

Sermon – 03/08/2008 pm

River of Life

Study Text: Revelation 22:1-5

When God made Adam he put him in a garden, a beautiful garden called Eden. There were lots of trees in this garden, flowering trees and fruiting trees – and also the tree of life. A river watered the garden. God made all sorts of birds and animals to live there. He also made Adam a wife.

We don't read much about this garden after Genesis 3 until we come to a similar picture here at the end of the Bible. Why is this? It seems such a beautiful place. We don't read much about this garden because Adam was thrown out of it when he disobeyed God's command. God *placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden and a flaming sword* to prevent Adam from eating of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). Adam was thrown out with a curse on his head and on the whole of creation.

But this is not the end of the story. God sent his Son, Jesus, into this fallen world, this world outside of Eden, to deal with the sin of Adam and resulting wrath and curse of God. He sent Jesus to reverse the curse, and reopen the garden as it were, as an even more beautiful and glorious place.

Water Of Life

The angel who came to John in 21:9 continues showing him the bride, the Lamb's wife, the New Jerusalem which becomes the holy temple. The city-temple now takes on features of a garden with a river and tree(s). The throne of God and of the Lamb reappears as the central feature of this city-temple-garden, otherwise known as heaven.

A river of the water of life ran down the streets of city (22:1). Whilst there is no more sea in heaven there is a river, a river of clear, pure water. Ezekiel similarly saw a river flowing from the temple towards the east (Ezekiel47:1). It was full of life and healing. It flowed into the sea and healed the waters of the sea – the Dead Sea. This is powerful, life- giving water if it can heal the Dead Sea! John does not see where the river in his vision goes but he does see where it comes from, and he sees its waters as life giving. The river comes from the throne of God and the Lamb. It is life- giving water because of this source.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman 'anyone who drinks the water that I give will never thirst'. The water he gives is the water of eternal life (John 4). At the feast of Tabernacles during the water carrying ceremony Jesus said 'If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink' (John 7:38).

The river of the water of life symbolizes this eternal life which Jesus gives, life that will be consummated in heaven. Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). True and enduring fellowship with the Father and the Son is what heaven is about. The water of life symbolizes such intimate fellowship.

Tree Of Life

On the banks of the river of the water of life John saw the tree of life. That he saw it on either side of the river is strange – but this is a vision. In Ezekiel's vision there were many trees, and there is an indication of this here also (22:2). But in Eden there was only one tree of life and with regard to the symbolism of this tree it is best to see one tree. Why is this?

The word for tree in this verse means 'dry wood'. It is not the usual word for tree (dendron). It is in fact the word used for the cross on which Jesus died and by which he healed us from our sin (Galatians 3:13). The tree of life in Eden had to be protected from sinful man but through the cross, the cursed tree on which Jesus died, the way to the tree of life is reopened. The tree of life is on the banks of the river flowing from the throne of the Lamb. It is vitally connected with Jesus. The life this tree gives, just like the life the water gives, comes from Jesus.

The life giving quality of this tree is pictured in its abundant fruit; life giving fruit every month. Normal trees give fruit for only a month or so each year but this tree is super productive. In Eden all Adam had to do was care for the garden and eat of its fruit. Outside it was very different. He had to cultivate the soil and fight against weeds, pests and diseases as we do today. In this holy city there is no more fruitless toil and painful suffering.

Moreover the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Since there is no sickness or pain in heaven this healing must be spiritual. It probably refers to redemption in the blood of Jesus. 'The nations' is again a reference to this healing being for the whole world, for all who hear the gospel and believe in Jesus. *Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord* (Acts 3:19).

Throne Of Life

The throne of God and the Lamb shall be in this city-temple-garden (22:3). The river of the water of life flows from this throne. There is only one throne not two. In his first vision into heaven John saw a magnificent throne with One sitting on it (4:2). The Lamb was in the midst of the throne. Here it is made clear that both Father and Son are on the throne together. Jesus overcame and sat down with the Father on his throne (3:21). The holy Trinity is clearly one of unity and equality, three persons in one. Here we see two persons on the throne. The Holy Spirit may be symbolized in the water – 'the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son'.

No longer do we see judgments coming from the throne because the wicked have been cast into the lake of fire. Those under the curse because of sin have been destroyed. God cursed the whole creation, including Adam, because of sin. The Canaanites were under the curse of God because of sin and were given over to destruction. Those who broke God's covenant were under the curse (Deuteronomy 28).

On the cross Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law. The law has the effect of pointing out sin and condemning us. But it also leads us to Christ who sets us free from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). If you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus no curse remains. In your eternal home there is no more curse, hence no more suffering and death.

His servants shall serve him (22:3). His servants will come before his holy presence and see his glorious face. Under the Old Covenant, to see God's face meant death. No man could look on the face of God and live. Jesus wonderfully revealed the Father, saying to Philip *he who*

has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9). But that revelation was only for a short time. In eternity and in our resurrected bodies we will see his face continually and forever. We shall be eternally blessed as slaves who serve him – or ‘worship’ him as some translate this word.

His saints will also have his name on their foreheads. This was promised to those in the church at Philadelphia who overcame. They overcame by not denying Jesus even when tempted or persecuted by the world. *I will write on him my new name* said Jesus (3:12). The 144,000 with the Lamb had the Father’s name written on their foreheads (14:1). This you will remember was in contrast to those having the mark of the beast on their foreheads. This name, like the brand on a slave, signifies ownership and protection.

They shall reign forever and ever (22:5). The servants/slaves are saints at the same time. They sit with the Lamb on his throne, reigning with him. Daniel also spoke of the saints of the Most High being given the everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:18, 27).

What a glorious picture we have of the consummated kingdom of God and the Lamb. What awesome blessings await those who belong to Christ, those whose names are written in the Book of Life? God predestined us to be conformed to image of his Son. *Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified* (Romans 8:30).

Light Of Life

Since the Lord God gives light there is no need for lamps or for the sun. There is no night there. This is a summing up of what John has already seen in this vision. It is a new creation – the old has passed away. It is a new city, the city with the throne of God and the Lamb at its centre.

From the throne flows the refreshing water of life, irrigating the tree of life which yields an abundance of fruit. From the throne shines plenty of light, light of life. In his gospel John introduced Jesus as the true light that gives life to men. There is no more darkness, no more night. The glory of God and of Jesus will shine brightly forever and we will bask in the glory as we worship the One who gave us life, life everlasting.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon