

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 Lamb² 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. (Revelation 22:1-5)

Find Your Happy Place!

Do you remember the movie *Finding Nemo*? If you're not up on your children's flicks, *Finding Nemo* is about a clownfish named Nemo who gets picked up by a diver and put into the aquarium at his office. Nemo's father sets out on an epic quest to find his son. There's this scene where Nemo is in the aquarium and the diver's niece starts banging on the glass. While the shockwaves are going through the water, a starfish starts chanting, "Find a happy place! Find a happy place!" I was amused by that because it's a parody of a common therapy technique that's used for lowering stress. The therapist tells you to envision your perfect spot. It might be a beach on a tropical island. It might be a quiet spot by a lake. Whatever it is, that's your happy place. You're supposed to think about it when your life gets stressed.

We could think of our text for today as God's take on that therapy technique. But God never tells us to choose a happy place. In this text, he gives us one. And he intends us to go there mentally when life is hard. The book of Revelation was written during a time of persecution, a time when life here was brutal. God gave these images of a better place to get us through what hurts here. This better place is your truest happy place. My friends, **find your happy place!**

I.

Now, I've told you many times that the book of Revelation is a book of visions that represent what God is doing for us. In Revelation chapter 22, we've reached the big finish and God is talking about the ultimate goal of every Christian. Just to be clear, that goal is not heaven. We do go to heaven when we die. Jesus won that for us when he died and rose. But that's not the end. The end comes when Jesus comes back. The end comes when we rise from the dead and God wipes away sin and sorrow and gives us a new home. In Revelation 22 John saw the Church in that new home after the resurrection.

God showed John a city – not a dirty, industrial, slum ridden city like we're used to, but a city that sparkles and shines, the New Jerusalem, the City of God. At the center of that city stand the throne of God the Father and the throne of the Lamb – of Jesus. Out of that throne a great river is flowing. The river represents the gospel that brings us into this golden city. It flows from the very throne of God because God himself gave us the gospel.

But the detail that's most striking is the return of the tree of life. John sees it **"bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month."** Today, we go to the grocery store twelve months out of the year and we expect to find fresh vegetables and fruits. In John's day, even kings couldn't eat oranges in the winter. But the tree of life will bear fruit all year round. Every month, a person will be able to go and eat from it. What does that mean? Well, when Adam and Eve sinned, God threw them out of the Garden of Eden so that they could not eat from the tree of life and live forever. That's what Genesis says. But when we rise from the dead, we will go back to Eden. We will be able to eat from that tree and live forever.

Now is this an image or is this how it's really going to work? Will we eat actual fruit from a physical tree? I don't know. It doesn't matter. What matters is that death will die. Drive around town here. How many funeral homes do you see within a half an hour of this church? And every time I have to go to one, they're busy. Open the newspaper. How many people are listed in the obituaries? We keep dying. Every one of us has been dying since the moment we were born. And there is no cure for it. If the Lord doesn't come back first, you will die. Today, tomorrow, ten years from now or fifty – at some point your life on earth will end. But when Jesus returns, death will die. And we will live forever.

John said that the leaves of the tree of life **“are for the healing of the nations.”** Just this past week, at least three of our members had surgery. At least two more were in the hospital. How many dozen had colds or stomach problems? How many of you take some kind of medication? Many members of our church have plastic containers divided into 21 sections so that they can keep track of their morning, noon and night pills. What a blessing it would be to have leaves of a tree that put an end to all that! That erased the effects of age, that smoothed wrinkles and erased scars, that restored organs and eliminated cancer. But you know what? This healing is more than just the physical. It’s a healing of all the hurts and sorrows of life. How much would you pay a therapist to take away guilt and loss and the sense that you’ve been abandoned or mistreated? How much would it be worth to you to have your heart be perfectly at rest? That is what is coming.

Why will all those things vanish? Because hurt and sorrow, aging and physical illness, decay and death are all consequences of sin. We suffer them here because we are sinners. Sin infected this world when Adam and Eve disobeyed the one command God gave them. From that moment death and pain and sorrow have reigned here. They are the just desserts for our sin. But God loved us too much to let those things rule our lives. So he sent Jesus to set us free. He sent Jesus to get us out from under death and pain and sorrow. He sent Jesus to open for us the door to the New Jerusalem, to the city of God.

How did Jesus do that? You already know! He was perfect in our place. And he died and he paid for all our sins. He suffered everything that sin does to us here. He carried our fear and our hurt, our sorrow and sickness, he carried all that on the cross and God added to that death and even hell. Jesus suffered everything that every human being deserves. He died. And then he rose. When he rose, he wiped our sin away and he showed us what’s coming. He gave us the first glimpse of the eternal life.

Today, he calls us to contemplate that glimpse so that we have the strength to endure what lies between this moment and that life to come. My friends, what is your hurt? What loss troubles you? Whatever it is, it’s the cost of being a sinner in a sinful world. But Jesus has redeemed you. He has bought you out of this world. And today he shows you what is coming. When you struggle, when you hurt, when you can’t forget what you have lost, **find your happy place! Find the place where all our hurts are healed.** In your mind and in your heart, go to the place where you will live when you rise from the dead, and you will find that God’s healing begins already now.

II.

Everything that we experience here is contaminated with sin. Even the best things we have here – our families, our marriages, our friendships – sin corrupts them all. Even when we come here and praise God, even when we have a faithful pastor who proclaims the gospel to us, even when we have teachers who love our children and work day and night to show them the way to heaven, even those efforts are contaminated by sin – the sin of our pastors and teachers that makes their efforts less than they want them to be, the sin of you members that confuses the message and even rebels at it sometimes, the sin of other people that inflicts loss and difficulty and hardship on us.

But when Jesus comes back, he’s going to sweep away the world as we know it. We will live in a new and perfect world. John’s vision points to the very heart of that new order: **“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.”** No more curses. In the Bible a curse is God’s sending someone to hell. That will be over after Judgment Day. Certainly, on that day, God will curse millions even billions of people to hell. But then it will be over. Never again will God have any reason to curse us. Sin won’t touch anything in our lives or our world anymore.

Then we will serve him and he will live among us. Right now, one of the hard things about being a Christian is that we don’t get to see Jesus. We have to trust that he loves us, trust that he’s even there. But I can’t prove it. Well, we won’t have to trust anymore. We’ll see him face to face. That’s not possible now, because sin corrupts us. Our own sin makes us unworthy of seeing Jesus’ face. But when he comes back, Jesus will cleanse us from all sin. He will purify our hearts and make us perfect and holy.

And he will purify the world, too. That’s why John says that there will be no night in the city of God. He says that the people who live there won’t need lamps any more. They won’t even need the sun anymore because the Lamb – Jesus – will be our light. That’s such an important picture of the change that’s coming because that’s totally different from what we know now. My friends, have you ever been afraid of the dark? When you were kids, right? Of course, now, not so much. That’s a thing for children. Or is it? What about

when the power is out? What about when you're alone on a dark street and you hear a noise that you can't identify? Can you honestly say even now, that you're never afraid of the dark?

For us darkness has become a symbol of evil. It's a symbol of the devil waiting to attack us and his followers wanting to hurt us. It's a symbol of sin making our lives hard every single day. It's a symbol of the sin in our own hearts. How much darkness is there in your heart? How often do you make your own life harder? How many times have you driven friends and family away because you were being unlovable? We're sinners. Our hearts are full of darkness by nature. Even though we have the light of Christ shining in our darkness, the darkness isn't over yet. But it will be when Jesus returns. He will purify our hearts. He will purify our world. We will be free from sin and from all that it does to us. Never again will we hurt ourselves with our sinful stupidity. Never again will anybody else's sin cause us pain or loss.

Instead, we will live in harmony with each other and we will see Jesus. We will experience his love without end. That is the heart of what's coming. When I was child and even a young man, I often thought of the resurrection in terms of physical perfection. I looked forward to being free from my glasses and hoped that I would be a better athlete. If you live with chronic pain or difficulty walking, it's good to know that in the resurrection you will be free. But as I've matured in my faith, I've come to look forward to the end of the darkness in my heart even more. I long to be free from sin, from temptation, from my own laziness and failures as a pastor and husband and a father. I long to be free from guilt and fear and doubt. All that is the darkness we were born with. In this dark world, it's impossible to shake it off.

But in Christ's promises, we have light. Already here and now, Christ works in our hearts against all that darkness. He takes away our fear and our guilt. He strengthens us against temptation and failure. He keeps us in the faith until we reach that city of God. There we will at last enjoy perfect, eternal light. That promise changes everything while we struggle here. My friends, **find your happy place! Find the place where all your darkness is turned to light!** In the gloom of this world, that light keeps us going until we reach it.

This vision is all about the resurrection. It's about what's coming at the end. Often we focus on going to heaven when we die. That is God's promise to us. When we enter heaven, sin is done and joy begins. But God isn't done until we rise. God isn't done until we get our bodies back, holy and perfect the way he intended them to be. Jesus isn't finished until he restores the world to the way it was in Eden. It may surprise you to know that the Bible emphasizes that much more than going to heaven when we die. Not because the other is unimportant, but because God wants you to know that he will not rest until you have the greatest of all happy places: eternal life with him in a perfect world. Look forward to that place! Amen.