

Revelation 22:1-5, Genesis 2:7-10
What Happens When You Die: Paradise
Sunday November 6th, 2016
All Saints Day

Today is the conclusion to my series on “What Happens When You Die. Some have said this has been a “killer” series. Others have simply enjoyed it. Some have said they have even been encouraged and strengthened in their faith and hope. I hope it has touched everyone in a positive way

A story is told about, “An 85 year old couple, who had been married almost 60 years, when they were killed in a car crash. They had been in good health the last ten years mainly due to the wife’s interest in health food and exercise. When they reached the Pearly Gates, St. Peter took them to their mansion which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite, hot tub, etc.

As they “oohed and aahed”, the old man asked St. Peter how much all this was going to cost. “It’s free,” St. Peter replied, “this is Heaven.”

Next they went out back to survey the championship golf course that their home backed up to. They would have golfing privileges every day and each week the course changed to a new one representing the greatest golf courses on earth.

The old man asked, “What are the green fees?” St. Peter replied, “This is Heaven, you play for free.”

Next they went to the club house and saw the lavish buffet lunch with the cuisines of the world laid out. “How much does it cost to eat?” asked the old man? “Don’t you understand yet? This is Heaven, it’s free!” St. Peter replied.

“Well, where are the low fat, low cholesterol, sugar free tables?” the old man asked timidly.

St. Peter sighed, "That's the best part. You can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is Heaven."

With that the old man went into a fit of anger, throwing down his hat, stomping on it, and shrieking wildly.

St. Peter and the man's wife were astonished and asked him what was wrong. The old man looked at his wife and said, "It's all your fault!"

His wife said, "My fault? What are you talking about?" He yelled, "If it weren't for your blasted bran muffins, I could've been here 10 years ago!"

We each have our own vision of what Heaven and the New Heaven and Earth will be like and we use the words, images and desires of our age to form our own image of Heaven. The Bible uses images, words and the desires of the people's hearts of their age, but the symbols can still speak to us today if we understand them.



Brueghel 1500s

A review of our series is: when we die we as Christians go before the "Bema Judgment seat" directly into the presence of Christ in Heaven. We join all of the Church, the redeemed in heaven and await the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead after Jesus returns to Earth.

After the Resurrection of the Dead, God brings a New Heaven and Earth into existence; and into this New Earth: the New Jerusalem, The City of God descends where we will live together forever more. Today's verses are the ending of the section on the New Heaven and Earth that begins in Revelation 21:1.

The 2 passages read today, tell us that Humanity began our relationship with God in a garden and we will complete our journey with God in a Garden, in Paradise.

The word Paradise literally means Garden. And though Jesus showed all how to get there, he only promised 1 person face to face that he would be there, and he was the thief who died with him on a cross.



In these verses we see Heaven in terms that would be of great value and desire to a people living in the sparse desert environment of the Near East. Abundant plants, trees, water and food were very appealing and desirable in a climate and time when all of the above were often very scarce and starvation, sickness and dying of thirst always a current possibility.

We have no idea of how fragile and hostile that environment was. So images of Paradise being a garden, filled with living water, fruit, eternal life and leaves that healed summed up much of their hopes and dreams, but also speaks to deeper issues of suffering humanity. Suffering that will be eliminated in Heaven.

First I want to say that the Bible is a trustworthy and true book in terms of containing all things necessary for salvation. Over the last 50 to 100 years many have tried to destroy it as a trustworthy book, saying it is full of errors, and changes etc. But I have studied this book both with scholars that were deep believers, and those who were not; who were simply trying to destroy people's faith in this book, but their arguments rang hollow. But that is the subject of another series on the Bible, God's word and truth.

But back to our scriptures today, I am contrasting the story of the beginning of man's relationship with God in the creation of Man and the instillation of his spirit with the re-creation of humanity we see in Revelation 21 and 22.

In Revelation 22 we see the completion of Creation in a set of comparisons and contrasts.

First, in Genesis we see God creating Man, breathing into him “the breath of life”. As I said last week, “God is the Creator and Re-creator. We are procreators. When we conceive children we are privileged to bring with God a new soul into being. And if that child dies, either in or out of the womb, that little girl or boy will be with us in heaven forever more as I said last week. Like Jesus, our children are an eternal gift as we believe.” In Revelation God recreates us through the Resurrection of the Dead.

Second, in Genesis, God creates a Garden, a Paradise for Man to live in. In Revelation God recreates this Garden within the City of God, the New Jerusalem that comes to the New Earth.

Third, in Genesis God places the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden.



(Pause here to look at trees)

In the New Heaven and Earth he again places the Tree of Life. “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.”

Fourth, in Genesis, 3:17b the ground is cursed because of the actions of Adam and Eve. In Revelation 22:3 that curse has been removed, “No longer will there be any curse.” Remember this is Paradise. We as humans will return to our first job of tilling/taking care of the garden. If you ever wanted to be a farmer your chance is coming.



I found this joke on a Jewish joke website, “Adam was walking outside of the Garden of Eden with Cane and Abel. Cane and Abel looked into the garden and saw waterfalls, lovely birds, lush forests and fruit trees sagging because of the large amounts of fruit on them.

Then they took a long look at where they lived. It was dry, dusty, full of weeds, stickers and sick-looking trees.

"Daddy? Why don't we live in there instead of out here?" they asked.

Adam said, "Well sons. Eve and I used to live in there. But your mother ate us out of house and home."

Maybe the original sin was a failure to be accountable for your own sin.

Fifth, in Genesis God has a river watering paradise flowing from Paradise. In Revelation that "River of Life" flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. We also see that same river about midway through the Bible in the book of Ezekiel.

Sixth, in Rev 22:1 we hear of this "river of the water of life, as clear as crystal" And in Rev. 21:1 the beginning of this closing section of the Bible, we see the curious phrase, "And the sea was no more". This was another way of saying all evil was cleansed and gone. The seas were thought of as the place where evil resided and when they were gone; so was evil and in the place of the seas was the "river of life."

I want to speak to one question here before I go on with the contrasts. It is a very difficult question for some because it has touched some people's lives so personally and that is the question of suicide. I have been asked many times by very desperate and heartbroken people, "My loved one committed suicide. Will I see them in Heaven?"

I had a deeply insightful talk with a Roman Catholic Priest over this question after I was asked to do a memorial service for a RC teenager who had killed himself. The boy's parents came to me to do the service because they believed the RC Church would not do a service for the boy and at one point the Priest told me that was true. He said in the past if they did a service it would be done on the steps of the church. The casket couldn't be brought inside.

He said they did this before they understood mental illness. They thought this prohibition would stop people from killing themselves. It didn't work. So now they do services for those who kill themselves trusting in God's grace and forgiveness, which I do too. I don't believe

God will take a person's last desperate act and judge all their life against it. It would take me an hour to fully address this, but I say to those who worry, trust in God's love. There's "a wideness in God's love" as the words of the hymn say.

In Gen. we see Adam and Eve wandering in shame from the presence of God.

In Revelation the relationship is restored and we will see God Face to face. Our foreheads, in fact, will be tattooed with name of God. In the age and culture that these words were written, slaves had their master's names tattooed on their foreheads. Where ever they went they were marked as slaves and the property of the one who owned them. We will bear God's name, a new name too, in contrast to the followers of the Beast who had his name tattooed on their foreheads.

Seventh, there is eternal day. We will not be burdened by the heat of the day. We will not have to worry about stumbling around in darkness. All darkness and night will be ended. We will experience firsthand and forever more the truth of John 1:5. **"The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."** And 1 John 1:5 **"God is light and in him there is no darkness at all."** We will all walk in the freedom of the light of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the leaves of the tree of life are for healing. In this world we have sickness, illness and death. We are enslaved by the passions of our bodies and minds. We are often driven by our fears and bound by our addictions. In Paradise we will be free. There will be no darkness, no sea, no sin, no curse. We will be free!

On earth there will always those who seek to enslave us through addictions for profit. Our illicit drug trade screams of this and some people's attempt to make marijuana legal is just more of this. If this is passed, I believe will lead many to the bondage of addiction of many, because, yes, I have seen the ganja men of Jamaica deeply and hopelessly addicted. So make sure you vote.

In the end, what Paradise, Heaven will be like only God knows. We often cast in terms of our deepest desires, but we know when we die we will go home to God and what God has for us is good. So I leave you with this promise, “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,” 1 Cor. 2:9

Let us join now in communing with God and all those who have preceded us in the faith and all those yet to be, in Heaven, on earth in the New Heaven and New Earth. Amen.

May the ushers bring the Communion elements forward.