

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Midweek Advent 3  
December 18, 2024  
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl  
**Eat and Live Forever**

The angel showed me the<sup>[a]</sup> river of the water of life, which was as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. <sup>2</sup>In the middle of the city's street and on each side of the river was a tree of life that yielded twelve kinds of fruit. The tree yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.

<sup>3</sup>There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>There will no longer be any night or any need for lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

—Revelation 22:1-5 EHV

During our Midweek Advent services, we have been looking at various trees which connect to Christmas. Two weeks ago, we explored the Tree of Rebellion. Instead of trusting in the goodness of God, Adam and Eve rebelled by eating the fruit that God had forbidden. In response to their rebellion, God promised a human Savior who would crush Satan's head.

Last week we explored God's solution to the problem of sin as we looked at the Tree of Promise. God acted in history to keep his saving promise. We looked at the family tree of Jesus. At just the right time, Jesus was born into this world as the God-man, true God and true man. He was born under the law to redeem us, to save us. As the descendant of David, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise, and he produces a greater kingdom than David had.

Today we see the full results of Christ's saving work. In a sense we return to where we started, focusing on the Tree of Life. But instead of going back to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve sinned, we see a glimpse of what Jesus has prepared for us in heaven. We see the Tree of Life.

Today we look at Revelation 22:1-5. One of the characteristics of the book of Revelation is that John sees visions. God gave various visions of things to communicate truths. In fact, John was instructed to simply write what he saw. We have such a vision before us today in Revelation 22:1-5. This is what John saw:

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As we look at these words, we can see some clear references to the Old Testament Scriptures. First of all, we clearly see some similarities to the Garden of Eden with some refreshing differences. At the creation of the world, in the middle of the Garden of Eden, God placed the Tree of Life. Evidently, if Adam and Eve would continue to reach out and eat from that tree, they would have lived forever.

Health experts are always giving advice on the best foods to eat to elongate your life in this world. Well, God actually created a tree that produced fruit which would do that very thing. Adam and Eve could eat from that tree and live forever.

But as we heard in the reading from Genesis today, God lovingly did not want Adam and Eve to remain living in that rebellious and sinful state. When they ate from the Tree of Rebellion, they became sinners filled with shame and guilt and separation. They hid from God rather than walked with God. It was a horrible situation they were in because of sin.

God didn't want to leave them in that sinful state forever. So, God cast them out of the Garden so that they could not eat from that tree and live forever. And God placed angels at the entrance to the Garden so that they could never enter it again. These were powerful cherubim, fiery angels. With a flaming sword that guarded the way to the Tree of Life. No one could eat from that tree anymore.

But in Revelation, at the end of the Word of God, we once again see the Tree of Life. But the angels aren't barring access to it. Rather an angel escorts John right up to it.

In John's vision we have direct access to this Tree of Life. Now, I want to highlight several things for you in this vision. First of all, notice from where the river flows in this vision. Do you see the source of the river?

**“The angel showed me the river of the water of life, which was as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.”** The source of this river is significant. The water of life is **“flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.”** The source of this life is not found in anything we have done. The only source of life is God himself. Life comes from the God who has prepared his salvation for us through the Lamb. The Lamb, of course, is Jesus. Therefore, life and salvation are found only in Jesus.

John saw **“the river of the water of life, which was as clear as crystal.”** Some of you know that I enjoy hiking in the wilderness. I love going into the mountains and spending a few days in the wilderness. And it is so neat to come across a beautiful stream flowing through the mountains. But even though the water of those streams looks so crystal clear, I wouldn't drink that water without filtering it first. It could do some bad things to my stomach.

But what John is picturing here is a river of water that is so pure and clear. It has no impurities. What is this river in John's vision? Well, what flows from Jesus that gives us purity? Everything he has accomplished for our salvation. Jesus gives us his forgiveness. Jesus took all of our impurities upon himself. He willingly came down to this earth on that first Christmas to remove our sin and guilt from us. He became sin for us. And what flows from him is perfection and righteousness. He is the source, the only source, of 100% purity for you and me.

So, this water supplies life for the Tree of Life. Remember these are visions that John has as God is communicating truths to us. And look at what kind of fruits the tree yields.

**“On each side of the river was a tree of life that yielded twelve kinds of fruit. The tree yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.”**

John sees a tree of life yielding twelve kinds of fruits. That seems to indicate that this tree is not only a source of everlasting life but also a source of abundant life. Just think about that this means in our lives. For one thing, there is no more death. That's gone. We know that **“the wages of sin is death.”** But since Jesus has removed our sins from us, that also means he has taken away everything associated with sin. No more death. No more diseases. No more pain. No more suffering. None of that. In fact, John sees that this tree's **“leaves are for the healing of the nations.”**

All the afflictions with which we suffer in this world are gone. They're gone. They are completely removed. Therefore, it makes sense that John would see that **“there will no longer be any curse.”**

Adam and Eve experienced the curse of God when they fell into sin. Jesus faced the curse and became the curse for us so that it would be taken away. So, there is no curse in heaven. All the consequences of sin are gone. The only thing we will experience is unending blessings.

And John sees the greatest of these blessings. **“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him. They will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads.”** The greatest blessing is that we will be with the Lord. We will see his face. None of us has seen God here in this world. We only view him dimly right now. We see him through his precious Word. In his Word he reveals who he is and what he's done for us. We see him as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But in heaven, we will see God face-to-face.

And there won't be any doubt about the connection we have with God. We belong there. We belong to him. In fact, his name is already written on us.

When I was a child, my parents bought me and my brothers the same T-shirts. I guess they got a bulk discount. I don't know. But I would take my T-shirt, grab a marker, and write my name on the tag of the T-shirt. This one was mine. Not my brothers'.

Well, God has done that with us. He has written his name on us. He claims us as his own through the waters of Baptism. He wrote his name on us. And it will be so evident that is true when we are in heaven, standing before his face, **“and his name will be on [our] foreheads.”**

Oh, what joy will be ours. Blessing upon blessing is poured upon us. John sees all of this. And finally, notice what else John sees: **“There will no longer be any night or any need for lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will shine on them.”** Does that stir up an image for you? Oh, it does for me. How about these words? “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord *make his face shine upon you* and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

This is the very blessing that God wanted spoken over his people. This is the blessing we speak when we gather together. These are not empty words. God is putting his name on the line. He's putting his name on you. He's shining on you. I don't know what will happen to you this week, but you will be blessed because God speaks his blessing over you. That's what is yours now and forever in heaven. Blessings from God.

You and I are members of God's kingdom. And as members of his kingdom, he pours countless blessings in our lives. Oh, I know that it might not feel as though your reigning in his kingdom right now. We face all sorts of pain and suffering as followers of Christ. But one day it will be very clear. John sees you when he writes, **“And they will reign**

**forever and ever.**" Oh, yes, you are kings and queens from the moment God brought you to faith in Jesus, but your kingship has been hidden under the dark clouds of suffering and persecution in this world.

But not in heaven. In the presence of God and the Lamb, with the face of the Lamb clearly visible to you, the glory of your royalty is no longer secret or hidden. It is visible and clear. And here's the great news! It will never end.

Oh, Handel beautifully reflected the truth, "And he shall reign forever and ever." But in heaven it will also be said of you, "**And they shall reign forever and ever.**"

When John wrote these words, Christians were literally losing their lives in martyrdom. This vision from John lifted their spirits. With promises like these, it's not surprising that the early Christians could face the lions in the arena and sing songs of praise to their God and Savior while they waited for the doom that had been decreed for them by emperors whose rule could last only a few years.

My friends, that's what is in store for you. Eternal life with unending victory and blessings.

So, let me ask you a question, "Why would you settle for anything less than what Jesus has prepared for you?"

Your house? Too small. God has a mansion prepared for you.

A decent income? Too low. God has an eternal inheritance prepared for you.

You know, Jesus once asked, "**What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?**" John helps us see that there is nothing in this world worth more than Jesus and what he has prepared for us.

So, what is the most important thing that Jesus has given to you right now? Is it not the food that he gives to nourish your souls? Is it not the promises that he reiterates for you in his Word? As John wrote in his Gospel, "**These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**"

There's the food that will give you eternal life. The most precious gift you have right now is the Word of God that proclaims the Word made flesh. That Word will nourish and sustain your faith until you are welcomed into the paradise of heaven. Therefore, my friends, eat and live forever. Amen.