

**+ Revelation 22:1-5 + Our Future Leads to a Heavenly Home¹ +
+ 2nd Sunday of End Time: Feast of All Saints + 1 November 2015 +**

This morning we're going on a tour. Now tours may not necessarily be one of your most favorite activities. You might even think they're boring or a waste of time, but it all depends on what you're touring. For some, a tour of a battlefield or the restored home of a president is more exciting than a factory tour or a stadium tour or a brewery tour. Others think the opposite. Some might enjoy a backstage or behind-the-scenes tour, while others prefer to take in what's right in front of them as they tour a city or a region or even a country. Maybe you enjoy a tour of churches like ours!

Today our tour is a little different than any of those tours that I just mentioned, because today's tour involves a glimpse into our future. The Apostle John gives us a glimpse of what awaits those who remain faithful followers of Jesus to the end. In one sense, it's like a home tour because we're getting a glimpse of the home that will be ours in heaven someday. In another sense, it's like a city tour because we get a glimpse of the New Jerusalem—a place where every believer in Christ will dwell someday. In yet another sense, it's like a history tour except we're going to see what's going to happen rather than look back on the good and bad that happened.

Before we go on this tour, it's important to remember that in this vision, the Lord uses earthly terms to describe the indescribable. He's describing heaven. Without using terms and imagery with which we're familiar, a full description of heaven would be so far beyond our limited human minds that it would be impossible to understand. You and I have to do that sometimes when we try to describe an abstract concept like peace or love or when we try to describe something that is beyond what our minds can comprehend like eternity.

God also uses such familiar terms to comfort and strengthen us when we're hurting or weak or feeling helpless. Knowing what awaits you in heaven gives you the comfort and assurance that the suffering and struggle which accompany your Christian faith in this life are more than worth it. That's why the Lord encourages you to remain faithful, even to the point of death. In fact, that was the purpose of this book. It was written to believers who were struggling under pressure and persecution for their Christian faith.

As we begin our tour, John tells us how the Lord allowed him to look ahead to a beautiful, heavenly city, ***"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"*** (Revelation 7:2-4)

What a sight! God himself is there with his people—his believers all rescued by his gracious, saving hand. Yet unlike this life, in that heavenly city, there will be no more death and no more of effects of sin and death—no more mourning and grief, no more bitter wailing, no more painful toil. Instead the Lord in his gracious love removes ***"the old order of things"***—how sin and death seem to rule every day of our lives, and declares, ***"I am making everything new!"*** Jesus reminds us that he's preparing a new and better future—free from sin and death—for us in the glories of heaven.

Now the Apostle takes us into that Holy City and shows us what the Lord has waiting for us. Using imagery that we can comprehend, John describes how he saw a river and a tree in our heavenly home. Both are full of life. We see a river with water so clear and refreshing that it actually gives eternal life from its one and only Source. ***"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 down the middle of the great street of the city."***

Over that river, we see a tree, but not just any tree. We see a tree that bears fruit every month and grows healing leaves. This ***"tree of life"*** was last seen being protected by an angel with a flaming sword in the Garden of Eden. You see, Adam and Eve had sinned. So God didn't want them and all who came after them to be stuck in an eternity of this old, sinful life with all its pain and grief and sorrow and guilt. So God prevented Adam and Eve and everyone else from partaking of the fruits of the tree of life.

¹ Some of the thoughts from this sermon were adapted from the 2014 Lenten sermon series "From Garden to Glory" produced by Northwestern Publishing House.

Yet here we find that tree again offering life eternal, but there's no more flaming sword keeping us away. We have access to that source of life and even to its leaves that bring healing and reconciliation to people opposed to one another. ***"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."***

So what's the point of these pictures? Consider the next thing we're told: ***"No longer will there be any curse."*** The curse of sin fell on all humanity and all creation back in the Garden of Eden. That curse brought ruin and sorrow, pain and shame, guilt and death to all of us, but in our heavenly home, that curse of sin and its awful, tragic consequences will be gone. The curse of death, hell, Satan, and every kind of suffering will be erased.

You see, just like a river of crystal clear water, Christ's pure righteousness and his forgiveness of sins give us life forever. In our heavenly home, the effects of his death on the cross will never run dry. Just like a tree that produces much fruit and even has edible leaves with healing power, Jesus said, ***"I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full."*** (John 10:10)

With bodies held back or crippled with sin, with minds corrupted by temptation and guilt, with hearts hurting with grief and sorrow, it's almost impossible to imagine what such an abundant life would be like. Because of sin, you and I are not able to fully enjoy everything in this life at all times as God intended. In fact, because of sin, if you enjoy anything too much, it enslaves you and becomes another source of death. Then whatever you enjoy doing ceases when you go to your grave, but in heaven, there will be perfect satisfaction. Your enjoyment will never cease. No pleasure will have a bitter side effect, and no sin will ruin and corrupt it.

What a wonderful glimpse of our heavenly home, but there's more! ***"The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."*** You could actually say, ***"his servants will worship him."*** Now you might think, "Oh, great! Heaven's going to be so boring! I'm going to spend my time serving and worshiping the Lord? What's so exciting about that?" Yes, you might not get all excited about that now, but imagine how awesome worshiping our Savior-God will be without the dullness, monotony, and sleepiness of your sinful flesh weighing you down.

Think about it! On this side of heaven, you and I can only take God at his Word. You can only cling to his promises by faith, but in heaven you will actually see the face of Jesus, the face of God—and you won't be in any danger! You will see the same Savior-God who made all these promises, and you will finally have the reality as John points out, ***"They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."***

That will be your greatest source of joy. Nothing else in heaven or on earth will be more fulfilling and satisfying than that. After all, the sole object of your faith is to be with the true God who loves you dearly. It's not unlike Peter's reaction when he saw the glorified Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. ***"Lord, it's good for us to be here. Let's stay awhile!"*** (Matthew 17:4) He wanted to keep the Lord with him on earth, but in heaven that's what you'll have for eternity!

In your heavenly home you won't be in any danger of losing your salvation, no temptations or bad influences to struggle against, for Scripture tells us that Christ's name will be on our foreheads. In a sense, God will brand or label us as his own as we were at Baptism. Your almighty and merciful Lord will not lose you nor lose track of you—and your relief will be eternal.

In your heavenly home as you serve your Savior-God who will be living right there with you, you won't have to worry about getting tired and growing weary. You won't even need sleep because ***"there will be no more night."*** In fact, you won't ***"need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give you light."*** Even now, your gracious Lord points you to that heavenly future every time you hear this blessing, ***"The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you."*** (Numbers 6:25) God's glorious mercy shines on you and me, and that glorious light will reflect from us for all eternity.

You see, in heaven, you and I aren't going there to be servants slavishly worshiping a holy deity. Our service, our worship will not be toil or drudgery or boring. Why? Because this is how Jesus describes us, ***"they are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."*** (Luke 20:36) Through faith in Christ Jesus, we are ***"God's children...children of the resurrection."*** Because we're children of God, as John explains, ***"...they will reign for ever and ever."*** That means you'll share in Christ's glory as a co-ruler with him. His eternal inheritance is yours and you will reign with him. Jesus has made you his royal brother or sister through his holy, precious blood.

With that glimpse of glory, the tour ends. Our future in Christ leads to a heavenly home like none other—a home being personally prepared by Jesus, a home where there will be eternal and abundant life, a home where there will be perfect healing and reconciliation, a home where we will be with Jesus, with God himself forever, a home where we will serve and reign forever. As you face suffering or trouble or difficulty in this life, dear Saints, don't lose sight of what awaits you. Don't lose sight of the Savior who awaits you, who will one day make all things new for you and all believers forever. Amen.