

Forrest Gump arrives at the pearly gates – and finds an angel standing there.

“Good to see you”, says the angel, “but Forrest, I need to let you know, because we’re filling up fast, we now have an entrance exam – but, fortunately, it’s a short one.”

Forrest replies, “Well, nobody tolt me about any entrance exam. Shor hope it ain’t too hard!”

*“It’s only three questions Forrest”, says the angel. The first one is: **What days of the week begin with the letter ‘T’?** The second is: **How many seconds are there in a year?** And the third is: **What is God’s name?**”*

Forrest leaves to think the questions over, and then returns and says to the angel, “Well, the first question – what days in the week begin with the letter ‘T’, shucks, that one’s easy. That’d be Today and Tomorrow.”

*The angel says, “Forrest, that’s not what I was thinking, but I’ll let you have that one. **“How about the next one?”** he asks. **“How many seconds in a year?”**”*

“Now that one’s harder,” says Forrest, “I think and I think about that and I guess the only answer can be twelve.”

***“Twelve?”** **“Forrest, how could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?”**”*

Forrest replies, “Shucks, there’s gotta be twelve. January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd...”

*“Hold it,” the angel interrupts. “I get it, I’ll let you have that one, too, but let’s go onto the final question. **Can you tell me God’s name?**”*

“Sure can”, Forrest said, “that’s even easier than the first question – it’s Andy.”

***“Andy?”** **“How in the world did you come up with the name of Andy?”**”*

“Shucks, that was the easiest one of all”, Forrest replied. “I learned it from the song.... ‘ANDY WALKS WITH ME, ANDY HE TALKS WITH ME, ANDY TELLS ME I AM HIS OWN...’”

Obviously, Forrest misunderstood the words from the hymn “In the Garden”, but in an innocent way, he understood the truth behind it – there is a garden, and we will be in God’s company.

Last week, we left off with God making all things new, to include a new atmosphere, a brand-new earth with some radical differences, and a new home – the Father’s house, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which the Apostle John watched descend from heaven like a bride. If you recall, the holy city was unimaginable and wonderous in its beauty and it was enormously massive. It will be the capitol city of heaven on earth, but more importantly, it will be a place where God Himself will dwell in full fellowship with His people. All things will be brand new – for the former things – the things in this life will disappear.

On John’s angelic tour of the holy city described in **Revelation 21**, it seemed like he was primarily focused on the structure and the design outside of the city, but now as his vision continues, it appears John finds himself inside the city – strolling down main street – describing for us what he sees along the way.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 22** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

¹Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ²in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

In this passage, we get a picture of John walking down main street with his angelic tour guide towards the city center – towards the heart of the city, and the closer John gets to the city center – the less it seems like a city and the more it seems like a garden – in many respects, reminiscent of garden paradise described in Eden.

We are told by John that in the heart of the city is the **throne of God and of the Lamb** – they appear together, and the throne seems to be the centerpiece of the holy city as it should be, and coming from the throne, right down the **middle** of main street, flows the crystal-clear river of the **water of life**. If you recall back in **Genesis**, a river also flowed in Eden to water the garden – and so, we begin to see some parallels between the first garden in Genesis and this new garden in Revelation, and in some respects we might say, these two gardens serve as “bookends” of the Bible.

Now John's not done, for he sees the **tree of life**, which definitely brings us full circle to the Garden of Eden – but with a twist and let me explain. The Greek word here for “**tree**” is *xulon* which is not the usual word for a living tree, instead it is a word typically used for an object made of wood – the same word the Apostle Paul often used to describe the cross of Christ. So, surprise, surprise, this tree is unusual – and in some special way it may blend the idea of the cross with the living tree of life described in the Garden of Eden – becoming this ultimate tree of life found in the heart of the city.

John continues and tells us the tree of life is **on either side of the river** – which is a little confusing to picture. Some suggest John could be describing multiple trees on either side of the river, or one tree in the middle of the river with water flowing around it, or as I tend to think, it could be just one giant tree that spans the river – like one of those massive red woods in California you can drive a car through. Whatever the case – the tree or trees depending on your view, it's watered by this life-giving river and it produces **fruit every month**. So, either there are twelve different trees with different kinds of fruit or there is this one single tree producing **twelve kinds of fruit** – which I think would be awesome.

Okay, since there is this fruit tree in the holy city, some people – namely me, wonder if we will eat – because I like to eat. The best answer I could find is that we can eat, but I don't know if we will have to eat. In His resurrection body, Jesus enjoyed food with His disciples. We also know from **Genesis 18** that angels ate with Abraham, and we can't forget **Revelation 2:7**, where Jesus told the church in Ephesus that to those who overcome, He “*will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*” So, it appears we can eat – I just don't know if it's necessary.

We are also told the leaves of the tree are for the **healing of the nations**, which brings up a good question. **Why would healing leaves be necessary where there is no pain, no sickness, and no death?** Well remember, the tree of life existed in the Garden of Eden before sin and sickness and death ever entered the world, so it need not refer to healing of an illness as we might first think. The word used for “**healing**” here is the source of our English word “*therapeutic*” – as in gardening can be therapeutic, so in that sense, it seems these leaves may have an energizing or invigorating purpose, rather than correcting an illness which will not exist.

Now before we move away from the tree of life, I want to remind you that as a consequence of sin – there was a **curse** where Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden and unable to access the tree of life and thus live forever, and from that

moment on, things went terribly wrong. Sin brought a curse which included disharmony, and disease, and death, but here in the garden center of this holy city – everyone will have free access to the tree of life because the curse is gone – it’s a complete reversal of the fall.

Notice John says we **will serve Him**, which tells us we will not be idle or lazy. If you recall, before the fall in the Garden of Eden, Adam was given the task of tending and keeping the garden. So, this might come as a complete shock to some, but work is not the result of sin – it’s not a bad thing. It’s part of God’s perfect design. So, we will serve God. We will be busy and useful with the talents and gifts He has given us, but will not have any of the limitations and burdens we currently experience and better yet – we won’t have the stress, and the pressures, and the headaches that come with our work now. As I see it, this service, this work will be just like a very passionate hobby that we love and enjoy to do.

Then we are told something really unheard of. John says that those in the city **will see His face**. God has never been fully seen by men. Not even Moses saw God face to face, in fact in **Exodus 3**, we are told that Moses was afraid to look upon God, but here, in the heart of the holy city, we can look upon God’s face without fear for we will carry His name and reflect His divine glory.

So, with all of that we come to the end of the city tour, but the book isn’t over just yet. Let’s continue with **verse 6**.

⁶And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true”; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. ⁷“And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”

As John was taking it all in – and granted it was a lot to take in, the angel knew John needed to hear that **“these words are faithful and true.”** In other words, everything you have seen and heard and read is going to happen – and because it’s going to happen, you had better pay attention. You better respond because it’s all coming exactly as it has been revealed. The Tribulation period is coming and the stage is being set. There are three series of judgments, each series growing in wrath and intensity – the seven seal judgments, followed by seven trumpet judgments, lastly followed by seven bowl judgments. Then Jesus will come suddenly to establish His earthly kingdom. It’s going to happen – these words are faithful and true. Jesus is coming, so you had better get yourself ready and **heed the words** of this book for you will be **blessed**.

If you recall, the book of Revelation began with a blessing for anyone who reads and hears it, now we are told there is a blessing for those who heed and keep the words in this book. This is the only book in the Bible that begins and ends with a promise of blessing to the one who takes it to heart.

Now, following these words by the angel, John gives his own seal of approval on everything he had witnessed. Let's continue with **verse 8**.

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹But he said to me, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.” ¹⁰And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

Here, John puts his own reputation on the line – in essence claiming, this is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God. It was a truth so overwhelming and so thrilling that John doesn't know what to do with himself – **so what does he do?** He falls down to worship at the feet of the angel.

If you remember, he's done this before. Back in **Chapter 19**, he did the same thing and mistakenly fell down to worship an angel, but just like back then, the angel says **“Worship God.”** In other words, *“John, your response to worship is right but the object of your worship is all wrong – Worship God because He is the One doing all of this.”*

Then the angel tells John **do not seal up the words** because the time is near. John, don't keep these words to yourself. God's people need to know this book. It is meant to be read, and studied, and shared, and applied. People need to know the reality of eternity – eternity with God, or unfortunately, eternity separated from God in the lake of fire. People need to see the hope pictured in this book – a hope that reminds them that the experiences in this life, in the here and now, are like vapors when compared to eternity. John do not seal up the words, even though at times they may be difficult to understand, for there is a promise of a blessing for those who take these words to heart.

Now, in the remaining portion of this last chapter of the Bible, we are given some *final words to a fallen world*. Let's continue with **verse 11**.

Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”

I will admit, these final words from the angel seem a bit odd. He seems to be encouraging the wicked to continue being wicked, but that would be contrary to the repeated pleas of repentance throughout the book of Revelation – even during the worst parts of the Tribulation period.

So, then what is John being told here? To me, it’s almost like a form of reverse psychology. *“Go ahead, touch the electric fence and see what happens.”*

“You wrong-doers, go ahead and keep doing wrong. Just keep doing what you are doing and see what happens. You’ve already been told what’s in store for you, so go ahead and ignore God’s warnings, but just so you know, in the end, you will get exactly what’s coming to you and there will be no excuses and no arguments. And as for you righteous and holy ones who may be suffering, keep on doing what you are doing too. Keep living godly lives, for in due time, in the end, you’ll come to realize it was all worth it.”

After the angel says his piece, Jesus has something to say to the churches – to us, so with great authority, He chimes in beginning with **verse 12**.

¹² “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man 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, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. ¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

Jesus said, **“Behold, I am coming quickly”** but after two thousand years, we might wonder what *quickly* actually means to Him, but it might help to know that the Greek word for **“quickly”** has less to do with how soon He will come and more to do with the suddenness of the event when He comes. In other words, His return to the earth will be sudden – it will happen in a flash, and when it happens, Jesus says He will render to every person according to what he or she has done.

This is one of those “*I have good news and I have bad news*” statements. Jesus says, blessed are those people who have **washed their robes**, meaning they have been forgiven of their sins, they have trusted Him as their Savior and Lord, and their lives show it. They are the only ones who have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city where God dwells. That’s the good news.

The bad news is – the spiritually dead, those who have rejected Jesus Christ and *continue* in their wicked ways – they will never enter the gates into the holy city, and I want to clarify something here. It’s not that the sins of sexual immorality and murder and idolatry mentioned here are so heinous that God won’t forgive them, because He will. Instead, Jesus is talking about those people whose lives are characterized by these sins – it’s their way of life, it’s their normal lifestyle of sin which reflects what they really believe about God. You cannot say, “*I know God*” but then continually live in sin like there is *no* God. It doesn’t work that way. As Jesus said, “***You will know a tree by its fruit***” and to those who do not belong to God, Jesus will say, “***I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.***” They will never enter the holy city where God dwells with His people, instead their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

Jesus continues and says, “**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.**” Here Jesus reminds us of His timeless and sovereign nature – He is the source, and the theme, and the sustainer of all things. Jesus is the beginning, the end, and everything in between.

Lastly, He says, “**I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root of the descendant of David, the bright morning star.**” His last statement testifies to the truth of the whole book of Revelation. Like a king putting a royal seal on an official document, Jesus ties His reputation as the Son of David and the Son of God to the words of this book, and once the words have been written – there is no turning back. The words of the book are faithful and true because they were given by the One who is faithful and true.

Now in these final verses, John concludes with a benediction – giving his own last words to a lost world beginning with **verse 17**.

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. ¹⁸ I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from

the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

This passage begins with an invitation – the final invitation for salvation given to the lost. To those who hear the gospel message spoken to them, to those who hear the hopeful promises, to those who hear the horrible warnings, to those who are drawn by the Holy Spirit to Christ, to those who will – then **come**. To those who know they are lost, to those who are spiritually **thirsty** – let them come to the One who gives the living water of eternal life – life that Jesus paid for with His own.

Now before concluding, John gives a personal warning from himself as the one who was given the vision by God and wrote it down in this book, and his warning is to those who would intentionally, and maliciously, and deceptively alter God’s Word. John says that to do this – knowing what you know, to disregard and distort God’s Word in this deliberate way – essentially, amounts to unbelief and you will be treated as an unbeliever.

If you think about it, in many ways the Bible ends just like it begins – it comes full circle. The people of God are once again in paradise – seemingly a garden paradise, with a river and the tree of life in the heart of the holy city, enjoying fellowship with God just like it was with Him in the very beginning. But between the beginning and the end of the Bible, between these two gardens, between these two bookends, is this lengthy account of God’s interaction with a sinful and wayward people – and when all seemed hopeless, when the time was just right, the Savior entered another garden.

This other garden was in Gethsemane, and it was in this garden that the unbearable magnitude of what Jesus had come to do weighed heavily upon Him. Jesus knew that His hour had come, and very shortly, in obedience to His Father’s will, He would take the cup of undiluted wrath. Even though despised and rejected by the very ones He loved, Jesus would pay the terrible price for their sin and our sin with His very life on a wooden cross. Jesus, who committed no sin, would take the full penalty of sin upon Himself, so that those who place their faith in Him might enter into a right relationship with God, and in the fullness of time, enter this future garden paradise found in God’s holy city.

At the beginning of my message, Forrest Gump made reference to a hymn entitled “In the Garden” and here are the words to that hymn:

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear
The son of God discloses*

*And He walks with me
And He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known*

*I'd stay in the garden with Him
Though the night around me is falling
But He bids me go
Through the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling*

*And He walks with me
And He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known*

The truth is, spiritually, we all fell in the first garden when sin entered the world. It was there that sin became part of our spiritual DNA so to speak, but now there is this hope of a new garden paradise in the holy city where God will once again dwell with His people – a hope only realized by you and me through the willing obedience of our Savior in another garden. Jesus paid the price, so that you and I could experience paradise. The invitation has been given. **Will you be there?**

Source Material:

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