

No More Let Sins & Sorrows Grow

The Reversal of the Curse at the End of Days

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed--

¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.

¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.

¹⁷ He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

¹⁸ The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,

²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,

²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day-- and there will be no night there.

²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of **the water of life**, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, **the tree of life** with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

(Rev 21:4-22:6)

Far as The Curse is Found

Isaac Watts penned the line, “**Far as the curse is found**” in his now famous 1719 poem-hymn that we call, “**Joy to the World.**” This is a song the culture and church now sing at **Christmas.** In fact, it is found in the “Christmas” or “Advent” section of nearly every hymnal. Would it surprise you then to learn that the poem **was not based on anything in the Gospel narratives** of Jesus’ birth, but rather on **Psalm 98?**¹ In this sense, it is technically not a hymn but a Psalm.

¹ I first stumbled upon this history in **Al Mohler**, “Far as the Curse is Found,” *Albert Mohler* (Dec 8, 2017), <https://albertmohler.com/2017/12/08/far-curse-found>. This was a commencement address on the same date at SBTS Louisville, KY.

Watts was born in 1674, and according to his Preface in the *Psalms of David*,² he had been familiar with over 20 versions of Psalters put to English rhyme and meter. That's amazing enough as most languages don't have any. Yet even with all this, he suggests, word-for-word translations often **stifle the affections** of a people so very far removed from the circumstances and worship of a king of Israel living 3000 years earlier. Therefore, he sought to stir the affections anew and **"introduce warm devotion into this part of divine worship"** by offering *paraphrases* of the Psalms, and sometimes even running with ideas that come from other parts of Scripture that he drew inspiration from as he was doing this great work.

Psalm 98 is rather short, a mere nine verses. Watts' rendering of this Psalm is composed of **two parts**. The first, which he calls **"Praise for the Gospel,"** is three verses and is essentially **Psalm 98:1-3**. The second part he called **"The Messiah's Coming and Kingdom,"** and except for one stanza, it follows the rest of the Psalm. It is this second part that is the more famous of the two. Of this Al Mohler rightly

² **Isaac Watts**, *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to the Christian State of Worship* (London: John Clark, 1722).

notices, “When we sing ‘Joy to the World, the Lord is Come,’ it applies when we talk about Bethlehem and when we rejoice in the gift of the infant Christ. But the song also reminds us that Christmas isn’t over; the promises of Christmas are not yet fulfilled. Earth will fully receive her King when Christ comes again, to reign and to rule.” Hence he suggests, “Though sung rightly and triumphantly at Christmas, [it] is really about the Second Coming of Christ.”³

It’s the **third stanza** in his “Psalm 98 Part II” that is **out of place** with Psalm 98:

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found*

Watts seems to have been inspired here by the last verse of the Psalm which tells us let the hills sing for joy together “**before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.**” Yet he clearly takes this language, not from the

³ Mohler, *ibid.*

Psalm, but from Genesis 3, particularly the **cursing of the ground** (**vs. 17**) as directed at Adam who had fallen so badly into sin. The verse tells us, “**You shall not eat of it: *cursed* is the ground for your sake; in sorrow you shall eat of it all the days of your life.**” And yet, Watts is reminding us in his lyric that God’s work in judgment is not merely about the judgment of the wicked. Rather it also includes **restoration**, the making “new” of heaven and earth, particularly through the removal of the curse, “**far as the curse is found.**” It is a glorious hope and one that we will look at today.

The Genesis-Revelation Chiasm

Rather than going strictly through the remainder of **Revelation 21-22** in order, I have chosen to look at these chapters **thematically** as I’ve been inspired by several of John’s **literary units** in these chapters and, especially, as I continue to think about how the end of Revelation parallels the beginning of **Genesis**. Last week we looked at how God is making **all things new**, how that newness is a kind of **undoing** of all the OT history, taking us back to The Beginning. The newness that John speaks about starting in

Revelation 21:1 tells us about the new heavens, the new earth, the new **Jerusalem** which is the **bride** of Christ and the **dwelling place**/tabernacle of God with men. It is not the dissolution, decimation, or destruction of all things, but the *renewal* of creation and of the “sons of God” (7), making them even better than they were in the probationary state of the first two chapters of the Bible.

The way I’m going to proceed is by working through a kind of chiasm of my own for the next several weeks:

- A. The Triune God (Gen 1:1-3)
- B. The Earth-Garden Temple (Gen 1:3-2:17)
- C. The Bride of Adam (Gen 2:18-25)
- D. **The Curse and Sin (Gen 3:1-18-19, 24)**
- E. **E. Sermon 1: All Things New (Rev 21:1-5)**
- D’. **Sermon 2: Far as the Curse is Found (Rev 21:4ff)**
- C’. Sermon 3: The Bride of the Second Adam (Rev 21:2bff)
- B’. Sermon 4: The City-Temple (Rev 21:2aff)
- A. Sermon 5: The Triune God (Rev 22:17-21)

This week we will begin with **the reversal of the curse**, of sin, of death, which are all symbolized by darkness being overtaken by Light. In this, I’m inspired by the movement of two different takes on the structure of these chapters. **The first** is a structure from **Rev 21:4-22:6** which begins with God **wiping away all tears**, no more **death, pain, or sorrow**

and which ends with the **removal of the curse**. Both of these bookend the structure not only by that common theme, but with the language “**faithful** (“trustworthy” ESV) **and true**” (21:5; 22:6)

- A. **God wipes all tears, no more death, pain, sorrow, true and faithful words** (21:4-5)
- B. Foundations of the water of life (21:6-7)
- C. Abominable ... liars (21:8)
- D. Glory of God, light, jasper stone/crystal, wall, twelve gates/foundations (21:9-14)
- E. He talked with me ... measure the wall and gates (21:15)
- F. The length as large as breadth (21:16)
- G. He measured the city with the reed: 12,000 furlongs (16b)**
- F'. Length and breadth are equal (16c)
- E'. Measured the wall / measure of a man (21:17)
- D'. Jasper / clear as glass, wall, twelve gates/foundations, glory of God was its light (21:18-26)
- C'. Abomination ... lies (21-27)
- B'. A pure river of water of life (22-1-2)
- A'. **No more curse, faithful and true** (22:3-6)⁴

A second chiasm can be seen inside of that one, from **21:8-27**. It begins with a list of people identified by particular sins who are **thrown into the lake of fire**. It ends with another list of unclean people **not being allowed entrance** into the Holy City.

⁴ Admin, “Revelation 21:3-22:7,” *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Dec 28, 2016), <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2016/12/28/revelation-213-227/>.

- A. **Cowardly, unbelieving abominable** ... their part in **the lake of fire and brimstone** (21:8)
- B. Having the glory of God / Her light (21:9-11)
- C. Twelve gates / Twelve foundations (21:12-14)
- D. To measure the city, its gates, and its wall (21:15)
- E. Its length is as great as its breath (21:16a)
- F. He measured the city with the reed: 12,000 furlongs (21:16b)**
- E'. Its length, breadth, and height are equal (21:16c)
- D'. He measured its wall (21:17-18a)
- C'. Twelve foundations + twelve gates (21:18b-21) + mini
- B'. The glory of God illuminated it + the Lamb is its light (21:22-23)
- A'. **Those who defile (unclean, detestable, false) will by no means enter it** (21:24-27) + **mini**⁵

In these two structures, we see **the clear final resolution of sin and the curse** which takes us all the way back to Genesis 3. In the coming weeks, we will look at the **Bride**, the **City-Temple**, and the **Trinity**, each of which takes us back further and further until we come at last to the very beginning of the Bible.

The Genesis ... of Evil

To understand the eradication of **the curse**, you must first understand what it is and **how it came into being**. As far

⁵ **Christine Smith**, "Revelation 22," *A Little Perspective* (Dec 29, 2016), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/revelation-22-2016/>.

as Revelation 21-22 is concerned, we have several verses that tell us a bit about what it is. The first talks about **tears**, **death**, **mourning**, **crying**, and **pain** (**Rev 21:4**). This is matched by the parallel in **22:3** which tells us directly that there are things that are “**accursed**” (*katathema*). These have direct links to Genesis 3 (**Gen 3:14**, 17 LXX: *epikataratos*) and so I’ll return to it in a moment. But there are other verses that also help us understand the curse.

Rev 21:8 describes a list of sins: **cowardly** (*deilos*), **faithless** (*apistos*), **detestable** (*bdelussō*), **murderers** (*phoneus*), **sexually immoral** (*pornos*), **sorcerers** (*pharmakos*), **idolaters** (*eidōlolatres*), **liars** (*pseudēs*). **Vs. 27** describes that which is **unclean** (*koinos*), that is no one who practices **abomination** (*bdelugma*) and **lying** (*pseudos*). These last two are clearly related to things in the first list but are now viewed more from a religious-cultic perspective of holiness and the temple than one of pure morality. **Rev 22:15** combines these two verses. It lists many of the same things from 21:8: **sorcerers** (*pharmakos*), **sexually immoral** (*pornos*), **murderers** (*phoneus*), **idolaters** (*eidōlolatres*), adds one from **vs. 27**: everyone who loves and practices **falsehood** (*pseudos*), and

also has one of its own: **dogs** (*kuōn*). These, it says echoing vs. 27, will forever remain “outside” the glorious city.

What can we learn from these three lists? In the first list, we think about things that deal with **objective morality**. These are what we normally think of as **sins**. These are not culturally confined taboos, the relativistic product of a democratic political vote, inventions of people in power, or outdated artifacts of racist white males. They are violations of God’s eternal transcendent law. They are breaches of the covenant of works that binds all of creation together. They are defilements against nature, ruptures against the supernatural world, abuses against our fellow man, and most of all treachery against the Creator himself. Some we think of as big. Some we think of as little. All are falling short of God’s glory.

For our point of study today, breaking them brings a **curse**. **Deuteronomy 27:13-26** lists a dozen sins which it says very specifically that if they are committed, that person is “**cursed**” and all the people are to say, “**Amen!**” That list bears some striking parallels to what we see in **Revelation 21:8**.

Curse Parallels of Deuteronomy and Revelation			
Curses of Deuteronomy 27		Moral Sins of Revelation 21:8	
27:15	Idolaters	Cowardly	21:8a
27:16	Dishonors father and mother	Faithless	21:8b
27:17	Moves neighbor's boundary	Detestable	21:8c
27:18	Misleads a blind person	Murderers	21:8d
27:19	Distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, widow	Sexually immoral	21:8e
27:20-23	Sexually Immoral	Sorcerers	21:8f
27:24-25	Murderers	Idolaters	21:8g
27:26	Liars	Liars	21:8h

Later in the OT, **Jeremiah** combines the idea of **morality** being tied up with **covenant** and the **curses** of violating the law when he tells the leaders of Judah, “Hear the words of this *covenant*, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: *Cursed* be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt ... I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet *they did not obey* or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil

heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not” (Jer 11:2-4, 7-8). His entire book becomes a lamentation of woe upon Judah that God will not hear their prayers or listen to their pleas for mercy. He tells them, “I am weary of relenting” (15:6). Because they have mocked him for so long, now the curses are coming, and so they did when they were utterly uprooted and brought in iron fetters into the land of Babylon.

In the second list, we think about them as violations of holiness. The context of the Rev 21:27 is clearly the holy city-temple and as such they make that which is clean “unclean.” In this way, the purely moral, what we might think of even as secular since it applies to all people everywhere melts into the sacred and religious, especially in the sanctuary where God dwells. Yet, in Scripture, there really is no such thing as a purely secular view of morality. All sin is a violation of holiness, purity, and righteousness and as such it defiles everything and by its very nature must be eliminated so that the sacred can be decontaminated and made pure again. This is why, when we sin, the effects do not merely harm us, but they harm our families, our

churches, our governments, our neighbors, the animal kingdom, the environment (the oceans, the forests, the air, the water, our food supply, etc.), the entire created order that God pronounced “good.” Hence, “**thorns and thistles**” (nature) become part and parcel of the curse of Adam.

The final list (22:15) is a further elaboration on this movement from secular to sacred, and how the two are really interrelated. The list is bookended by “**dogs**” and “**liars**.” Beale says something profound here.

The despicability of the godless is emphasized, since dogs are regarded as despised creatures throughout Scripture and are sometimes used metaphorically for **unbelievers** (so Matt. 7:6; *Didache* 9:5). Dogs, as beasts, are concerned only about their physical well-being. The people in 22:15 are “dogs” because they have an insatiable craving to preserve their earthly security, which is a mark of “the beast” (13:15–18) [that’s an interesting comment, isn’t it?]. Similarly, Paul applies the canine metaphor to Jewish Christians **who profess to be part of the Christian church** in Philippi, though their idolatrous actions and beliefs show otherwise (Phil. 3:2–3, 18–19). Also likened to dogs are **professing Christians** in the readership of 2 Peter who apostatize (2:20–22) by all kinds of corruption,

including false teaching (2:1–3, 13–14, 16) and “having a heart trained in greed ... having followed the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2:14–15; likewise Ignatius, *Eph.* 7).⁶

These three lists get increasingly specific: the **godless, unbelievers, religious hypocrites, Christian hypocrites**. These, Revelation clearly tells us, have no place in the new heavens and new earth. They will be thrown into the lake of fire and will never be welcomed into the holy city, the sacred garden-temple, or the wedding feast of the Lamb. There is no renewal for them. The curse will remain forever. To anyone who truly knows himself, this is terrifyingly bad news, and well it should be, for what else will wake people up from their spiritual slumber?

As already discussed to some degree, this is Revelation’s way of telling us about **the curse**. This is such a major theme of the entire Bible, let alone our topic today, we must not move on without thinking more specifically about **where this curse originated**. This takes us back to **Genesis 3**. As we

⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1141.

saw last time, the end of Revelation has many points of contact with Genesis 1-3, including at least 10 points with ch. 3.

Genesis 3 – Revelation 21-22 Parallels ⁷			
Genesis (Probationary World)		Revelation (Eternal World)	
3:1-5	Garden accessible to the Liar	City closed to all liars	21:27
3:3	Or you will die	No more death	21:4
3:6-7	Shown a garden into which sin entered	Shown a city into which sin will never enter	21:27
3:8-10	Walk of God with man interrupted	Walk of God with man resumed	21:3
3:13	Initial triumph of the Serpent	Ultimate triumph of the Lamb	20:10; 22:3
3:14, 17	Cursed ... cursed	No longer ... any curse	22:3
3:16-17	I will greatly multiply your pain	No more ... pain	21:4
3:23	God banished him	They will see His face	22:4
3:24	He drove the man out of the garden	I saw the Holy City	21:2
	Man's dominion ceased and Satan's begun	Satan's dominion ended and man's restored	22:1ff

Genesis 3 is the story of **the original Fall of humanity**. More specifically, it tells us about why there is a curse. It

⁷ (Gold:) **Non Dignus**, “Is This a Valid Chiasm?” (March 2, 2013), <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/is-this-a-valid-chiasm.78133/>.
 (Green:) **Dan Kidha**, “Genesis/John/Revelation Parallels,” *Slideplayer* (n.d.), <https://slideplayer.com/slide/13974755/>.

begins with **the Serpent** in the Garden. Rev 20 has talked much about this serpent, his binding, his future release, and his eventual fate in the lake of fire. But in Genesis 3 he has **access to the Garden**. The devil finds the woman whom God had made and begins to speak ever so subtle lies to her. “*Has God really said ...?*” Isn’t it interesting how in Genesis 3 the Liar has access to the Garden, but in Revelation 21-22, liars will not have access to the Tree of Life or the Holy City that emulates the Garden?

As the woman hears the serpent’s beguiling words, she becomes **confused**. “*I’m not really sure what God has said. Didn’t he say we weren’t even to touch it? What do you think, O Guardian Cherub?*”

“*You will not really die!*” his **lies** come to full fruition, though his forked tongue only slithers out for a moment, and then sinks back into the open grave of his mouth as he now mixes it with truth, “*For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.*” **The woman was now blinded**. She did not realize that in standing firm against the temptation, she literally would have known or discerned good from evil and she would have made a right judgment.

Maybe she was blind because **her pathetic husband** was spiritually absent, **neglecting** his duty to protect the Garden, **condoning** the whole discussion by his silence, becoming **complicit** in the temptation and guilty of the first sin by which he unknowing would plunge the entire human race after him into darkness. She ate the forbidden fruit. She gave some to Adam who was obviously standing right there the whole time. And at this moment, contrary to the serpent and some current popular opinion, **they did in fact die**.

This was not a physical death, for they both lived many centuries afterwards. It was a **spiritual death, separation from God** that was evidenced in their reaction to the sound of the walking LORD in the Garden after their stolen meal. They **clothed** themselves—their innocence was gone. They **hid** themselves—their separation from God was the inevitable outcome of their own guilty consciences not wishing to be exposed by the one who see all that is done in the open or in secret. They were **separated** from him. It was then, in a separation of their own making, that the LORD God came in judgment and finalized what they had instigated.

God would cast Adam and Eve, and therefore all of humanity, out of Eden, out of the temple, out of the Holy Place, outside the gates, consigning them to the place reserved for liars and murderers and sorcerers and idolators in Revelation. This is the fate not only they, but all their posterity deserve in these lists in Revelation. That includes me. That includes you. Everyone suffers this curse because of them.

Some people say this is unfair. But there is something in that objection that presupposes had I been in their shoes, I never would have done what they did. But that objection is self-evidently full of pride and arrogance and self-congratulations; it reeks of the very sins they committed. That makes the objection rather ironic, for in objecting this way, it overturns itself in its hubris. Adam was in a much better position—he was upright and innocent. He was in a much better condition—a perfect garden without curse or sin. He was created in perfect submission—to his God and Lord. Yet, he still sinned. How much more any one of us? Yes, we all deserve their fate because all have sinned. That's not unfair. That's justice.

Before they are **kicked out** and the way to the tree of life is guarded by fiery cherubim with flaming swords, God explained to them what would happen. God had told them, “**In the day that you eat from it you shall surely die**” (**Gen 2:17**). But it wasn't just them. Upon leaving the Garden we get the story of **Cain** who killed his brother Abel. This turns into two genealogies, one which shows the multiplication of murder (**Lamech**). This turns into the entire earth saved Noah suffering the consequences of the immorality and **violence** that filled the earth in their days. All humanity perished in the Flood. And this in turn becomes a theologically and historically inescapable truth: **In Adam all die** (**1Co 15:22**; **Rom 5:12-21**). This is the great conclusion of the curse.

But Revelation mentions **pain** that precedes death. Because of her role in the whole debacle, God told the woman, “**I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children**” (**Gen 3:16**). Revelation mentions **weeping** (tears, mourning, crying). Though not explicitly in Genesis, ancient expansions (see *Vita Adam and Eve*; *Apocalypse of Moses*) of this story have so much of this it becomes nearly overwhelming to read them. Eve and her

children are in almost perpetual states of weeping over sin, over pain, over death, over the thought of what happened in the Garden, over just about everything. This story has always been viewed as the origin of all such emotions.

All of this is summarized in Gen 3 and **Rev 22:3** as **the curse**. “*Cursed* are you more than all cattle,” God told the devil. “*Cursed* is the ground because of you,” God said to Adam. The Curse. To put this in plain language, sin (**21:8, 27; 22:15**) results in the pain, sorrow, and death of the curse (**21:4**). The curse comes about because of sin, our falling away from the Glory of God, our willful rebellion against our Creator.

“**Curse**” is a terrible word in English. *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* gives several definitions; all of them are horrible. 1. “**To utter a wish of evil against one; to imprecate evil upon; to call for mischief or injury to fall upon; to execrate.**” God is pronouncing a curse upon his creation for what transpired in the Garden. It is not itself evil, but is the result of their evil. 2. “**To injure; to subject to evil; to vex, harass or torment with great calamities.**” What are sorrow, pain, mourning, and death if not great calamities? 3. “**To**

devote to evil.” What did God do? Did he not devote mankind to evil in this curse?

There is a bit more we could talk about in Genesis 2-3, but at this point I want to mention one more thing that Revelation 21-22 calls all of this: **Darkness**. Darkness, of course, is the initial state of the earth prior to Day 1. “Darkness” does not appear formally in Revelation, but informally, by way of implication. The words “dark” and “darkness” are not found here. However, we find “**night**.” “**There will be no *night* there**” (**Rev 21:25**). This “night” is contrasted with evil that must remain forever outside of the city. We also find “**light**.” “**The city has no need of sun or moon to *shine* on it, for the glory of God gives it *light*, and its *lamp* is the Lamb**” (**23**; cf. **2:5**). The promise here is the removal of darkness and darkness is clearly a metaphor of sin. These images then add to the lists of sins we’ve already seen, and to the curses that we’ve looked at in the Garden and ever afterward throughout history.

Into this, I want to consider now add the inverted parallels in the early part of John’s Gospel. These are found both in John 1 and 3. **John 1:5** says, “**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome** [“did not

comprehend it” NAS; “perceive it” YLT; “understood it” NIV] it.” “The Greek verb [*katelaben*] is not easy to translate.”⁸ If we go with the translation of *understanding*, then the idea is that those in darkness do not understand what light is; it is foolishness to them. If we go with the idea of *overcoming*, then the thought is that the environment of darkness into which we are all born is so thorough and complete that it is impossible to escape it, even when the light shines upon us.

Either way, it speaks to *human inability* due to sin. As Paul says, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14). Or as John says, “People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (Jn 3:19).

This verse in John takes us to the second inverse parallel of night. The context is the Jewish Pharisee *Nicodemus*. We read, “This man came to Jesus by night...” (John 3:2). Now, many people read the conversation of Nicodemus coming to

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 75–76.

Jesus at night in a way that I think is quite wrong. Their idea seems to be that he was a true seeker of truth, but for fear of being seen by his fellow Pharisees, he went away at night to have a private talk with Jesus. I think this is reading back into the story the later seeming conversation of this man to faith in Christ ([John 19:39](#)). I'll return to that later.

If we read his coming at “[night](#)” in the context of the two passages we’ve just looked at, then a wholly different picture seems to emerge of this conversation. Either his fear of others shows that he cannot [overcome](#) the light, or his own internal struggle darkness shows that he cannot not [understand](#) it. Remember, at this point, Nicodemus is not a disciple of Jesus. He is a Pharisee. “Pharisee” is a word that “[carries hostile overtones throughout the Gospel.](#)”⁹ He is a ruler of the Jews, the “[teacher of Israel](#)” ([John 3:10](#)), as Jesus called him, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel. These are the men who caused the people to turn on Jesus and it recalls the rich “ruler” in [Luke 18:18](#) who fails to become a disciple. He begins with the question, “[Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God.](#)” As

⁹ This discussion is taken from [Michael Goulder](#), “Nicodemus,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44.2 (May 1991), 154.

Goulder says, “This tone sounds greasy, and is perhaps an intended echo of the Pharisees’ question in **Matt 22:16**, ‘Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God in truth’—a similarly insincere compliment, and one which led to a trap.” But Jesus is more than a teacher, he is God in human flesh.

There are many more things we could say, but all this is what leads Jesus to say that the darkness does not come to the light because of fear of being exposed. But something remarkable happens in this famous exchange. There seems to be a parallel with the word “second.” Nicodemus hears Jesus talking about being born again and asks, “Can a man enter a *second* time into his mother’s womb and be born?” He is talking about the **second birth**. The parallel is found in **Rev 20:6**, “Holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the *second* death has no power.” Jesus is giving this man the Gospel.

There are **other Gospel parallels** in this exchange that fit things we will see in later sermons. He tells Nicodemus, that He who *descended* out of heaven is the Son of Man (**John 3:13**). Later in the chapter, John the Baptist brings up the **Bridegroom** (29). **Rev 21:2** says, “I saw ... New Jerusalem,

descending out of heaven from God, made ready as a *bride*.” Jesus reminds Nicodemus of Moses *lifting up* the serpent in the wilderness (**John 3:14**), as a picture of that Son of Man being lifted up on the cross for sin. **Rev 20:2** has told us that the resurrected Christ laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old ... and threw him into the abyss. He tells Nicodemus, “That the world through him might be *saved* ... *light* has come into the world, and men loved *darkness* rather than light because their deeds were evil ... be he who *practices* the *truth* comes to the *light*” (**John 3:17-21**). But in **Revelation 21:25-27**, “the nations of those who are *saved* shall walk in its *light* ... its gates shall not be shut by day, and there shall be no *night* there ... and nothing unclean, and no one who *practices* ... *lying* ... shall ever *come* into it.”

It is this Gospel message that, I believe, ends up *regenerating* Nicodemus. The man came to Jesus under suspicious circumstances, to say the least. And Jesus gave him some pretty harsh words. But in the course of those words, he also spoke life-giving truth to him. Truth that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, created new life in a man that was perhaps seeking how he might trap Jesus.

“You must be born of the Spirit, Nicodemus.” The wind blows wherever it chooses. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:8). “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:14-16). That’s all the Spirit needed to convert the man, the seed or germ or Gospel, the word of God, planted in his heart by the Great Preacher himself.

Near the end of the book, we read of Nicodemus again. “Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there” (John 19:39-42). Why would he do such a thing if he had not become a disciple? In a later week, we will look much more in detail at this Garden theme, but since we are

even in the Garden today, albeit at the end of the story with the curse, it is worth pointing out that John and Revelation both end in a garden. This is not a coincidence. Nicodemus, the man who was not a follower of Christ, is now **going to the garden** to anoint the body of Jesus which he was told would hang on the pole as the Serpent of Moses did so that those who look to him might be healed of their poisonous wounds and live.

Life! This is **the reversal of the curse**. Eternal life of a reborn spirit; then eternal life in a resurrected body. As the Apostle earlier had said, “**In Adam all die**” (1Co 15:22; Rom 5:12-21), he then added, “**in Christ all shall be made alive**” (1Co 15:22b). Revelation puts it this way. “**Death shall be no more**” (Rev 21:4). This is the reversal of the curse. **Death is removed**. As we saw in a previous sermon, though you may die once, you will not die twice in that unthinkable horror of the second death in the lake of fire. God has found a way to restore the original condition of life in the Garden, but better, so that now it is not a probation and temporary, but rooted in the perfect obedience of Jesus who is Eternal. But **we do not have to wait** for the reversal of the curse in the future with the second death. There is **a striking parallel**

in the resurrection story of Jesus as John tells it in the parallel. As John and Peter hear the incredible news that Jesus is not in the tomb on that First Day of the week and race to get there first, “**Mary stood weeping outside the tomb**” (**John 20:11**). **Weeping**. The curse. But two angels in white were sitting there as she looked in (12) and said, “**Woman, why are you weeping?**” She said, “**They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him**” (13). Suddenly, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus (14). Jesus said to her,¹⁰ “**Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**” Then, all he said was one word to her. “**Mary**” (16). “**She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Raboni’ (which means Teacher).**” Her tears of the woman came to an end. The curse was removed in the resurrection of her Lord.

What does **Revelation 21:4** say? “**He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.**” Jesus will do this. **For whom?** For those who call him Teacher, Master, Lord. **When?** Right now, to anyone who trusts in him. **Where?** Everywhere. Did you not hear what Dr. Watts penned?

¹⁰ **The opposite of Jesus coming to the woman in the Garden of Eden, for the Garden sermon.**

“Far as the curse is found.” How far is the curse found? Everywhere. “No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow, Far as the curse is found.”

Hear then the rest of the words of Watts’ two Parts of Psalm 98 and understand what all creation is about to enter into as the fullness of the removal of the curse awaits the final revealing of the sons of God. These words are trustworthy and true:

Psalm 98 (Isaac Watts)	(Psalm 98:1-9 ESV)
<p>Part I: Praise for the Gospel (C. M.) To our Almighty Maker, God, New honors be addressed; His great salvation shines abroad, And makes the nations blest.</p> <p>He spake the word to Abraham first; His truth fulfils the grace; The Gentiles make his name their trust, And learn his righteousness. Let the whole earth his love proclaim With all her diff’rent tongues, And spread the honors of his name In melody and songs.</p> <p>Part II: The Messiah’s Coming and Kingdom (C. M.) Joy to the world! the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;</p>	<p><i>A Psalm.</i> Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. ² The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. ³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. ⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! ⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody!</p>

Let every heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing!

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy.
He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love.

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the
horn make a joyful noise before the King,
the LORD!

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the
world and those who dwell in it!

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands; let the
hills sing for joy together

⁹ before the LORD, for he comes to judge
the earth. He will judge the world with
righteousness, and the peoples with
equity.

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20:15 "Jesus said ... 'Woman, why are you *weeping*?' "

21:4 "and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes"

Out of the Darkness	The City of Light
3:2 "this man (Nicodemus) came to him (from Jerusalem) by night "	21:23–25 "and the city (New Jerusalem) has no need of the sun or the moon ... its lamp is the Lamb ... for there is no night there."
3:5 "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be <i>born</i> ? (i.e. second birth)"	20:6 "holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power."
3:13, 29 "He who descended out of heaven , even the <i>Son of Man</i> ... the Bridegroom "	21:2 "I saw ... New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride "
3:14 "And as Moses <i>lifted up the serpent</i> ..."	20:2 "And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old ... and <i>threw him into the abyss</i> "
3:17–21 "that the world through Him might be saved ... light has come into the world, and men loved <i>darkness</i> rather than light because their deeds were evil ... but he who practices the truth comes to the light "	21:25–27 "the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its (New Jerusalem's) light ... its gates shall not be shut by day, and there shall be no <i>night</i> there ... and nothing unclean, and no one who practices ... <i>lying</i> ... shall ever <i>come into it</i> "
3:24 "for <i>John</i> (the Baptist) had not yet been cast into prison "	20:3–4, 7 "and he cast him into the abyss ... and I saw <i>the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus</i> ... Satan will be released from his prison "
3:36 "he who does not obey the Son ... the wrath of God abides on him"	19:15 "He will rule them with a rod of iron ... the wrath of God Almighty. "