

## **Sermon 60: Revelation 22:1-5: Paradise Regained**

### **OUTLINE**

Garden  
Temple  
Kingdom

### **INTRODUCTION**

'Protology is eschatology' is an important truth that helps you grasp the unity and overall storyline of the bible. The study of first things makes no sense unless we study them in light of last things. God by the power of His Spirit and through the work of His Son is driving the story of the bible towards the realities of the New Creation. From the very beginning of the bible God is setting things up and preparing us for the greater future realities that are reserved for us in the future. By way of progressive revelation God who is the single author behind the bible wields the human authors as His pens to speak of these future realities. So what starts as a garden, becomes a land, gets concentrated as a temple, exists as a church, will culminate in the Garden-temple-city-kingdom that is spoken of in these closing chapters of the bible. As we come to the end of the story and God wants to tell us about what is coming He draws on the pictures of the Garden of Eden, the Temple, and the kingdom. Those were the shadows that had stored up in their outlines a pointer to these realities. We want to ponder the paradise lost, and foreshadowed in the paradise regained.

### **Garden**

V1, 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.' We are being shown around the New Jerusalem by our tour guide the angel of the 7 bowls. We have considered the exterior of the town and are progressively being shown more pertinent details. We are taken to the main street of the town and we see a river. The River. We know that the Garden of Eden was abundantly supplied with water. Gen. 2:10 talks about a single river that divides into four to water the Garden. When there was no rain and all other things were watered by a mist, Eden was well watered. The place where God would dwell with man had a river in it providing all man's needs. So here in the new creation we see a river. It is the river of the water of life. It is clear, a point we take for granted in our day of water filtration. And it flows directly from God's throne. This river featured largely in prophecy when God was speaking about future grace. In Ezek. Temple in Ezek. 47:1-9 a river runs from the temple, this is that river. This is the river of Zech. 14:8 that flows from Jerusalem. This is the river of Joel 3:18 when God restores Israel's fortunes. All those promises were looking forward to Garden of Eden fruitfulness and peace, and here they are fulfilled. Now many questions arise at this point? Do we have to drink the water to get life? Does the water work in a sacramental fashion? What would happen if we didn't drink could we die, or will we all just inevitably drink? How often would one have to drink? Is there rain in heaven if there is no sun, and will there be other water to drink? Or is the river a symbol of something else? We have stated that the water of life is often associated with God, especially the Holy Spirit, as well as God's sufficient provision for us. The river satisfying our deepest needs flowing from God in a sinless world is the point not the mechanics of how the water will work, the detail is not given to us for that reason so withhold your questions.

V2, 'through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.' As we walk with our tour guide along the river from its source we see what grows on its banks. The tree of life. Not just in one place but it has diversified and grows on both sides of the river and yields 12 kinds of fruit. The number 12 we know is for the people of God, indicating the food for the people of God. The fruit is not annual but monthly. (how do you record months without days?) There will always be fruit on the tree. And the leaves we are told heal the nations. The tree we know also comes from the Garden. Adam probably had not yet eaten of its fruit before he had sinned, and was removed from the Garden before he did 3:22-24. The river and the tree speak of paradise regained which had been lost but in greater proportions to what we lost in Adam. How literally we can take this is unknown. The nations do not need healing. The inclusion of the nations in this picture is the result of the us and them separation between Israel and the nations in the OT still flavouring the promise. The OT picture of the new creation was still in its infancy stages in progressive revelation and still had nappies on. There was still a temple, death, sin, Jews and non-Jews, circumcision, unclean, etc. These anomalies are pointers for us as we interpret the text. They are not contradictions but indicators of what we should be seeing as getting fulfilled in this section. In other words, many things once thought to be for the millennium in order for them to be interpreted literally are in fact in shadow anticipating the new creation. I see a principle of consolation and restitution, God giving back what the locusts have eaten.

V3, 'No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.' Whenever we think of Eden we can't help but think of the curse, but here we are told explicitly, there will be no more curse. The world which was subjected to futility as it shared in our corruption will be renewed. Relationships which had been ruined by sin will be freed. The presence of satan as our prison warden over. Our alienation from our environment, finished. No more moth and rust destroying, no more ageing, no more sickness, no more death, no birth defects, no stillborn children, no dentists or hospitals, no glasses or braces, no corrupt nature drawing us away from God to sin, no more inward struggle with sin. V3 tells us that then we will be free to worship. Can you imagine it? Your mind will not wander, the truth will never be familiar and boring, your emotions will be firing on all cylinders, there will be no shame that makes you hang your head and hang back, you will have a perfect voice, all your bad theology will be replaced with truth, and all your doubts and questions which breed reserve will be swallowed up in informed abandon. God will be our portion, our treasure, our love. No running from Him and hiding making fig leaves to hide our shame, we will be perfected by grace and shameless in His presence.

## **Temple**

Not only do we have themes that take us back to the bliss of the pre-fall Garden, but we also have themes borrowed from the temple and priesthood woven into the matrix of this picture. The links between the garden and the temple are undeniable. The garden and the temple were the place where God met with His people. In Gen. 2:15 we are told that Adam was to work and keep the garden. This is the same language describing the priest's duties in the tabernacle, Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6. Just as the priests were entrusted to keep out all uncleanness and unlawful people from the various parts of the tabernacle, so Adam was entrusted to keep out all uncleanness from the Garden. When the unclean serpent came and slandered God, Adam was to act to cleanse the holy ground and put the guilty to death, but failed. Adam was driven from the garden and God's presence was guarded by cherubim, likewise God's presence in the tabernacle is guarded by cherubim. Solomon's

temple had garden themes uniting palm trees, cherubim and flowers, (1 Kings 6:18, 29). And both Eden's and the temple entrance were on the East side.

The river in this portion is just like the river that runs from Ezekiel's temple in 47:1-9. The trouble is that when the fulfilment finally comes there is no more need for a temple because Jesus has fulfilled all its significance. In Ezekiel's vision we see the river and trees growing on either side, this is what the fulfilment looks like. It is not literal but better, more developed.

There are other priest/temple themes here too. In v3 we see the servants of God serving in a perpetual priesthood in the immediate presence of God. Every saint will be a priest. Have you ever read through the psalms and deeply resonated with David's desire to be in the temple of the Lord, the king who wanted to be a priest, Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.' As we live as perpetual priests we will be living David's desire.

V4, 'They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.' We will see His face. There is no greater desire, and no greater theological problem than this. God does not have a body, He is Spirit. He does not have eyes, ears, hands, feet. 1 Tim. 6:16 as part of a doxology Paul says of God, 'who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.' What about all those sightings in the OT? They were theophany's, John 1:18, 'No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.' So what do we make of this, the beatific vision? It might be that Jesus is the one being referred to as the context allows in v3. Or there is a theological point being made. In the OT we know that no one could see God and live, Ex. 33:20, 'But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.'" In light of God's holiness and our sinfulness we know that this is true. Because of sin we can only come to God through our Mediator Christ. The theological point being made is that there is no more sin. Whether we will actually see God in His essence is a debated point, and I come down on the side of saying no. We will see manifestations of His glory, and we will see Christ, but I don't think we will be able to penetrate to the essence of God as a finite creature even though sinless. The gap between God and man is not merely one of sin but one of nature as well. Beholding His face is the fulfilling of all David sought and the fullness of the blessing the OT priests pronounced upon Israel. It is likely that it is meant as it was meant of Moses, Ex. 33:11, 'Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.' We will not be sold short or disappointed, but neither will we become divine knowing God as He knows Himself. We can only ever know as creatures, and then we will know without sin and without restriction apart from our nature as creatures. I believe this is the missing ingredient in worship today. We think God is the Mormon god, a man, a daddy, when He is 'immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes.'

But we also see that His name will be on our foreheads. The Highpriest wore a plate which said 'Holy to the LORD' on his head. This name indicates our priestly role as well as God's ownership of us, our protection by Him, and our citizenship in the New Jerusalem, Rev. 3:12.

## **Kingdom**

V5, 'And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.' Have you ever had a day you never wanted to end? That is what the new creation is going to be, it will be day and no night. In Narnia it was always winter and never Christmas, in the new creation it is always day and never night. That Sabbath day that Adam failed to enter, we will enter it and it will never end. God's glory will be pervasive and we will not even need a light.

There is one last idea I would like to place before you that picks up on themes from earlier in the bible, 'and they will reign forever and ever.' Go back to the garden and you will find Adam. He was given dominion over God's creation and commanded to reign and subdue it as God's vice-regent, Gen. 1:28. Adam sinned and lost his authority and was an exiled king. We all fell in him and lost our inheritance rights to the earth and were placed under Satan's power as a type of prison warden. But God brought the Israelites into Egypt and established a new kingship. It was however imperfect. And the shadow kings who hearkened back to Eden and pointed forward to someone greater repeated the sins of Adam and suffered the same fate as Adam, they were deposed and exiled. But Christ the true King comes and in His ministry He reveals to us the Kingdom. His kingdom will be without demons, sickness, death, nature will comply with His will, etc. By His death and resurrection He inaugurated that kingdom but has not yet consummated it. We live now in the already but not yet when Jesus is ruling but is waiting for all enemies to be put under His feet. But one day when Jesus returns Christ will consummate the kingdom putting all things under His feet. The church militant walks as Christ walked in His incarnation, as humble royalty. We have authority but it is resisted. Those saints who have died we have revealed in Rev. 20:4 rule with Christ in the intermediate state where running parallel to the church persecuted in the tribulation on earth some have already participated in the first resurrection by going to be with Christ in the intermediate state. But all that will come to an end and in the new creation we will see a restoration of Adam's dominion in Christ's full dominion and we will be co-regents with Him sharing not only in His riches but rule. Man's original dignity and destiny will be fully realised.

Paradise lost becomes paradise regained. Protology gives way to eschatology, shadows give way to reality, promises to fulfilment and all that Christ died to accomplish will be achieved. All of this is revealed not to tickle your imagination but to fuel your perseverance.