

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.
“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

REVELATION 22:1-5

¹The angel showed me the river of the water of life, which was as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. ²In the middle of the city’s street and on each side of the river was a tree of life that yielded twelve kinds of fruit. The tree yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.

³There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will no longer be any night or any need for lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.



Several years ago most of my brothers and sister got to visit Disneyworld for a second time. My little brother had not been born yet the first time we went, so it was fun to see it through his eyes. But none of us had seen Disney’s ANIMAL KINGDOM yet. In the center of Magic Kingdom is Cinderella’s palace; in the middle of Epcot Center is the giant “spaceship earth”; but in Animal Kingdom it’s a giant tree. Their tree of life stands 144 feet tall and 50 feet in diameter. It is immense! There are thousands upon thousands of branches, and it is the focal point of all kinds of nature and animals and exhibits, tying everything together.

But there’s just one thing; it’s not real. The tree’s skeleton is actually an upside-down oil rig, and the branches are all artificial. The tree’s outside is made of cement and plaster. And as it turns out, the happiest place on earth can be a lot like waiting in line at the BMV, only in the Florida humidity. Florida in December was no better weather than Indiana in a Fall rain. Comedian Jim Gaffigan says, “How can I spend an enormous amount of money, be extremely uncomfortable, and listen to my children complain and whine? Disney!” Gaffigan says his favorite ride was the air-conditioned bus back to the airport.

What we find in Revelation of St. John is something far better, something far happier, than anything this world could promise, even the happiest place on earth. And as much as I enjoy Disneyworld, there is no way I’d choose the animal kingdom tree of life over the great tree God describes today.

PEEK INTO PARADISE LIFE

1. Flowing from the throne
2. Focused on the throne

The Bible only says the word “paradise” a handful of times, and this is not one of them. But “paradise” is an ancient Persian word that means “garden,” and that certainly fits the description.

By His truth and power, Jesus has locked up the devil (20:1-3) and demolished His work (1 John 3:8). Revelation 21 has already told us there is no death, no mourning, no crying, and no pain, and every tear will be wiped from the eyes of the redeemed. All who believe in Jesus are therefore victors over the devil and victors over sin. Finally the Bible leads us into symmetry in this last chapter.

We started with a garden, with the tree of life, and with union and communion with God. So we end with paradise, with the tree of life, and with the throne of God and the Lamb.

The first thing these St. John sees is a river. It is streaming with *the water of life, clear as crystal*. The river at the end of time shows up in several places throughout the Bible. Each time, there is a slight location difference. In Ezekiel, the river is flowing from the temple, emptying into the Dead Sea to make it fresh and alive. In Zechariah, flowing East and West out of the city of Jerusalem, to water the desert. So it may be difficult to talk of a physical river. It is equally difficult not to think of Jesus, who told a woman in John 4 about water that is greater than an Old Testament well. His water of life will quench the drinker's thirst forever, for Jesus Himself is the water of life.

The fact that this river is *clear as crystal* suggests that all impurities have been swept away. Heaven's water of life has no dirt or bugs or debris. But more importantly, it doesn't carry any speck of greed or coveting or lust. No sin flows in heaven, for Jesus Himself is the water of life, and the river flows *out from the throne of God and of the Lamb*.

It will be God and His powerful reign that brings us the flowing water of life. No false god offers this river of the water of life. Only the Creator God can remake the blessings of Eden into a paradise that is even better than before.

More than that, flowing out of the throne and the Lamb reminds us that the source of our salvation is not to be found in anything we have done or merited. Instead, the sole source of salvation is God, who prepared salvation through the Lamb. There is an admission fee to God's paradise, and it was far more expensive than a trip to Florida, a night at the resort, and a day in Disneyworld. It cost the lifeblood of the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He has prepared it for you so that it would cost you nothing.

ILL: My vicar year, training to become a pastor, was in Orange County, Florida. One of our members' brother had worked at Disneyland for years. He was generous enough to stand at the park entrance and give me free tickets four times that year, along with friends and family. The man had done electrical work underwater for the Finding Nemo attraction. He had paid for those tickets with tenure and risky electrical work. I trusted I would get those tickets, and sure enough, he brought me in. >>>Trust in your ticket holder, who put in the risky business of being our Savior. By faith alone in Jesus, we take hold of the price Jesus paid, and are ushered in for free.

We are also told that there is a tree. If you'll remember back to the garden of Eden, there the tree of life was a place to show worship to the Lord. But eating from the other tree in the garden brought a curse. So this tree became forbidden because men would live forever (Gen. 3:22). Later on, we learn in the Law of Moses that cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. Even later, the Savior Jesus became the curse for us by torture and death on the wood of the cross. Now what will those who enter paradise see? The tree of life has been restored, where they can eat and live forever! Now this tree blooms in foliage of healing!

This is true because now the CURSE is gone. In verse 3 the Bible literally says, "*And every curse shall be no more.*" The curse of pains in labor and sweat in work; the curse of sadness and suffering; the curse of arguing with our neighbors over politics and impeachments; the curse of wondering what comes next; the curse of sin and its closest of friends, death. Those in heaven will not have those warnings of eternal death looming over them anymore. Such are the curses that God and the Lamb have removed.

Because every curse shall be no more, those who enter this paradise will not be focused on tree, limb, fruit, crystal-clear water, or streets of precious metal. Their heavenly happiness will be contingent NOT on all these decorative things, but on the Lamb and His eternal reign. Their focus will be on Him.

You may feel like you would NOT like to go to heaven to be a servant of God. But the citizens of heaven will not be servants because of oppressive labor. They will be servants because they will be bound to God's righteousness and confirmed in holy deeds. There will be no thought of hurting or laziness or trouble or stress. Remember, the curse of sweat and hard labor is gone, so that they will enjoy work.

God's glory would strike us dead if we viewed it, but now we learn that in heaven, stripped of our sin, believers will be allowed to adore Him. "*We shall see Him as He is,*" says 1 John 3:2. Just as Peter was happy at the day of Jesus' Transfiguration, "*Lord, it is good for us to be here,*" God's glory brings joy we cannot yet understand. His shining face will prove the absence of the night, the darkness, the curse, or any looming death.

The final line may be confusing. "*And they will reign forever and ever.*" We may remember the line from Revelation 11:15, "*And He shall reign forever and ever.*" We may remember Revelation 20:6 that the souls of the beheaded will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. This line is a furtherance of that promise. *And they will reign forever and ever.* It is one thing for God to reign. It is one thing for God to win paradise for Himself. Yet today He not only wins it; He gives it to others to reign, just as Adam and Eve were given dominance and authority in the original garden.

To whom will God give this reign? Will you be a saint triumphant in the victory of Jesus? Will you eat this fruit, walk in this foliage, and drink this everlasting water? Will you see Him face-to-face? You who long for every curse and every consequence of sin to be erased; you who know the holy cross of Christ; you who agree that God is true and right; you who rest in His resurrection; you who have His name on the forehead, the forefront of your mind; you who drink already His flowing side; place your trust in the Lord Jesus. The triumph is yours already, and one day soon the garden will be, too; in Jesus' name, Amen.