

Eden Restored at Emmanuel's Return – Revelation Part 20
Revelation 22:1-21

One pastor noted, “Christmas is a little like virtual reality, an image you can see but aren’t sure is really there. We all have the picture in mind: a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, protected by his teenage mother and her carpenter husband. Shepherds watching. Wise Men coming. But how do we know it’s real, or that it’s relevant? [P]

We can’t go back in time; but even if we could, how could we know that this child is really God in the flesh? He’s supposed to be the King of Kings, the ruler come to his realm. But his kingdom doesn’t seem to have changed much since his visit. We’re still plagued with disasters and disease. Ancient diseases to the Black Plague to Influenza to COVID-19. People are living longer, but they still die.

How did Christ’s coming, his First Advent, really change anything? How is Christmas more than virtual reality to your soul, to your family, to your problems? It’s a good question, and perhaps the *most* relevant issue we can discuss today.

As you know, the bad news of the Bible comes early, with the fall of humanity in Gen. 3. Because Adam and Eve refused the word and will of God, they were cast out of paradise: “*The Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden ... and placed on the east side of the garden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life*” (Gen. 3:24).

With the fall of humanity, everything changed. Satan became the “*god of this age*” (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus calls him “*the prince of this world*” (Jn. 12:31). Revelation 12:9 tells us that Satan “*leads the whole world astray.*” The present fallen world has rebelled against its true King.

At the first Advent, the Son of God came into this world to begin an insurgency, an underground movement to overthrow the “*god of this age*” and return the world to its rightful King. If Jesus is your Lord, you have joined his resistance. You are operating

behind enemy lines, participating in a revolution against the unlawful ruler of this fallen world. All because of the First Advent – the coming of Emmanuel – God with us.

But even after Christ returned to glory, his coming to us was extended with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who came to empower us to advance the Kingdom of Christ – to give us the wisdom, endurance, protection & boldness we would need to overcome the Enemy (Matt. 16:18). And if we will confess whatever is wrong between us and God and ask the Holy Spirit to fill our lives each day, He will grant us all we need to live faithfully for Him. *Then ...* Christmas will be real in us! The Son of God will make our lives his manger. We will be a living nativity, the presence of Christ in the world! The *Spirit* of God will use the *people* of God to build the *Kingdom* of God.

Then one day, the King of Kings will return to reclaim and restore all of His creation. This will be the Second Advent. We witnessed it a few weeks ago in Rev. 19 – *“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True ... The armies of heaven were following him, dressed in fine linen. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword ... On his robe, he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”*

And then, after His final defeat of the Enemy, after He is exalted above every authority as the only authority, He will make a new heaven and a new earth to replace the world corrupted by our sin, as we saw last week.

And now, as we come to Revelation 22, we see that we have come full circle. When Christ’s final Advent comes, you and I, who were barred from Eden’s tree of life, will be banished no more! Look again at v. 2: *“On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”* There’s a lot of profound packed into that verse!

Both in the ancient world and our world, we are used to main streets being lined with shops to meet our needs & wants. But Rev. 22 presents a very different kind of provision. Ezekiel 47 envisioned fruit trees for healing on either side of the Temple river. Many thought this to be 12 trees – one for each month. However, here, at the conclusion of

God's Word, the vision is of the single tree of life. Why? Because there is only one source of eternal life ... Jesus! The tree of life, whose leaves heal the nations, whose branches never fail to bear fruit, is a powerful and precious picture of Eden Restored at Emmanuel's Return. Since the Fall, we have been barred from partaking of life eternal. Because of that, we have come to know death all too well. At the Second Advent of Christ, that will all change once and for all.

The next verses reveal more about the restored Eden. V. 3 – *“No longer will there be any curse.”* Where do we find the first curse? In Genesis 3, upon the Serpent, upon Eve, and upon Adam. Near the beginning, we meet the curse. Here in these final verses, we meet its end. This is a reversal of the Fall. The curse of sin & Satan & death will be no more.

Right now, because of sin, no one can see the face of God and live (Ex. 33:20). We read in Rev. 20:11, that at the Final Judgement, even the earth and the heavens will flee from His holy presence. This would require a new creation – a new heaven and earth, a sinless place where God's children would now see His face. Verse 4 promises that day is coming. We will behold our King. Our Bridegroom. Our Savior.

But we are promised more. V. 5 – *“There will be no more night. They will not need the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.”* The dwelling place of God and His redeemed will be radically radiant. His glory is greater than all the light from all the stars that He has made. And we will be privileged to take in His glory for every moment of eternity. This light bestowed upon us is more than mere illumination – more than light to help us see what is around us. The Old Testament prophets give us more of the picture. They portray the righteous as shining with glory in the new heaven and earth. In other words, we not only *receive* His glorious light; we will *reflect* it as well. As His children, we will see Him; we will emulate Him; and we will *“reign with Him forever and ever.”*

But before we get to the heart of the matter, the crux of it all, let me share a few notes ...

V. 11 says: *“Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong.”* Why would the angel, a messenger of the Lord, say this? Is God sanctioning evil? No. Daniel 12:10 reveals that, in the end times, the wicked will continue in their wickedness. So, no, God is not inviting

anyone to continue in rebellion. Rather the language is ironic, serving the rhetorical function of challenging their unrepentance. The prophets Isaiah & Jeremiah did the same.

In v. 12, Jesus says: *“My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”* Now, we have to consider what these words communicate. The role of ultimate Judge – of giving to each person according to what they have done – is reserved for the divine. This role, belonging by God, expressed throughout Scripture, is here specifically applied to Jesus. And in case anyone missed it, Jesus’ next words making it abundantly clear: *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”* Jesus is the Lord Almighty! Jesus is God in the flesh.

This book began with beholding the glory of Jesus the Christ; and it is how it ends as well. He says in v. 16: *“I am the Root & the Offspring of David, and the Bright Morning Star.”* The Messiah would come from the royal line of David. So, the *Offspring of David* communicates: *“I came from him, from the lineage of David, come to save my people.”*

But there is more here. Jesus says, *“I am the Root”* (Not “I came from the root” “I Am the Root.”) *“I Am the Beginning. I Am before all. And so, David first came from me.”* But even more, Jesus calls himself *“the bright Morning Star.”* Gentiles viewed the morning star as a deity, but Jesus uses it as a Messianic name. So – Offspring of David – came for the Jew. Bright Morning Star – came for the Gentile. He is the Messiah of all.

Then comes the gospel. In these final verses of this final chapter of this final book of God’s Word, we are shown the way of life one last time. First, look at v. 14: *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”* Only the pure could enter the city’s gates. But I’m not pure. I’m guessing you’d say you’re not either. Not in ourselves. Not on our own.

But thanks be to God, our entrance through the gates does not have to depend on our worthiness – but on the worthiness of the Lamb who shed his blood for us. Remember Rev. 7:14, *“They have washed their robes & made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Those who enter the gates are not those who have washed their robes in their own

righteousness – that would only soil them more. No, Jesus is the only One who overcame sin and death itself – only He is righteous.

So how do we wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb; how do we become clothes with his righteousness? V. 17 shows us – *“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”* We are invited to come and receive! We are not asked to add anything to what has already been given – for that is not possible.

And so, the Spirit who grants life says to us, “Come!” The Bride, who is made spotless through the One who laid down his life for her, says to us, “Come!” To the one thirsty for forgiveness, for redemption, for a fresh start, for an enduring love, for an empowered life, for a purpose greater than yourself or anything this world has to offer ... Come. Take the free gift of the water of life.

Where do we find this water of life? John writes in his Gospel: *“Jesus answered, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘Where can you get this living water?’ ... Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’”* (Jn. 4:10-14)

Jesus is the Living Water. And He invites you to come and drink. He invites you to come and be washed clean and robed in his righteousness. Turn from sin that destroys. Trust in the Lamb who was slain. Live for your King who reigns. [P]

Now, let me ask, what would you say is the focus – the main message – of this chapter (of the entire book for that matter)? [P] Is it the promise of *Eden Restored* with the tree of life and the healing of the nations? That’s key for sure! Something that we hope and long for. Is it the *Final Invitation* to “Come” – to take the free gift of the water of life? This is absolutely vital – no decision is more significant! ... But something even greater than restored Eden or our salvation is preeminent – something proclaimed 3 times in this final

chapter alone. What is it? *“I am coming soon!”* It is all about Jesus! The Jesus who is coming back! [P]

So, when will Christ’s Second Advent come? [P] 1 Thess. 5:1-3: *“Now, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”* No one but God knows when Jesus will return. We must be ready every day, for it could be any day.

The early Christians were sure about this. They didn’t have our programs or property or professionals. But they had the one thing we have lost. They had the urgency and focused passion which come from knowing that Jesus could return today. Just as Christmas was a real event that changed history, the 2nd Coming is a real event that will culminate history.

And so they lived in the expectation of Jesus’ imminent return. They wanted to be found doing what they would be doing if they knew Jesus were coming back that day. They had a passion for proclaiming Christ, for they knew time was short. They wanted to be found serving the King of Kings when he returned to his Kingdom. So should we.

You have less than 5 days to be ready for Christmas, the first coming of God in the flesh. But you have only today to be ready for his Final Advent. John could say, *Marana tha!* *“Come, Lord Jesus!”* (v. 20). Can you? [P] Are you ready to meet your King today? [P]

The most effective, fulfilling, joyful way to live on this fallen planet is to live for your Savior & King. To refuse the god of this age for the God of all ages. One day, you’ll step on ground and find it celestial. You’ll breathe new air and find it heavenly. You’ll hear new music and find it angelic. You’ll feel a touch and find it Jesus. What if it were today?

Yes, let us be captivated by the heavenly picture that we have been graced to receive ... let us be captivated by the wondrous salvation that is now ours & is leading to eternity ... and yes, let us yearn to go there! But let us yearn all the more for Christ to come here! May we pray with John, and the saints through the ages – *“Come, Lord Jesus!”* Amen.