

Sermon 6-2-19
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
Based on the Second Lesson for the 5th, 6th and 7th Sundays of Easter,
Revelation 21-22

The Book of Life

Last week we briefly examined the well-known historical human experience of having a vision. A vision is a waking dream. The person having a vision sees and hears things that any others in the vicinity do not. Last week, we compared a vision to a computer generated virtual reality. Only in a vision there is a direct link between a human brain and the supernatural source of the vision.

Some visions are from Yahweh, our Creator. Some are from other sources. There's only one way to tell the difference, and that is through the Word of God, the Bible.

The Apostle John was given a very marvelous, lengthy and strange vision that he wrote down in a book called the Revelation. In Greek it is Apocalypse. John knew that the vision was from Yahweh because He saw the same suffering and victorious Messiah Jesus, crucified and risen, as he had seen on earth. And John knew that both a suffering and victorious Messiah was prophesied in Moses and the Prophets. He knew the validity of the vision by the Word of God.

In the vision recorded in Revelation John saw the end of the present earth, and present universe. Revelation's main theme is judgment and wrath – God's judgment of human rebellion, sin and evil. John foresaw God sending 21 crushing catastrophes upon planet earth. Yet earth's inhabitants will refuse to repent, and their persecution of Christians will become more extreme.

Finally, after the 21st catastrophe the Lord Jesus appears as the Victorious Messiah come to vanquish all His enemies. He avenges the blood of all His saints who have been persecuted to death because of His Name. This earth is consumed and the universe as we know it is brought to an end.

Following this event, John saw that all who have ever lived must stand before the judgment seat of their Creator. We read in Revelation 20:11-15, "11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

The lake of fire is the destiny of all those outraged at the prospect of dwelling with their Creator, and their Messiah both here on earth and for all eternity. In the

lake they will receive what they have always wanted. They will never have to deal with Yahweh again. They will receive a dwelling of their own free from any responsibility to Yahweh and His goodness. Therefore, like the devil, they will become totally free to define their own goodness.

Here on earth the centuries have shown us what things look like when human beings define their own good apart from the righteousness of Yahweh. The horrid concentration camps and the hundred million dead in the wake of the Communist urge to create a good and just utopia is just a foretaste of the lake. This is why I say existence in the lake will be an eternal combination vicious marriage argument/bar fight/gang war/holocaust/utopian building world war. All will be eternally deceived into thinking they can build their own good when in reality they have fallen into all the evil and depravity possible to fallen angels and fallen human beings. The lake will be a place of eternal rage and despair where no one can die because they will already be living an eternal death, the second death – the total death to Yahweh’s gracious righteousness.

However, in the passage from Revelation 20, did you notice that there is something that saves a person from the lake of fire? It’s having your name written in the book of life. But what exactly is this book?

We read in Revelation 13:8, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” The beast is an agent of Satan, the deceiver. The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world is Jesus, the Son of God. So, we see that Jesus is the only way anyone’s name gets written in the book of life. By the way, that song we sing – Worthy The Lamb That Was Slain – comes from Revelation. He’s Jesus.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Sin is deciding for ourselves what is good, apart from Yahweh’s holy Law. An example of this is abortion. Our governor and legislature think abortion is a great good. But is it?

So, Jesus came to earth to have all our sin loaded upon Him in order that He might suffer in our place. In effect, for our sake Jesus was submerged in the lake of fire while on the cross. And by willingly and obediently suffering the lake of fire for our sake, He paid for our sin. In this way, Jesus could bestow on us Yahweh’s righteousness as a free gift as it says in 2Corinthians 5:21. It’s God’s gift of eternal righteousness that gets a person’s name written in the Lamb’s book of life.

No one can earn having their name written in the book of life. For the righteousness of Christ alone does it. When your name is written in the book of life you have received a righteousness you don’t deserve and haven’t earned. It is the free gift of God that comes by faith in the person and work of Messiah Jesus. Therefore, when by God’s gift of faith we have believed that Jesus is our personal forgiveness of sins, and that He personally has given us eternal righteousness before our Creator, then let our hearts rejoice and let us be committed to the one who is absolutely committed to us. We are saved by grace through faith in the Word alone.

So, at the judgment seat of God everyone’s eternal fate will be determined by the names written in the Lamb’s book of life. We have already seen the fate of those whose names are not written there. It’s the lake of fire.

But what of the fate of those whose names are written in the book? That's what we looked at last week in Revelation 21. These verses are so wonderful that they're worth hearing again. Revelation 21:1-7, "1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 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.' 5 He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' 6 He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'"

What exactly does it mean to dwell with God? It means to dwell in a goodness and righteousness that we can't even begin to imagine. Everything on the new earth will be a gazillion times better than the best day on this earth. The misunderstandings, moodiness, unfaithfulness, boredom, dissatisfactions and fears of this life will just disappear. For, sin and the results of sin will be gone. It will be true utopia – the utopia of God. Those who will inherit the new earth will be truly alive because they will be alive to God's perfect righteousness. Yahweh's righteousness is life itself.

And as we just saw, everyone who is thirsty for this life of righteousness is invited to drink of it without cost. We can't clean up our own unrighteousness. For the sinful nature is stronger than God's righteous Law. However, Yahweh sent His Son to do for us what the law cannot do. He came to make us the righteousness of God. That is what all who drink of Jesus, the water of life, will find to be true. Nevertheless, we are still stuck in these bodies conflicted with the sinful nature. Therefore, until the great day of resurrection and the new earth we graciously receive the righteousness of God through confession of sin, receiving Christ's absolution and submitting ourselves to Lord Holy Spirit's daily transforming righteousness.

So there are two paths in this life. One leads to Yahweh, our Creator. The other leads away. One leads to Messiah. The other leads away. One leads to the fountain of eternal life – Yahweh's righteousness. The other leads to the second death – the total death of Yahweh's righteousness in a human being. Therefore, the call of the gospel goes forth. Turn! And drink without cost from the spring of the water of life who is Jesus.

In our second lesson for this morning, we see the great close of the Book of Revelation. Revelation 22:1-5, "1 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 2 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. 3 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. 4

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 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.”

By the grace of God we’re getting a look into the eternal inheritance of God’s people. It’s life without death; righteousness without sin. No more is anything accursed. All the burdensome judgments Yahweh laid upon the human race in the book of Genesis are gone. And as far as getting a tattoo, we’ll all have the wondrous Name of Yahweh on our foreheads. Everything will be bathed in that glorious otherworldly light that brings out extravagant and exquisite color, better than a sunlit day in May when the world is full of new green.

Revelation 22:6-7, “6 The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’ 7 ‘Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.’”

How do we keep the prophecies of this book? By contemplating the disasters prophesied in the first twenty chapters and repenting of sin. Then, by contemplating the last two chapters, and being encouraged in the gospel by the new world coming at the return of Christ.

Revelation 22:8-11, “8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’ 10 Then he told me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. 11 Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.’”

The book of Revelation has much in common with the Old Testament books of Ezekiel and Daniel. At the end of the book of Daniel, Daniel dialogued with the angel who had brought him a great vision. We read in Daniel 12:8-10, “... I asked, ‘My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?’ 9 He replied, ‘Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.’”

Do you notice the similarities? Except for one thing – Daniel’s vision was sealed until the time of the end. But, that means the time of the gospel. Therefore, five hundred years later the prophecy in Daniel was opened up in Jesus. Two thousand years later the vision of Revelation is still open to us for repentance and our encouragement.

Revelation 22:12-16, “12 ‘Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14 ‘Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.’ 16 I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for

the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

As we noted last week, those made righteous in Christ will be forever kept safe from all deceiving serpents in the city of God on the new earth. For, those who love and practice falsehood, including Satan, will be sentenced to the lake of fire where they can no longer harm the righteous. There will be no repeat of Genesis chapter 3.

Revelation 22:17, “17 The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” The bride is us – the Church of Christ. Therefore, in league with Lord Holy Spirit we have the task of inviting the world to “come.”

As we conclude Revelation, it may seem that these things are not real. But, why isn’t the lake of fire a reality? Just look at the terrible things that happen on earth when we decide goodness for ourselves, and attempt to build utopias. The horrors of concentration camps and killing fields are just a foretaste of things to come.

And, will the new earth be a reality? Again, why not? Look at the good things that can happen when people dwell together as best they can under the righteous will of God. There is peace and faithfulness, security and gladness. These are a foretaste of blessed things to come.

Therefore, all those who are weary of their own sin and the sin of this world are welcome to drink without cost of the righteousness of true life who is Jesus Christ. Lord Holy Spirit and the Church say come. Lord Holy Spirit, grant us an infilling to courageously say to the world, come. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.