

**Revelation 22:1-5** *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. 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. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

Dear friends in our Savior,

It must have been beautiful. They called it paradise. It was lush with green vegetation and trees that were full of fruit and pleasing to the eye. A river wound through the garden to ensure that everything stayed lush and beautiful. I'm talking about Eden, the garden that God created as the beautiful, marvelous, perfect home for Adam and Eve where God had intended his people to live forever. In addition to the vegetation and fruit, we're told of the gold, aromatic resin and onyx that were readily available. All of their physical needs were met. It was aesthetically pleasing. It was paradise!

This paradise provide satisfying work for Adam and Even in which they could put all of their God given faculties of body and mind to use for God's glory. The work of tending to this garden did not involve wearisome or burdensome toil and labor, but gave purpose to man and the opportunity to put to use the talents God have given them. Adam and Eve found great pleasure in the work that God gave to them in paradise.

In paradise, Adam and Eve were in perfect harmony with God. They had been made in God's likeness. They were like him in holiness and purity. Their thoughts were holy. There was no flaw, impurity, no envy, no pride, no hatred, no doubt or mistrust of God. All of their thoughts were in complete agreement with God's thoughts. Every thought they entertained and conclusion they reached agreed completely with God. Adam and Eve's emotions were in line with God. They found joy and delight in that which pleases God. All of their will—their impulses, desires and actions—were in complete harmony with God's will. Their words were nothing but love for God and one another. Their actions were the same; in all they did they served God and each other. There was no strife or discord. No harsh words. No sin. There was only perfect unity and harmony with God and with each other. Adam and Eve enjoyed a perfect marriage in every way. Scripture gives us the impression that they walked daily with God through this beautiful garden in the cool of the day. What an awesome place! It was beautiful. It was perfect. There was complete peace and joy. It was paradise! Oh how we would like to have been part of that place for only a little bit!

All of that was lost in an instant when Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of the devil. The very instant that Eve gave up her joyful trust in God, paradise was lost, not just for Adam and Eve but for all mankind. Sin took possession of their souls and every aspect of their hearts, minds and will. Now mankind knew good and evil by experience. They knew good as something they had lost and evil as something they were experiencing. Nothing would ever be the same.

With this sin, the image of God in which Adam and Eve had been created was shattered. Their thoughts were no longer in harmony with God. They no longer had full control of their impulses. Now selfish, unrestrained desires concerning the use of their impulses began to assert themselves. They were flooded with guilt feelings associated with shame and humiliation over their sin. When God came into the garden that night, they knew fear for the first time. Previously they would have rejoiced to hear God walking. Now fear gripped them. They were afraid to be in God's presence. Because of their sin, mankind had forfeited the blissful, restful fellowship with God that had previously marked the garden.

When Adam and Eve, in fear and shame, admitted their sin, God announced the curse that they would now live under on this earth. They were banished from the perfect garden that God had created. They not only brought death and destruction on themselves and every single person to live after them, but also subjected the entire world to frustration and the bondage of decay. Now, instead of abundant fruit, the ground would produce thorns and thistles that would hamper their growing and gathering of food. They would eat through painful toil. By the sweat of their brow they would now have to earn their food. Childbearing and rearing would now involve great pain. Worst of all, was the death that would come because of their rejection of God: not just physical death but eternal death as the wages that would be due to them for their sin.

Now life was to be lived outside the garden. Life outside the garden meant a tough life faced by the consequences of sin. Life outside the garden meant a life of wearisome toil and much sorrow and distress that would end in death. This is the life that you and I know. We can't even come close to understanding what life was like for Adam and Eve in the paradise of Eden because all we know is this life of sin outside of the garden. We know only the hardship and consequences of sin. We know only the shame and guilt of paradise lost. We know all about the selfish nature that controls each of us. We know the struggle against our sinful flesh and the pain and distress. We know the evil consequences of sin that lie in the inadequacies which we face in our tasks and responsibilities, in the frustrations we encounter and in the weariness and exhaustion which we experience in our labors. Our entire life has been lived outside the garden under the curse of sin. We feel it every day as our bodies experience decay, people die, there are famines and disasters, we have to work hard for food and shelter and there is so much uncertainty,

worry and anxiety. Having babies and raising kids is difficult and often filled with sorrows. The picture of our current home is pretty bleak. It is full of despair and lacking in hope.

That is until we remember the promise that God made to restore this paradise. Immediately in the garden, after sin had destroyed paradise, God made the wonderful promise that he would send someone who would crush the devil's head and restore paradise to his people. This God brought about through Jesus. You know the wonderful story of our Savior. Through his perfect life lived in our place, his innocent sufferings and death as our substitute, and his powerful resurrection from the dead Jesus restored paradise to God's people. He wiped away the guilt and shame of our sin and restored us to the original image of our Creator. He gave to us the gift of his holiness. He made us the holy and pure people God wants us to be and promised us life with him in his paradise of heaven.

This is the picture that God holds before our eyes this morning—the picture of paradise restored and waiting for us! What a change it will be! What a wonderful eternal home God has prepared for us! What a contrast it is to what we know now. John was privileged to see a vision of this paradise that awaits and we can't help but notice the similarities between the original paradise God intended for his people. In Eden, the river went out to water the garden. In the New Jerusalem that awaits, John saw a river flowing out of the throne of God with the water of life. This water of life is the forgiveness of sins that God offers to his people that is complete and flawless so that nothing more is required of us to make us perfect, blameless and sinless before God. The source of this forgiveness and salvation is God. The water is clear as crystal, having no impurities to wash us completely clean of the filth of our sin. In the Garden of Eden, the tree of life had power through its fruit to bestow everlasting life. John sees this tree growing by the river whose leaves could heal the nations. It produces enough fruit for all to eat of it and know everlasting life. In Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed intimate communion with God. In Paradise, the inhabitants of heaven will live before God's face in his presence and enjoy that perfect communion for all eternity. After the fall, the curse of sin struck the whole earth and brought death to mankind. In Paradise Restored, the curse is removed forever. There is no more death, disease or pain. All of the afflictions from which men suffered in this world because of sin will be completely removed. What a wonderful place! The Paradise that was lost is now restored through Jesus!

God has this home waiting for all the saints who endure the trials of life and finish their lives with faith in him. God paints this picture for us to give us the strength to endure what comes before us and to remind us what he has waiting for us. Too many people tenaciously cling to the thought that the bliss and glory of paradise is attainable on this earth. They live under the delusion that they can create this paradise here by removing disease and sickness, by creating better housing, schooling, recreation, improving ecology, distributing the wealth. They hope to attain this by banishing ignorance and poverty and through heroic efforts to prolong life. All of these are good in and of themselves. All of this could be welcomed with heartfelt thanksgiving as blessings of God if he so grants them. What is wrong is man's feverish effort and hope of turning this earthly life into paradise.

The reality is that because of sin this earth is full of trouble and God's people are not exempt from this. We constantly face danger. These dangers remind us that we are not to look for paradise here, but the better life that will be ours when Jesus comes and we enter into an everlasting, never-ending heavenly home filled with joy and blessedness. On earth, we are never safe. An accident may strike at any time. Anyone at any place may be struck by some fatal disease. The enemies of God and his people are still here. The devil is stalking God's people like a lion ready to strike. God holds this picture of paradise before us so that we can lift our eyes from what we daily see and feel in our bodies and find hope in the heavenly home that awaits through Jesus. He holds this picture before our eyes so that we can draw strength and hope during the inconveniences, difficulties and pains of our earthly pilgrimage. Amidst toil, sorrow, pain and frustrations we face as reminders of sin and its curse, we are to find our refuge in the grace of God displayed in Jesus in the free gift of salvation that he so graciously gives to us.

Many times when people go on a vacation, they print a picture of the place where they are going to help motivate them through the tough times with the reminder that something better is coming. This is what our God does to us today. What a picture: A place that is free from temptation, bodily sickness, mental anxiety, grief and fear. It is a place where there will be no more inner struggle between flesh and joy. Your heart will be filled with pure and lovely thoughts. Only God pleasing words will ever be uttered. And whatever is done will be done in pure joy for God. And this will last forever and ever! We can't fathom the joys of this place. Even our best joys of life eventually come to an end. Vacations end. Great nights with friends end. The joys of paradise will be yours forever!

With such promises to give them hope, it is not surprising that the early martyrs could face the lions in the arena with joy in their hearts and sing songs of praise to their God and Savior as they waited for the doom that had been decreed for them by the emperor. Keep your eyes on the same promise of what awaits and draw your strength and courage and patience and cheer from it to bear up under the tribulations of life. Hold this picture before your eyes when illnesses strike you or your family and don't want to let go. Hold it before your eyes when the weariness of parenting is getting you down. Hold it before your eyes when your marriage hits a rocky spot and you have thoughts of giving up on it. Hold it before your eyes as life gets hard with the work and labor before you and exhaustion starts to hit. Hold it before your eyes when you feel like giving up, giving in or letting go. Hold up this picture of paradise restored and look what is waiting for you. God has promised that through Jesus, the saints will triumph and reign with him forever. Paradise that was lost is now restored and waits for you through Jesus. Amen.