

***“The Right To The Tree of Life”***

**(Revelation 22:2 & 14)**

The Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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Grace to you and peace from our God Father and from our *ascended* Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The book of Revelation pronounced in the singular (“Revelation,” not “revelations”) is an amazing book of comfort and victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not about terrifying you; it is about assuring you that you are safe and victorious in the Lord Jesus who has conquered all sin, all death, and all that stands against God and His precious people (all of you)! This basic goal to put forth the book’s beauty, simplicity, and great encouragement (which attributes/characteristics) -- streaming from the glorious depictions of Christ -- have been the basis for this series which comes to a close this morning:

On April 7<sup>th</sup> we presented “Seven” based on chapter 1.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> “Worthy Is The Lamb” based on chapter 5.

On April 21<sup>st</sup> “Our Shepherd Through Tribulation,” Revelation 20.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> “All Things New” based on the *first part* of chapter 21.

And on *Cinco De Mayo*, May 5<sup>th</sup>, I did not mention good Mexican food (though now I have and now you’re distracted!), but instead presented “It’s Lamp Is The Lamb” based on the *second part* of chapter 21.

And now today on Mother’s Day, May 12<sup>th</sup>, we conclude our series with “The Right To The Tree of Life,” Revelation 22.

One of the most common and frequent complaints and concerns of our souls is to contemplate the state of our nation and the state of our world. It is enough – if you choose to dwell on it (and I am not joking) – to either lead you to complete depression or perhaps even to insanity. The state of our economy (we can be myopic and think things are better as housing prices go up again while we ignore the mind-boggling national debt we have incurred along the way) is extremely distressing (some recent headlines read simply, “*Will the class of 2013 be able to find jobs?*”), or you can consider the threat of terrorists which has now invaded our great nation, or you can consider the state of our culture’s moral bankruptcy. Our electronic media devices are unfortunately now also portals for influences that can quite simply destroy a

person's soul. A parent who does not care what their children do with such devices is a foolish one indeed.

Still, I've just mentioned the tip of the iceberg, which figure of speech reminds me of the condition of the polar ice caps, or consider astronomy and the realization that earth's preservation is quite simply *astounding*, because a single asteroid could make for a very, very bad day for us all. When we came back to California, my daughter in Chicago started poking fun at me when I had purchased some basic earthquake supplies (I had done the same thing in Texas in the face of hurricanes and the supplies paid off by the way). She told me, however, in so many words that the next "big one" in California would make my earthquake supplies quite superfluous. It was quite the cheery conversation (though I know she meant well). I have to admit, however, that when I attended the last Higher Things Conference which was here in Irvine at CUI, our own Dr. Mueller was the main speaker and he comforted me with the thought that who says California will fall into the Pacific Ocean? Maybe it will be the rest of the country to the east of us (which will do wonders for our property values)! You've got to laugh when taking in all the causes for human anxiety, or it can just seem to get overwhelming!

But as unsettling as these are, there is a greater problem: it is when in the midst of the common and frequent complaints, it is *implied* that somehow what this *means* is that we (Christians in the Kingdom of God) or even worse that *God Himself* is *losing*. It is implied that things have finally so much gotten out of control, that there is this suggestion that perhaps things are out of the *Lord's* control. All of a sudden, we jettison the Lord's teaching that the faithful do not walk by sight, but by faith (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:7).

I am now describing our sin dear Christians. Revelation 22 warns that those who reject God's Word (by adding to His words or by taking away from God's Word) are associated with those described as "dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolators, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood (verses 18 & 15)." These are not included in the Revelation 22 picture of the heavenly paradise. Now this sounds like a very "religious" thing to say that easily goes over the heads of folks. So let me translate: if we lose the Word of Christ which flows to us in the form of the Old Testament and the New Testament (associated with the number 12 in Revelation, think 12 tribes and 12 apostles), then we lose our source of light and life. Without the Word of Christ, we are overwhelmed and overcome by the darkness and sin of our own flesh and the evil influences in this world (even while we must also endure the incessant attacks of the devil).

But hear this description of the Christian life: ***"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."*** (Galatians 5:24) There is only one

response that is appropriate from the Christian in the face of the threat: it is not despair, it is not moaning and groaning about how bad things are getting: but it is repentance and it is faith. It is turning away from death and turning to Christ. It is turning from sin and turning to the Lord who forgives and then in true repentance we are led to follow Him, not the world, and not our flesh.

We must face and confess our sin: we treat the Word of Christ as less than vital. We pay more attention to the evening news than we do to the 66 books of the sacred canon. We thirst and yearn for so many other things. We prefer things that bring worry and even worse, death, instead of seeking and longing for the Word and the Sacrament. We embrace the world's priorities, loves, fears, and worries and when we do we begin to emulate the world...we start to become like the world...like wandering and thirsty dogs that are running around lost from their masters who can only devour the trash in the world...we become desperate and before we know it, we can begin to participate in the rebellion and immorality that is all around us. Such a soul forsakes faith and forsakes God. This should make us very concerned, because our sin proves that we practice idolatry -- loving other things more than God -- and that we do not belong to this picture of the heavenly paradise.

What is there to do? By the grace of God through His Word alone, we must change our thinking or better said pray that The Lord changes our thinking through the Word and Sacrament which give us Jesus. Our way of approaching everything must be changed. We must repent. The great Lutheran systematician Francis Pieper wrote in his essay *"What is Christianity?"*

"[The devil] endeavors to mislead man either utterly to despise the atonement of Christ or to attempt to establish his own righteousness, as a result of which Christ's reconciliation is forfeited. The consequence is that God must punish the world with dreadful plagues, wars, floods, earthquakes, and other frightful calamities to remind man for what purpose the earth still stands, namely, that he might repent and by faith accept the reconciliation of God which Christ has effected." (*What Is Christianity? And Other Essays*, CPH 1997 Reprint, 49)

The great irony which occurs when someone complains about the tumult while insinuating that God is not in control is that they are complaining about the very sign that proves that God *is* in control (as we witness the fulfillment of His prophetic prediction, Jn 16:33, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 3:1ff, et. al.).

Furthermore, the Lord reveals to us in His Word why this tumult occurs to begin with: He put us – at least our first parents – in Eden. The word "Eden" means "pleasure." When the

Old Testament was being translated into Greek, the word “Garden” was given a word that is the source of our word for “paradise.” This “Garden of Pleasure” was the “Paradise of Pleasure.” It depicts a King’s forest, a gorgeous park or orchard and in this Garden we had *everything*. In this Garden of Eden was that which ensured we had everything, namely “the tree of life (Gen 2:9; 3:24).” (see Brighton’s *Revelation*, CPH, 625-627)

That is, Revelation is simply going back to the Genesis terminology (and terminology also used in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel as well). Interestingly, the use of the word “tree” in Revelation appears to be in the collective sense. This is consistent with Ezekiel who describes heaven: ***“And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food...and their leaves for healing.”*** (Ezekiel 47:12)

In other words, these sources of life were everywhere and superabundant. Remember that in the Genesis account the Lord speaks of two particular trees, one was the “tree of life” and the other was “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” It may be that this tree of life permeated the Garden; God’s gift of life was everywhere in this paradise forest. But sin is so insane; it is so chaotic and dark, that sin rejects life. How often do we see this symptom of sin which for example rejects the unborn or the lives of the innocent in violent and heinous acts? When humanity rejects God, then humanity rejects life. In the Garden, the Lord simply recognized man’s choice for death over life...so they had to leave paradise with its tree of life. They could no longer care for that garden full of life, because they chose to embrace its antithesis. The tumult, the suffering, and the pain that we know on account of our sin is there because we rejected and lost the tree of life.

But the Lord never stopped being our loving and merciful Lord. He immediately had every intention to save us and acted upon that intention to save you and to save me. He found a way to keep the tree of life in play. He found a way to keep us connected to the tree of life.

The Lord has always intended to restore you to paradise and this is what He has in store for you; this is what He wants you to yearn for and look forward to (this is a picture of heaven):

***“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.”*** – Revelation 22:2

God in His grace has always intended to heal you from your sin. God in His grace has always intended to keep you connected to the tree of life. He just had to do something about our sin.

The word for tree – as used in Revelation – is not technically the word for “a tree,” but “stocks” or “wood.” It is easy to see how the collective can apply here. The Greek word is fun to say. It is *xulon*. Now here is where this gets really pretty awesome: this word is the very word used in reference to the cross of Christ!

Acts 5:30: ***“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree [xulon].”***

Galatians 3:13: ***“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree [xulon].’”***

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:24: ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [xulon], that we might die and live to righteousness.”***

How has the Lord kept you connected to the tree of life? Through Christ who went to the *xulon (the wood of the cross) and through His shed blood to cover and pay for your sins, He brought life and immortality to light (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:10).*

That is to say the true tree of life; source of life is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the way, the truth, and the life who reconnected you to life through another wood, another tree, another *xulon that has become your forgiveness and your life...because on that tree your sins were washed away. The sin which expelled us from paradise has been washed away. The doors of paradise are now open to forgiven sinners like it was to the thief on the cross who prayed to Christ and received Christ’s promise that he was going to be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43)...through the xulon of Jesus paradise is yours again dear Christian.* You’re back in business. You have the tree of life again in your life. The Revelation vision of paradise therefore belongs to all who trust in Jesus. That’s you!

Revelation 22:14 says:

***“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”***

The ancient church father, Primasius wrote, *“Thus, in a similar manner he promises the same reward, saying, ‘That they might have power over the tree of life.’ However, the tree of life is Christ, for we read, ‘Wisdom is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her.’ We must not think, however, that they [who have this power] are over [i.e., more powerful than] Christ. For ‘a*

*disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.’ Therefore, when he says here ‘over the tree of life,’ he means that their strength consists in the tree of life, that is, in the Lord Christ...” (Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament XII: Revelation, 402)*

The tree of life is yours again, paradise is restored for you. In heaven there is a river and fruit from the tree of life. And to keep this garden of pleasure in your possession, the Lord Jesus has set up a temporary connection to Himself, your tree of life. Trees always have water around. Your baptism into Christ is your water. Trees bear fruit. Holy Communion is your fruit which keeps you united to Jesus. Stay connected to these and when the day comes when you leave this world of tumult, you will enter the paradise of God where the tree of life will surround you and fill you with healing that is eternal. It has already begun because the sin that once kept you out, has been removed by Jesus who is in you, who is before you, who surrounds you with His life. In Him, He gives you the right to Himself. He gives you the right to the tree of life.