

The Book of Revelation

Week #21 – River of the Water of Life

I. REVIEW – WEEK 20

A. The New Heaven and the New Earth

The forces of evil having been defeated, John now turns to the establishment of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

- The theme is the new heaven, the new earth, and the heavenly city of God, the New Jerusalem.
- Nine elements of the old order disappear: the sea, tears, death, mourning, weeping, pain, the unclean; all that is under God's curse, and night.
- Of these, the sea and the night symbolized the primeval chaos out of which God created.

B. The New Creation

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

- The new creation does not necessarily involve the physical destruction of the universe.
- But it does imply a total renewal and restoration of it by removing the disorder and distortion of sin.

The new creation is no longer subject to death and decay caused by the ravishing effects of human sin.

- Sorrow will be no more; sin will be vanquished; darkness will come to an end.
- Perfect peace will reign in the new heaven and the new earth.
- The new creation is a wedding of heaven and earth where God dwells among men.

However, Scripture nowhere indicates what form the new heaven and the new earth will take.

C. Catechism of the Catholic Church

1042 At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign for ever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed.

1043 Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, "a new heaven and a new earth."⁶³²

1044 In this new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men.

Those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, "the holy city" of God, "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."⁶³⁷

1046 *For the cosmos*, Revelation affirms the profound common destiny of the material world and man:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.⁶³⁹

1047 The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, "so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just," sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ.⁶⁴⁰

D. The New Jerusalem

[2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;

The Holy City, the *New Jerusalem*, describes both heaven and Christ's Bride, the Church.

- Its builder and maker is God:
- It is inhabited by the entire assembly of the saved, the entire people of God.
- The *New Jerusalem* comes down from heaven to be with the saints.
- It touches down to earth so that the worshipping Church can join in the heavenly liturgy of the angels.

We have a foretaste of this in the Eucharistic banquet, where our heavenly High Priest is present under signs and symbols.

- In the Mass the heavenly Jerusalem touches down into our Churches and God dwells with us.

E. All Things New

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

For the first and only time in the entire book God himself speaks. He is the God who is able to make all things new.

- These words are to be written down and remembered for they are absolutely true and trustworthy.

F. The Fountain of the Water of Life

To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.

Jesus says that those who are thirsty will come to him, and then living waters will flow not only from himself, but also from them.

- *"Behold, I make all things new"* begins with the rebirth [re-creation] in the waters of Baptism.

G. The Glory and the Shame

Entry into the Kingdom – into the family of God - is only for those who remain faithful to Christ.

- To the faithful one God makes the greatest promise, *"I will be his God and he shall be my son."*

H. Taking the Easy Way

On the other hand, among those destined for the lake of fire and the second death, the cowards are listed first.

The cowards are those who loved ease and comfort more than they loved Christ. They denied Christ for safety's sake.

II. THE RIVER OF LIFE

Read: Revelation 22:1-2

[1] Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

[2] 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; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

A. The Holy Spirit

The water flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the main street of the city, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, flowing from the Father and the Son.

B. Ezekiel's Vision

John draws on Ezekiel's vision of the New Jerusalem where the great river flowed from the new temple out to the Dead Sea, revitalizing the salt water, making it fresh with fish.

Along the banks of the river grew trees bearing fruit each month with healing in their leaves [c.f. Ez 47:1-12].

C. Eden Revisited: Paradise Regained

In John's vision the river becomes the river of Eden [Gen 2:10]

"A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden . . ."

It is the river that gladdens the city of God [Ps 46:4]; and the fountain of living water springing from Jerusalem [Zech 14:8].

The new Jerusalem is the new Eden - paradise regained.

The water is life-giving water symbolic of the Holy Spirit. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says:

"He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive (John 7:38, 39)

D. The Tree of Life

The trees lining the river bank in Ezekiel's vision become, in John's vision, the one tree of life first mentioned in the Garden of Eden.

The tree of life is no longer forbidden, it is there on each side of the river; no longer is there a flaming sword barring access to it as in Eden, after Adam's sin. Nor are its fruits confined to the Jews.

Jesus made the Cross the tree of life, giving its fruit to those reborn in the waters of Baptism. His death and resurrection gave full access to the tree of eternal life for all.

E. Twelve Kinds of Fruit

The tree bears twelve kinds of fruit, indicating that it is a sign of God's people, the Church of the twelve apostles, the restored Israel. It also recalls the fruit of the Holy Spirit; Love, Joy, Peace, etc.

The fruit may also be understood as the Eucharist given to the nations.

Its leaves are for the healing of the *nations*.

F. The Beauty of Holiness

Read: Revelation 22:3-5

[3] There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him;

[4] they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

[5] And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

This is the climax of the description of the city of God. No accursed thing shall be in it – nothing unclean, no more sin to seduce and contaminate, because the thrice-holy God and the Lamb inhabit it.

There is no need for sun or moon for His glory gives light to the whole city.

G. The Beatific Vision

God's servants shall see his face. Jesus' promise that the pure in heart will see God will come true [Mt 5:8].

The direct vision of God is the great hope of Biblical spirituality and the greatest blessing of heaven.

Seeing God face to face is called the Beatific Vision.

Because they see him they shall be like him. The name of God on their foreheads shows that they belong to him, sealed by Baptism.

This is a profound privilege denied even to Moses, to whom God said, "*You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live*" [Ex 33:20].

III. THE FINAL MESSAGE AND OUR RESPONSE

Read: Revelation 22:6-9

A. What Must Happen Soon

[6] And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

[7] And behold, I am coming soon." Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

[8] I John am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me;

[9] but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

The book draws to a close by restating ideas from the introduction, tying the beginning and end together. Once again, the sense that Christ is fast approaching dominates the tone.

There are several points:

- 1) The message is trustworthy and true since it comes from God;
- 2) The "trustworthiness" of the prophecy is bound up with warning that Christ is coming "soon." This cannot simply be the end of time. It is imminent. He is just around the corner.
- 3) His coming is as close at the next Eucharistic celebration; and in the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70.
- 4) Because this is a genuine book of prophecy, those who read it and spread its message are called "blessed."

B. Worship God

Again John is warned to worship God alone – the angel is only another “fellow servant.”

C. Do Not Seal Up the Prophecy

Read: Revelation 22:10-13

[10] And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

[11] Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

[12] "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.

[13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

John is forbidden to seal the scroll, because the message is urgent and must be read to the churches as soon as possible. Daniel was told the opposite:

"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" [Dan 12:4].

John, therefore, is told that the end is about to come.

D. Hang On a Little Longer

Because of the imminent coming of Jesus, John is told to let the wicked continue in their ways – the time is short.

The righteous should continue to endure because they don't have much longer to wait for the just judgment of God who is “*the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*”

E. The Accepted and the Rejected

Read: Revelation 22:14-15

14] Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

[15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.

Those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb have the right of entry into the City of God and access to the Tree of Life.

“Washing” their robes and “eating” from the tree of life points to the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

“Those who have washed their robes” shows our part in salvation. It is Jesus Christ who, in his Cross, has provided that grace by which alone man can be saved; but man has to appropriate that sacrifice.

Those who enter into the city of God are those who have accepted the sacrifice.

F. The Rejected

The heavenly city is protected from the contamination of sin, with evildoers kept far outside its walls. Those who may not enter the city are listed again:

[15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.

G. The Root and Offspring of David

[16] "I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."

Jesus is the Davidic Messiah. The heir to David's throne is called the root of Jesse in Is 11:1, and the “offspring” of David in 2 Sam 7:12. Jesus is saying that he is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

H. Bright Morning Star

The name for the planet Venus is the morning star, visible just before daybreak. As the bright morning star Jesus brings about the dawn of a new age.

I. The Great Invitation

17] The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come." And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.

The last chapter of the final book of the Bible ends with a united plea for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The Church – the Bride of Christ – joins the Spirit in inviting all men to salvation.

Every Christian is invited to join in this prayer, and discover in the Church the gift of the Spirit, symbolized by the water of life.

The *Spirit* has been pleading and has been acting in a sovereign way in this our age through the Pentecostal renewal of the Churches.

It is up to the Bride now to join the Spirit in pleading for Jesus to come.

Mary, the Mother of the Church, has an important role to play in preparing the Bride for the coming of Jesus.

J. The Warning

[18] I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, [19] and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Using language similar to that of Moses' admonitions in Deuteronomy [4:2], the readers of Revelation are warned not to change anything in the book, or they will suffer the consequences – loss of the tree of life and the holy city.

K. Come, Lord Jesus

[20] He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

[21] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

The promise that Jesus is coming soon is strengthened by an oath formula, "Amen."

The response of the saints is, "Come, Lord Jesus." Jesus' coming is definitely imminent. He is coming in the year 70 AD with the judgment on Jerusalem.

He is also coming soon in the next celebration of the Eucharist. The very word "Amen" is a liturgical response.

From the earliest times the Church considered the Eucharist to be an anticipation, a celebration in, a sign, of the Lord's coming.

And he is coming again at the end of time.

Prayer

Jesus, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End!

When I experience storms in my family, my Church, and my world, may I keep my eyes fixed on you, as Peter should have done when faced by the wind and the waves.

Keep me from demanding a road map when you have said, "I am the way." Keep me from demanding to know in detail what tomorrow holds, when I know it is you who holds all my tomorrows. Amen.