

Sermon for November 17, 2013 – Saints Triumphant

Revelation 22:1-5 (NKJV)

Theme: “Heaven”

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴ They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. ⁵ There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. (Rev 22:1-5 NKJ)

Waiting is hard. It doesn't matter if you are waiting for something important or insignificant, waiting is hard.

How many times haven't you just wanted to hang up the phone in frustration while waiting for customer service? How about leaving a long line at the store? It is easy to give up unless we remember why we are waiting. We might think: "If I hang up the phone now, I will just have to call back later and possibly wait even longer. If I leave the line now, the product that I want to buy might be gone." And so we wait, hoping our waiting doesn't take too long.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus has saved you from hell through His perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. All your sins died with Him on the cross. The Holy Spirit has called you to repentance and faith through the Gospel – declaring you to be His dearly loved children through the waters of Baptism. Heaven is your home. The LORD himself is your inheritance. All the LORD asks of you is to believe His promises and wait patiently for His reappearing.

But here's the problem – waiting is hard. Sure, when we first came to faith, waiting was easy. We were on fire for the LORD. We joyously repelled all the foolish temptations of the devil to give up. Why would we give up? Salvation is just around the corner.

But then the days, months and years started to pass and still no Jesus. The world seizes the opportunity to bombard us with the message that if we would just loosen up a bit, and get with the times, we would be much happier.

And then the devil tempts us with personal tragedy. Jobs are lost, friends betray us, loved ones get sick and die, and we grow old. Our joints ache. We can't hear or see as well as we could. And our faith? Oh, haven't we all heard it all before: "Just hold on. Wait patiently – Christ will come." "WHEN!", we are tempted to cry out, "I have been waiting my whole life. Is Jesus really going to come?" Yes, waiting is very hard.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. It is so easy to become impatient – especially since we have been waiting so long. Let us, therefore, turn to God's Word for encouragement and hear our Savior tells

us: “Soon. I am coming soon. Why have I not come yet? Because there are others who need to hear the Gospel and be saved. Be patient. I am coming soon. Here is a glimpse of what I am preparing for you in heaven.”

Our sermon text is from the very last chapter of the Bible and concludes the wonderful vision of judgment Day that apostle John was allowed to see. In this vision, John heard the LORD declare that the time has come for God to dwell with man. He saw the Church triumphant come down from heaven like a beautifully fortified city. After describing the dimension of this city made up of precious stones and golden streets, the apostle John says that the angel *showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

Water is essential for life. Water is precious – especially in the hot and dry areas of the world. In Jesus’ day people had to labor hard to get water from a river or a well.

Do you remember the Bible story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well –whom Jesus asked for a drink of water? In the course of the conversation, Jesus said that if the woman knew who He was, she would be asking him for living water. What was the living water Jesus offered her? It is the forgiveness of sins that Jesus freely offers everyone through faith in the Gospel. For many of us, this water of life was first splashed on us at our baptisms when we were washed clean from all sin and faith was created in our hearts. And when we partook of this water through faith in the Gospel, we changed. The desert of our sin-scorched souls began to show signs of life. All sins was washed away. A garden of righteousness grew in their place. Our spirit was refreshed and we were at peace with God.

Still, on this earth we carry a sinful nature that tempts and burdens us, but in heaven it will be gone. We will be completely free of it. Why? Because all our sins will be washed away. We will drink from the river of life – we will drink the water of salvation that only comes from Jesus.

Our text continues. *In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

In heaven, in the middle of the golden main boulevard – near the capitol, where God’s throne is – will stand a massive tree that will span the both sides of the river. It is the tree of life that once stood in the Garden of Eden. It will grow 12 different fruits for each of the 12 months of the year. This tree represents the abundant fruits of righteousness that God’s people – the Church triumphant – will enjoy. Joyous life with God will be theirs. They will find healing for all the old wounds and divisions that existed on this sinful earth. Jesus, again, is source of life that this tree offers. He will be our shade from all oppression. He is the medicine to heal all the wounds sin's curse has caused.

Our text continues ³ *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.* The curse of sin will be gone. Just think of what this means! An ancient Church father once wrote: “What can be happier than that life, where there is no fear of poverty—no weakness of disease; where none can be hurt, none can be angry; where none can envy, none can be impure; where none can be tormented with the desire of honor, or the

ambition of power? No fear there of the Devil; no snares there of evil spirits; no terror there of hell; no death there, either of soul or body, but a life blessed in the gift of immortality. No discord there forever, but all things in harmony—all things in agreement: because there will be one concord of all saints—one peace, and one joy.” (Bede as quoted from The Lutheran Study Bible)

The curse of sin will be gone. No more will we be slaves to sin and the devil, rather we will be servants of the Almighty God – servants who worship the Lord for his glorious salvation. Do you want to know what the worship in heaven will be like? St. John described it early in his book, when He wrote:

I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶ "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev 7:9-17 NKJ)

Our text continues by telling us that believers *shall see* [God's] *face, and His name shall be on their foreheads*. Sin's curse prevents us from seeing God in all his holiness now. But in heaven, when our sinful nature will be completely removed, then we will be allowed to see our heavenly Father face to face. He will put his name on us, marking us as his own. We will belong to the almighty God and he will protect us, as our text says: *There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light.*

Many children (and even adults) are scared of the dark. Why? Because you can't see too well in the dark. You don't know what dangers are lurking around the corner. But in heaven, we will never have to be afraid of danger or crime. Why? Because there will be no scary night. The LORD God will protect us. His warm, life-saving light will permeate every tiny spot in heaven. The light emanating from God reminds us of the words in the Aaronic blessing that say: *"The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you."* Yes, the Lord's face will certainly shine on believers for all eternity. . .

And they shall reign forever and ever. Have you ever heard of servants reigning as kings? In heaven this will be the case for us. What wondrous love the LORD has for us in that He is not satisfied with us merely being his servants. He wants us to be princes and princesses of heaven. He wants us to be brothers and sisters of Jesus. He wants us at His family table forever.

And this, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is the reality that awaits us in heaven – all because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection for us.

Waiting is hard, but when we are reminded what it is we are waiting for, then waiting becomes a little more bearable. The LORD promises *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* (Rom 8:18 NKJV)

And so, holding on to God's promises we wait patiently – eagerly looking forward to the glory that is coming with Christ, and sharing the Gospel with the lost souls around us as we wait. And so we pray Amen. Come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.