

Last week we talked through one of Ezekiel's visions that he received from God showing him the judgment that was about to come on the nation of Israel. It included a look ahead to the judgment that would come to all people. The elements of the vision helped us to see that judgment was coming and God was serious about it. But God also did something about it.

This morning we're faced with another vision, this one to the apostle John. It's recorded in the book of Revelation. In a major portion of this book John receives visions of terrible scary things. The same story told over and over. This world goes on as it has since paradise was lost. Remember the beginning, Adam and Eve were created perfect. They lived in paradise, a place called the Garden of Eden. Soon Satan came disguised as a snake and convinced them to eat the fruit they weren't supposed to eat. The resulting sin caused the paradise they lived in to be lost. That reality was reflected in scenes John saw in his visions. Life was hard, the end would come where it looked like Satan would win.

It's not hard to admit we live in that time of paradise lost. The events in Paris on Friday night make that clear enough. Terrorist acts around the world confirm it. Death is an ever present reality. Every drive is a potential accident waiting to happen. Every time we leave the house there's a potential for crime against us. Our lives are so fragile they could be over at any moment from a heart attack, stroke, or cancer diagnosis. In paradise lost we face sickness and weakness. The weather changes and we ache. The other kids at the daycare sneeze and suddenly our kid is sick. The common cold is just that, common. Life here since paradise was lost in the fall into sin has been one of sin for each of us.

The vision in the second lesson is the culmination of visions in Revelation. There is no reminder here of Satan's small victories. We don't read about how life looks terrible. We need no reminders that paradise has been lost. This vision is all about the victory. How when things look impossible, God rescues his people and ultimately wins. Paradise was lost but God wins, and we win with him. We look ahead to say...

Paradise lost will be paradise restored

Listen again and concentrate on the picture language. **"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."** Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? A clear as crystal river with flowing water of life. The throne of God clearly visible as the source of this river of life. The tree of life standing next to the river, bearing its fruit, readily accessible, with leaves that bring healing. An ideal scene you might find on vacation or in a peaceful picture hanging in your home.

But we might sputter on some details. If you were to try and rationally explain them, how would you depict the water flowing from the throne? Or the river flowing down the middle of the street? Or the tree of life on both sides? How could one tree bear twelve different kinds of fruit, one per month? The more you work to explain the details the less you actually can. But how the scene looks isn't nearly as important as what it means. In the book of Revelation its vision language, so it's meant to picture something for us. Here it describes a paradise restored.

In the paradise restored to come eternal life is what it's all about. That's demonstrated in two ways. The river is the water of life. Refreshing, always cool, giving you back a life rejuvenated. And the tree is the tree of life. That might be calling to mind the other of the two important trees in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve couldn't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But the tree of life was also there. Once they ate from the one they were sinful and paradise was lost. They were forbidden and barred from eating from the tree of life. In paradise restored access to the tree of life is granted. It produces so abundantly all eat and live forever. There is no more death. And since its leaves heal, paradise restored will have no disease, no sickness, no weakness of any kind.

This vision isn't meant to be 'pie in the sky' thinking of what the ideal life could look like here on earth. God's more practical. He wants you perfectly aware of another reality hidden just below the surface of your life. While the real world says you're fragile and God's law says you're sinful, this hidden reality says something totally opposite. You're redeemed. You're a saint. You're a redeemed saint of God right now. Hidden below the pain and persecution, the sickness and struggle is the promise of paradise restored. And that was reality for you from the moment you were brought to faith in Christ Jesus. The moment the water passed over your head in baptism. The moment the Word penetrated deep into your heart and the Holy Spirit took up residence. Nothing can diminish the truth that paradise will be restored for you. Not because of you, but because of the Lamb.

Who is the Lamb? All throughout the book of Revelation, at one point he's the slain Lamb. At one point the victorious Lamb. At another he looks like a son of man. The Lamb is of course Jesus. The Lamb is the reason you're redeemed and you're a saint right now. The Lamb was slain for you, shed his blood for you like all the lambs before him as a sacrifice. But his blood was precious because he was perfect. His holy blood made you right with God. His shed blood restores what sin took. You have eternal life in the blood of the Lamb who was slain.

We can get caught up in the picture, details, and descriptions of this paradise restored to come. But we might miss a phrase so simple yet so powerful. **“No longer will there be any curse.”** Since Adam and Eve, this world has been under the curse of sin. We continue living under that curse. We’re fallen sinners in a fallen world. But in paradise restored there will be no curse. Sin will lose its grip. Punishment will no longer be a threat hanging over us. Life will be easy because it will be perfect. In heaven there will be no more curse. You’ll live in the Lord’s light. Paradise will be restored.

A hidden God is no secret to you. He’s the invisible God we can only read about now. When we talk about him it’s almost an abstract concept since no one has seen him, no one knows everything about him. But what if that weren’t always going to be the case? What if you could see God face to face? Stand right before his throne forever. In paradise restored that’s what you will have. God’s name will be stamped on you permanently. You’ll exist in his light. Not artificial light or sunlight. They won’t be necessary. God will provide the light that lights up paradise.

Nothing about this paradise will disappoint. It won’t be boring and it will never be dull. **“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.”** That’s you and me someday, servants of the Lamb in the paradise of heaven. Serving in heaven will be perfect, like the way work was always supposed to be. Adam and Eve worked in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world. Work was a gift of God, it was perfect. Paradise restored will bring us back to that reality. You’ll be serving the Lord. And listen to one way that will happen. **“And they will reign for ever and ever.”** You have no concept of that now, but as a gift of God it’s got to be good. Whatever you’ll do to serve the Lord, whether reigning from his throne with God and the Lamb, or perfect work of another kind, it will be good. In fact better than good, it will be perfect and you won’t want to be anywhere else.

You wait for paradise restored and everything described in this vision. While you wait, I can call you saints. Do you believe that? It’s all too easy to forget that’s what you are. Easy to drift. But you don’t drift today from God’s love and forgiveness. Not today, not ever. One day everything will change. For the saints triumphant it already has changed. They know exactly what it’s like by sight. They’re enjoying the perfection of paradise restored. You remember these loved ones, these now saints triumphant. Their faith trusted in Christ Jesus alone. When they faced tough times you quietly heard them whisper how they knew Jesus loved them. When blessings came into their life they raised their eyes to heaven and silently thanked God. They lived in faith. Now those saints live triumphant face to face with Jesus. No darkness, no sin, no death, no pain or problems. They live in a light that comes from God. They serve him and reign with him in eternity. Paradise lost has been paradise restored for them.

Jesus is your Lamb of God. You may not see his face yet, but you can remember his cross. That cross is your real promise of forgiveness, the love from God you need. That cross lifts away the penalty and the curse. You owe nothing for your sins. Your sins are completely gone, paid for by Christ. It’s true, it’s yours, and it makes you a saint right now. A saint on earth waiting to become a saint in paradise. I hope it fills you with eager expectation and confident hope. Waiting for you is a reunion with loved ones of the past. Waiting for you is an exponential expansion of your family since all believers will be your family. Best of all look forward to seeing God face to face. You’ll live in his light. The light of his love will forever shine on you. Paradise lost will be paradise restored for you.