



November 5-8, 2022 – Saint's Triumphant Weekend

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **Catch a Glimpse of Heaven**

Sermon Text: Revelation 22: 1-5

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 ² 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.

Dear fellow Christian saints,

Had a vacation lately? When was the last time you took a break from your business, or pressed pause on the stress of school? Maybe you relaxed for a few days up north at a cabin, or caught some rays on a beach.

In our busy schedules, vacation seems to be more important all the time. But what's the key to a great vacation? Knowing the destination, right? What if you were going on a trip and didn't know your accommodations? BIG mistake! You might end up staying in a youth hostel with a creaky hide-a-bed instead of a luxury suite with a king size bed.

If you're going somewhere special, you'll want a picture of that destination. Knowing what the destination looks like, will not only alleviate any concern, but it will also heighten the anticipation of going there. The apostle John does that for us today on this Saint's Triumphant Sunday. He doesn't just show us some place in this world, but literally a real place that's "out of this world," our final destination, that is heaven. Based on Revelation, chapter 22, John tells us to "*Catch a Glimpse of Heaven*" (where Christians will:) 1. Rest, 2. Rejoice, and 3. Reign

Most people prefer to stay at a nice place on vacation. No one wants to stay in a dump that has dead roaches in the corner or mildew in the shower. No one wants to go to a place where you still have to do the laundry, pick up the kids from school, or type research papers. Rather, we prefer to go to a place where we can rest and relax in style.

In the final chapter of the Bible, Revelation chapter 22, God peels back the curtain on eternity and shows us what the good life looks like. And God uses the writer John, who

was an eyewitness to heaven, to give Christian believers amazing encouragement. He describes heaven which is better than any 5-star resort or New York City penthouse. John tells us to *catch a glimpse of heaven, where we will rest*. Listen again to his opening words: **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 ² 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.** This vivid scene brings us back to the original paradise on earth, the great Garden of Eden. Before sin there were no weeds or thorns. Imagine the beauty and perfection of the Garden of Eden with the great Tree of Life towering above. John describes heaven as equally breath-taking, with a river flowing crystal clear from the throne of God. That reminds us of God's grace that keeps flowing like a river. Right before our reading, John described heaven as having streets of gold and foundations made of precious stones. Take just a moment to imagine how glorious heaven will be.

Remember the book of Revelation is God's picture language of the beginning of time to the end of time with fantastic colors, numbers, and prophecies. That means we don't necessarily take these words literally and only think we will be on one eternal camping trip. John is using earthly words to describe eternity. He's letting our imaginations run wild. He's simply telling us: "Hey, if you thought earth was great, just wait till you see heaven! So don't miss out."

After John allows us to catch a glimpse of what our heavenly accommodations will be, he comforts us by saying that we will have rest. He says, "and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." All people and all nations who believe in Christ will be there and they will have complete healing from all the troubles of this world caused by sin. John puts it another way in the previous chapter by saying, "he will wipe every tear from their eyes."

Let's face it, this life is tough. An understatement, right? But God gives us comfort by telling us that in heaven we will have true rest. Just imagine—a place where there are no more hip or knee surgeries; no more due dates or dead lines; no more blisters from a long day of work; no more papers to write or papers to correct; no more tedious house chores or yard work to be done. Come, catch a glimpse of heaven today, where we will truly rest!

What's the biggest problem with vacation? Whether you take a short fishing trip up north or make an extended stay with relatives down south, you still have to pay for your trip. It doesn't matter where you go or how long you stay, you still have to work hard to

afford the trip. So how are you going to pay for this ultimate trip to our final destination, called heaven? I guess what I'm asking: can you pay for heaven?

Take a closer look at what Scripture says. Remember the lawyer who came to ask Jesus how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus told him, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind**"; and, "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" Or remember what God says in Leviticus, "**Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.**"

Uh-oh! "You mean that the greatest place ever, the place where I will finally rest from all my problems has to be paid for?" Absolutely, and God requires our perfection as the entrance fee to his heaven. He demands that we be holy like he is. That means that we can't slip up with a bad word even once, that we can't tell one little white lie, or have one impure thought. God demands that we love our spouses, our parents, and our children perfectly, and that we love the person in the house next to us (even if their tree keeps dropping leaves on our lawn). It's like trying to go on a trip, but not having enough frequent flier miles in our account. No matter how we look at it, none of us can pay for heaven!

Remember how we caught a glimpse of how great heaven will be? Now take a moment to consider all the things we've done wrong in life to lose that. We really have lived our lives to pay for a one way trip to suffer forever in hell.

But catch a glimpse of heaven where we will rejoice. We won't rejoice in the great things we've done, but rather we will rejoice in the full payment that our Savior Jesus made. Listen to what John says, "**No longer will there be any curse** (that is, the curse of sin that we have been under ever since Adam and Eve sinned). **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.**"

The very throne of Jesus, the Lamb of God will be in heaven. What does God tell us in book of Romans? "**The wages of sin of death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" That's right, God tells us that if we can't pay for heaven with perfection, we deserve death. God tells us that the wages of our sin is death, but Jesus the Lamb became the ultimate sacrifice when he took away our sins on the cross. And eternal life became the gift of God when Jesus rose again on Easter morning. Now he is ruling forever on his throne in heaven. Now, because of his work, we'll be right there with him, in a position of glory. John tells us that we'll have his name on our foreheads. We will be branded with the name Jesus, because he has paid the cost of our stay in full. Come catch a glimpse of heaven where we'll rejoice—rejoice forever in what the Lamb of God has done.

Isn't it true that when we take a nice long vacation, we're often eager to get home and get back to our familiar routines? But once you get back, what do you often say after a couple weeks of hard work—"Oh, I wish I was back on vacation again!"

Our vacations on this planet are often far too short and far too few. But John helps us catch a glimpse of heaven where we will reign forever. Imagine that! A place that we will never have to return from, a trip that will never end! John assures us in our final sermon verse that we will "reign forever and ever" with all the saints (all the believers).

But that's sometimes hard to look forward to? It is great and comforting to take a look at heaven, but sometimes it seems so far off and we might ask, "Lord, why can't I be there now?" That is why we have days like today, the Festival of Saints Triumphant. On this day we remember those believers who've died in faith, those who are already reigning in heaven.

We remember sinners like Moses who made excuses why he didn't serve the Lord, or David who committed adultery and even murder, Peter who denied his Savior, and Thomas who doubted. Yet by God's grace, these imperfect sinners made perfect by the blood of Christ, are now called saints. They kept feeding their faith. They became Christian examples and even heroes of faith! Now they are waiting for us to reign as saints forever with them in heaven. We remember how God used them despite their failings and foibles, and try to imitate their faith.

And on this day we remember more recent saints. We remember people like Martin Luther who literally fought an empire to hold on to the pure truth of God's Word. We remember the faith of St. Paul's grandpas and grandmas who've died but gave us real examples how important it was to worship God, take Holy Communion, give their offerings, and serve God in our churches and schools even though they too were busy.

May we be encouraged by and imitate the faith of saints, or Christian believers, who are still living. Maybe it's a parent who raised you in truth of the Gospel or a pastor or teacher or staff minister who showed you what the love of Christ looks like. They are all giving us Christian examples of how to live the Christian life, to make it easier for us.

Maybe you haven't taken a vacation recently and just maybe, you won't be taking one soon enough. But Revelation writer John encourages us to wait eagerly for our final destination of heaven. It is there that we will have true rest, there we will rejoice in our Savior, and there we will reign forever with all the saints. I pray this glimpse of heaven will inspire to be more faithful, even to the point of death, as we look forward to God graciously giving us the crown of life. Amen.