

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**

**November 17, 2013**

**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 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. 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

*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.*

I think you've all seen the ads on television for places like Atlantis, Disney World, going on a Carnival cruise or a deep sea fishing trip off the coast of Florida. These places offer beautiful weather and a refuge from the cold. They offer white sand beaches with plenty of sun. They promise you will be able to catch the biggest fish you have ever seen. All of these places offer us something. However, they have one thing in common. They all claim to be a place of paradise.

How can these places claim to be paradise? They tell us white sand beaches and plenty of sun will relax us and these beaches will melt our worries away. Sunshine promises to replace the gray and gloom of winter. It will leave us happy and refreshed. The family time and enjoyment of a cruise or tropical resort will make us feel like royalty. The deep sea fishing adventure will give us a thrill which will last for a lifetime.

All of our lessons today paint us a picture of paradise as well. We are going to focus specifically on the lesson from Revelation. It says, **"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. 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."**

**"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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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."** Doesn't this sound wonderful? Wouldn't you love to go to this amazing city?

Compare God's vision of paradise with the vision advertisers try to offer us. First, think about a beautiful tropical island with white sand beaches. We could look at the picture and think to ourselves that this is paradise. It looks warm. It looks inviting. We could lay out in the sun. It would be great. However, what if I said this island was in the path of an immense storm like the one which just hit the Philippines? Would still be willing to call this place paradise?

What is God's vision of paradise when it comes to the sun? **"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."** We won't need the sun anymore in God's paradise because God himself will be there. He will shine on us with his presence. We won't have to worry about major storms because God will shelter us and be with us.

Second, I want us to think about going on a cruise or to a resort and see how it matches up to God's view of paradise. These places try to make us feel like royalty. They try to cater to our every need or desire. They try to help us forget about life and focus on fun. But, what if the ship we are on strikes an iceberg and starts to sink like the Titanic? What if the ship we are on has a fire in the engine room which cuts all power to the ship and makes life miserable like it was on the Carnival Triumph? Still paradise?

What is God's plan to make us feel like royalty? **"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. 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. 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”** God promises us he will make us feel like royalty because he will be with us. We will get to see his face because we will be living in the city of God. The tree of life will nourish us and we will be able to drink from the river which flows directly from God’s throne. Which idea sounds better?

I think you are starting to get the picture. We can never have paradise here on earth. We can dream up what it would look like. We can paint what we think is the perfect picture, but it will never truly be paradise here on earth. Why? Why won’t it really ever be paradise here on earth? It will never be paradise here on earth because of sin. Sin leads to troubles and frustrations in this world which prevent earth from being a paradise.

These troubles and frustrations include things that break down. These troubles and frustrations include gigantic storms which cost people lives. Sin leads untold suffering and hardship. Do you know what the worst part about sin and its frustration is? It isn’t the storms which it brings in this world. It isn’t the fact our stuff breaks down or wears out. It is the fact we often times invite the pain and hurt which sin brings right into our own lives.

Think about a family vacation once. We might think going on a family vacation will be paradise, but what soon happens when we do? We start to get on each other’s nerves. Siblings fight with each other. Parents get mad because their kids instead of listening whine about how much they hate this trip. Some of the family wants to do one thing. Others in the family want to do something else. One group gets its way and the others become unhappy.

What does the unhappy group do? They start to complain. They figure if they are unhappy it means everyone should be unhappy. They spoil the good time the rest of the family is having. Does this sound like a good time? Does this sound like paradise? No. It sounds like a miserable and horrible experience. It shows we can never have paradise here on earth. It is impossible to find because sin will always find a way to ruin it.

Where can we find perfect paradise? The only place where will be able to find a perfect paradise is in heaven. **“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. 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.”**

**“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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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.”** God promises us heaven will be paradise restored because sin and its curse will have been removed forever.

Why will the curse of sin be removed? All those who are in heaven will be there because the name of Jesus’ is written on their foreheads. We will be in heaven because when God looks at us he sees a stamp across our heads which says we belong to Jesus. Jesus’ blood has bought us our ticket into heaven. He provides us with a much better paradise than we could ever imagine. He provides us with a paradise which is perfect and lasts forever.

Heaven is a place where we won’t have to worry about storms or things breaking down. Heaven is a place where we won’t have to worry about getting on each other’s nerves. Heaven will be a place where wounds will be healed. Heaven will be a place where we don’t need any sunlight or shelter. Heaven will be a place where we get to be with and serve Jesus’ forever. We won’t get sick of being there and we won’t ever have to leave because we will be reigning forever and ever with Jesus.

Today, we especially remember those saints who have gone before us and are now at rest with Jesus. We thank God for them because they knew and understood the importance of God’s kingdom here on earth. They pressed on despite the corruption and chaos sin produced in their lives. They fought because they knew they could never produce a paradise which lasts here on earth. Heaven is the only place where paradise can last forever.

What about us the saints who are still fighting and struggling here on earth? How can we become saints triumphant? Keep this vision of paradise restored in front of you. **“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. 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. 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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.”** Keep it in front of you. Hold God to his promise to take us there since he placed his name on us. Amen.