not in the minority this morning when in times of corporate or private worship there is this spiritual desire to sing louder, dance, leap. There is something more that I would like to offer to God for all that He has done. On that day, whatever physical hindrances we have on this earth will be gone! Our voice won't crack or give out. Our legs won't get tired.

This never-ending worship is tied to the next verse in that the more we see the more we love Him and desire to worship Him.

The new experience for humanity is their closeness in worshipping God. Which leads us to our next point:

2. Our Highest Good - God Himself

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.

Matt Redman wrote a lyric in the worship song, "Seeing You"
"No one can sing of things they have not seen,
God open our eyes towards a greater glimpse"

We will forever be seeing more of God.

Before we unpack what it will mean to see His face, there are a few ways in which we can enhance our "seeing God" while we await that day.

First, we drink deeply from the source of God's Word - the more we see of the character and beauty of the redemption story, the more we love.

Second, talking to older saints. One of the joys of being a part of this particular church is talking with older saints. Those who have walked with God a long time. Hearing the stories of God's provision and grace. Those stories open my eyes to see the many facets of who He is towards His people.

While there is no description as to what His face will look like, the original hearers would once again be reminded of the description of Jesus given to the church at Thyatira, **"The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire."**

Meaning that God is all seeing! That nothing can escape His vision or knowledge. The promise of seeing God's face is also a promise that He will see us and because we have been cleansed and glorified He will see no remains of sin but instead His complete masterpieces, in the righteousness of His Son.

There is a sober moment here not just because we have the promise of seeing our Savior with glorified eyes but that there are those who have no desire to see His face. They were made in the image of God and yet they are blind to His goodness. In Revelation 6:14-17

¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

What a great Savior we have! If left on our own that is where we would be, "asking mountains and rocks to fall on us to hide us from his face." But God is rich in kindness and mercy! If you have a desire to see God's face this morning it only comes from God.

Our first parents were removed from the face or presence of God. Yet the face motif continues throughout Scripture.

In Numbers 6:24-25 The blessing of the OT priest:

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you

The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

It has been God's plan from the beginning to have a people for Himself on which to shine His face.

Seeing the face of God or having God's face turn toward you is the sign of His pleasure, His grace. God turning His face towards us and letting us see His face is only by the blood of Christ. Christ, our great Savior, has reconciled us to the Father. Once banished from His presence, now welcomed. Once enemies, now friends.

It brings Him glory and worship for us to see who He is!

This is what theologians call, "The Beatific Vision." One writer states it this way,

*"This signals a new level of intimate knowledge and access to God not previously experienced by His people. - **David H. Wenkel***

What John sees in Revelation 22:4 is far greater than what Adam and Eve had in the garden.

This will be a new experience but it is not a new desire for God's people. Moses in Exodus 33 desired to see the face of God. His request was denied with God explaining to Moses, **"I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name... But you cannot see my face, for man shall not see my face and live."**

Moses however is shown the "backside" of God and he is so transformed that his face shines, so much so that he needs to wear a veil to hide the glory of God upon his face.

If Moses is only allowed to see the glory of God from the cleft of the rock with God covering him with His hand until He passes and thus radiates from a glimpse, how much more glorious will it be to see God's face!

Theologians have been debating what exactly this blessed vision is.

Parkison:

"The beatific vision is God's incomparable and ineffable glory beheld directly."

Where words fail me, I need to quote two great theologians. What is the glory of God?

*"The glory of God is the infinite beauty and greatness of God's manifold perfections." - **John Piper***

Augustine:

"We are to see a certain vision, my brethren, 'which neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man': a certain vision, a vision surpassing all earthly beautifulness, of gold, of silver, of groves and fields; the beautifulness of sea and air, the beautifulness of sun and moon, the beautifulness of the stars, the beautifulness of angels: surpassing all things: because from it are all things beautiful." - Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle to John

And it has been the prayer, the desire of the righteous to be with God, face to face. It is in this new body, with a glorified mind and eyes, that we will be "God-beholders!"

I think Scripture would teach us that we are glorified at the moment that Christ comes back. As I said earlier we will have new bodies.

Throughout the Bible God shows up and has encounters with people. The result of those encounters is that people are changed. We think of Jacob wrestling with the angel, or Moses seeing a glimpse of God. The fact is that we cannot encounter God in this life or throughout eternity and not be transformed by the encounter.

1 Corinthians 13:12 — For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

What is Paul saying? Somehow we are going to see God face to face, but something else is going to transpire. Our minds are going to be enlightened in a way that cannot happen on this earth.

Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount said **"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."**

And 1 John 3:2-3

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

There is a correlation between seeing Him and our change. "Those who meet Jesus face to face will forever be with Him and they will be glorious even as He is glorious."

Scripture links the promise of seeing God with a desire to be pure. It is here that we want to cultivate a desire for purity. Now we know that in our own strength we cannot make ourselves pure. We need to allow and join the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification.

If we are lacking in our desire to see God, I think that it might have something to do with our desire to be pure. And where in our heart we find the desire for purity lacking we need to cry out to God for that desire.

What can we expect when we do see Him?

Samuel Parkison:

"All creaturely existence is a gift, including creaturely limitations. In that blessed vision, our comprehension and vision and delight, which are all finite, will be perpetually maximized. And as our capacity for comprehension and vision expands, so will our delight. In other words, the very limitations we are tempted to bemoan create the possibility of never-ending delight, where each level of enjoyment is topped by the next—forever."

God is amazing, how He thought of everything! In His presence we will be whole and perfect. Yet, we will still have the capacity to grow. We will see everything clearly, yet we will still have room to learn. We will know God as we are known. And yet we will have the ability to discover more and more about God for all eternity. Our limitations now remind us that we need God. But that need doesn't stop in heaven. It will continue. But it will be a need without any lack. It will be healing without sickness. It will be longing that will perpetually be fulfilled, because in His presence is fullness of joy forever more.

Not only do we get to see His face, **"and his name will be written on their foreheads."**

Again, we see something from the OT fulfilled in Revelation. It was the priests in the OT who bore the name of God on their heads. This also speaks of ownership.

vs. 5 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.

There will be no dark corner in the new creation. The light will be provided by the Lamb. What John describes for us in this last verse is that in the new Eden, God

is present with His people and His glory makes unnecessary all other sources of light, for in the new creation nothing will compare to the radiance of the Lamb.

What a plan of redemption: cleansed from sin, made righteous, justified and glorified, and He gives us the promise of royal authority with Him!

Augustine in "The City of God" said about God's people that they will, "rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end."

In these short verses there is the consummation of all things. From the Fall, to God redeeming us, to the ability to see His face. The triune God has been working all of history to this end. Eternal life and unceasing worship, our unending need continually being met, and our highest good being with God Himself will never end.

(Let's Pray)