



# Sermon Growth Guide

**June 27, 2021**

**Future Jesus – Jesus the River of Life**

**Revelation 22:1-7**

**Key Verse:** Revelation 22:1-2a “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, down the middle of the great street of the city.”

**Big Idea:** The world is made new in Christ as Future Jesus meets us here and now.

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## Foundations

Every day we get news that reminds us of what we are painfully aware of—our world is broken, and we don't seem able to fix it. And we don't even have to look at the whole world to see that brokenness. It's all around us in our own city. Those who work for the healing of our world and cities are often overwhelmed by the imbalance between needs and resources.

And when cities break down, people leave them. They don't want to live there anymore. We are seeing those kinds of migrations today. But in Revelation 22, we see a vision of a city that we want to move to ... that we want to live in. It is a city filled with light, life, abundance, peace, and health.

As Pastor Katie shares this passage with us, she asks us to wonder about this delight-filled city and our place in it. Rev 22 tells us that this city “happens” when Jesus comes to make His home with us. So, maybe this heavenly city is not off in a distant future but instead, that future has come to be with us now.

Pray that God will enable you to get glimpses of the city because by the Holy Spirit, Jesus has already made His home with us. And pray that God's Holy Spirit will give you such hope for the ultimate heavenly city that you live like a citizen of the City of God.

## Understanding God's Word

What are the symbols of a vibrant life in this city?

What does the healing of the nations mean to you in our time?

What will not be found in the City of God?

What images in this passage give you the most hope?

## Applying God's Word

- Martin Luther once said, having been baptized into Christ and joined to Him, we become like “little Christs” as we go into our neighborhoods. As Jesus dwells with us, how shall you dwell in your neighborhood so that others can see glimpses of the life Jesus promises us?
- This passage tells that Living Water and nourishing fruit will sustain our lives. As you examine your daily routines, from what rivers do you drink? What do you really consume, hoping to be satisfied?
- In what ways is God's Word food and drink to you?

## Witnessing God's Word

This week, as you move in and about the earthly city that is Colorado Springs, how will you bear the light of the heavenly city into the dark places around us?

Revelation 22:1-7: “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. 6 The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’

7 “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

Spoiler alert! A well-meaning friend starts to tell you about a movie that you ... haven't ... seen ... yet. And she says, “That ending! Can you believe it? The dog dies, there's that explosion. The couple breaks up, then they run through the airport, and then finally get together in the end and then ... the whole thing was a dream!?! And you respond quietly, “I actually haven't seen it yet.”

How do you feel about spoilers? Do you want to jam your fingers in your ear? Start shouting, “No, no, no, no?” Or do you lean in? Yes, please, tell me how it ends. I personally love spoilers—my husband Chuck hates this. We'll be watching a movie together, and I'll be on my phone googling how the movie ends. I want to know, does this end well? That's what I want to know every time I open a new book or start a movie. Whatever tension or suspense might come along, I need to know—will this end well?

It's one thing when you are hearing about the season finale to your favorite show. Or

the twist for the new movie that just came out. But what about our world? What about our lives?

These past 16 months, we have faced the hard reality again and again that we are not in control. There's been so much pain and loss, such a disorienting year, revealing so much suffering and injustice. Is this going to end well? Is this story going to end well?

Today, we are going all the way to the end, the last chapter in the last book of the Bible. Spoiler alert—it ends well, beyond our wildest dreams, the whole of history is headed toward the most glorious future in Christ. So we have hope, hope that meets us here and now, in this present moment.

Three questions to guide our time:

Where are we headed?

Are we there yet?

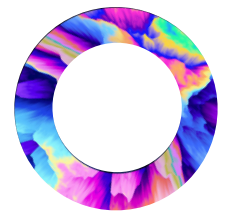
So now what?

So first: Where are we headed?

Answer: the world made new in Christ.

The last chapter in the last book in the Bible shows us the restoration of our world. Our passage—like the rest of the book of Revelation—is full of images. And we have to take care to understand what these images would have meant to John's 1st century audience as they heard the words of his letter. In the case of Revelation 22, they would have recognized allusions to Scripture, particularly the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

Hear again verse 1 and 2: “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” (Revelation 22:1-2). As we peak into the future, we find a river. This image brings us back to Genesis 2:6, where God provided water, “streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.”



And a river watering the garden flowed from Eden

There is no life without water. My old neighbors in the Springs, Kate and Brett, have this gorgeous garden in their yard. Their whole yard was essentially this massive garden. I remember one time they went out of town, and they took care to assign different sections of the yard to different neighbors to water. It required a lot of watering. I do not have anything close to a green thumb so I was a little nervous about my assigned role. I gave myself this pep talk, “Katie you have one job, water these plants.”

Water is essential for life. In the beginning, God provides a stream, which becomes a river. Life flowing through God’s good creation. And in the middle of the garden was the tree of life. In the beginning, this garden was overflowing with life, the very life of God. These images we find in Revelation 22 evoke the garden from Genesis. But in Revelation 22, in the final restoration, we find not a garden but a city.

Why a city? Again we go back to the beginning; God put human beings in the garden to cultivate that place, to cause it to grow and flourish. But human beings weren’t meant to stay in the garden, no, with God, partnering with God, human beings would create, cultivate, enhance God’s good world. Things like cities would be built. Things like symphonies would be written, delicious food and drink would be made, culture would be created. The human job description was to use our power and will for good, to join God in God’s loving rule of creation. But, and this is where the story takes a dark turn, the human race failed to fulfill the job description God gave us. “Oh that with God thing, I would rather do it without God.” And the first humans were then banished from the garden after they rebelled against God. They were cut off from the tree of life. And the curse of sin seeps into the ground, seeps into our relationships—with God, with each other, with creation itself.

And the question we carry deep within our souls—can we ever get back? Can what has been lost ever be recovered? The storyline of Scripture traces God’s loving pursuit, God’s faithfulness—God who won’t quit, God who won’t give up on us, and in the fullness of time, Jesus, God in the flesh came. Jesus, who is fully God, is also the true Human. Jesus did what we could not do. He fulfilled the human job description. Through His faithful life, His sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection. It’s Christ who brings God’s purposes for all of creation to fulfillment.

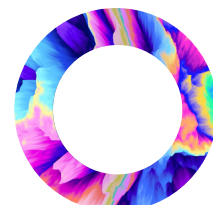
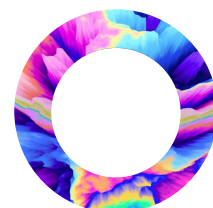
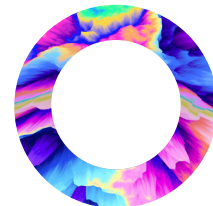
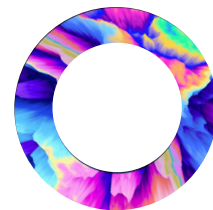
We peek into the future in Revelation 22 and we find a city. And we find the river of the water of life. Life flows through the city because of what Christ has done. Light fills the city—because the presence of God fills it. Life and Light. All emanating from Jesus.

Where are we headed? Let’s be clear: Revelation 22 (and Revelation 21) is not a picture of heaven, or what we commonly think of as heaven. If my heart were to stop beating this morning, if I died, I would go to be with the Lord, I would be in Christ’s presence. Because of what Christ has done, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus, not even death. But that’s not what Revelation 22 is talking about. There is a future day of hope. Revelation 22 is showing us our ultimate hope for when Christ’s returns—when all those who are in Christ are raised to life, with transformed bodies and all of creation is renewed.

The ultimate Christian hope is not going to Heaven when you die. As true and glorious as this is! The ultimate Christian hope is heaven and earth becoming one. The life of heaven fully invading a renewed earth. Our world, this creation that God declared good, not cast aside but renewed.

Hear again Revelation 22 verse 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.

Did you hear that? We are headed to a day



when the curse of sin, the pain of living in a broken world will be no more. It's hard to wrap our minds around that. It's hard to imagine. No more alienation from God. No more broken systems, broken families, broken hearts. No more abuse of power. Racism. Misogyny. Violence. Oppression. Greed. Poverty. Deprivation. Loneliness. War. Mental illness. Isolation. Sickness and death. Sin. One day will be no more.

We are headed to a day when we will never again hear the words, "I am so sorry, it's cancer." We are headed to a future in Christ, where we will never again wake up to the news of another mass shooting or a devastating earthquake.

Take heart, breathe deep. We are headed to a day when the curse will be no more. God will do it. Jesus is not finished. We will spend eternity in a renewed earth, heaven and earth made one.

This may be the point where we strike up the hallelujah chorus. But wait, there's more: "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4). We will see His face. When Christ returns, God will make His dwelling among us, and we will see God's face. Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known. God's presence—the life-giving, transforming presence of God will surround, fill, envelop everything. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Where are we headed? The world made new in Christ.

2nd Question: Are we there yet?  
This is what I want to call the road trip question. You know the question, the question that begins about two minutes after you pull out of your driveway and continues on all the way up to your destination ... are we there yet?

Revelation 22 gives us this picture of a restored earth, of heaven come down.

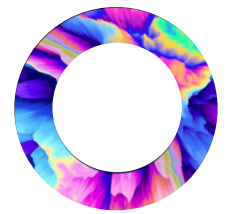
No more curse of sin. Are we there yet? Well, did anyone get in a fight with your roommate or your kids on the way to church? Did anyone have technical difficulties getting online today? Has anyone read the news this morning?

Are we there yet? No. No, we are awaiting a future day—the day of Christ's return. We are waiting for God to act—for God to do what only God can do and keep every single one of His promises. Are we there yet? No. And yet, something new has most assuredly begun in Christ.

Christ came proclaiming the good news of God's loving reign, the kingdom of God. In the person of Jesus, heaven and earth meet, the life of heaven touching down on earth. And all that would threaten to undo God's good creation, Jesus took it head on on the cross, defeating sin and evil through His very death. The Lamb that was slain—that's what John keeps calling Jesus. The Lamb. Can all that is lost ever be restored? Yes, But only through the Lamb that was slain.

Three days later Christ walked out of the tomb. Everything changes. Death no longer gets the last word. Happy Easter, by the way. And then Christ ascended to the throne. Do you want to know who is in charge? His name is Jesus. Christ is King. The Spirit has been poured out on all God's sons and daughters, a promise of what is to come, a first deposit of all that is to come.

Something new, gloriously new, has begun in Jesus, waters of life can flow through you! Come all who are thirsty. The life of God's renewed creation is here but it's not yet here too. We live in the already and the not yet. Already and not yet—how do we wrap our minds around that? Here's how I have heard it explained: we just commemorated Juneteenth, the holiday celebrating when slaves in Texas finally heard the good news that they were free. Now the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln became official January 1, 1863. But the Civil War continued for two more years.





And then there was even more of a delay, and it was not until June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, that the slaves in Texas finally heard the good news that they were free, more than two years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. And even at that point there were still slaves in some Union states, and the struggle for freedom and justice continued. A victory was achieved, but it wasn't yet realized.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christ unleashed the beginning of new creation, but we are still longing for a future day, for the full reality of God's victory to be here. Right now it is hidden. But we do get glimpses. The life of the world to come breaking in—in unexpected ways, in upside down ways as we follow a crucified Savior.

I want you to hear these words from a Presbyterian statement from the 1970s: "Hope gives us courage for the struggle. The people of God have often misused God's promises as excuses for doing nothing about present evils. But in Christ the new world has already broken in and the old can no longer be tolerated. We know our efforts cannot bring in God's Kingdom. But hope plunges us into the struggle for victories over evil that are possible now in the world, the church, and our individual lives. Hope gives us courage and energy to contend against all opposition, however invincible it may seem, for the new world and the new humanity that are surely coming. Jesus is Lord! He has been Lord from the beginning. He will be Lord at the end. Even now He is Lord." — A Declaration of Faith Hope gives us courage for the struggle.

Our final question: So now what? I used to think we would spend eternity singing worship songs. There was an old praise song called, *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever*. Like just that song on an endless loop.

But what do we see in Revelation 22? "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of

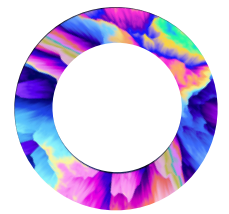
the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5). They will reign for ever and ever. Who is they? It's the church, the body of Christ. Us. This speaks to the human job description. We were made to partner with God in His loving rule of this world, remember? And that's our task in the life that is to come.

Here and now, we are learning what it means to partner with God in God's work in our world. Becoming a new sort of people. The river of the Holy Spirit flowing through us. The life of God flowing through us. Light and life for the city.

Author and Speaker Michael Frost likens our role here and now to that of a movie trailer. At the movie theater, (remember movie theaters?!) before the movie starts, there are all those trailers, providing a sample of the upcoming films. Sometimes, after a particular preview plays, you will hear someone whisper, "I want to see that movie." Frost says that's the role of the church—our task here and now is to give little glimpses, previews of the life that is to come.

In our worship lifting up the name of Jesus, in the way we treat each other in the ways we care for the poor and the hurting, in the tables we set and the meals we share, we preview the life that is to come. And we pray that our neighbors, that our friends, that the people of COS, would say, "I want to see the world they come from." And in this we trust that Christ is not finished—the life of the world to come is breaking in ever here, even now. We are not building sandcastles on the beach, waiting for the tide to come in and wash it all away—what you do here and now matters. That's part of what it means to be ...Light and Life for the City.

We see that city in Revelation 22. The city we belong to. Where ... Life flows like a mighty river. Where ... Light fills the city. The Lord God will give us light. And in that city ... no one is estranged from God.



In that city ... there are no empty bellies.  
In that city ... there is no mistreatment  
of women, abuse of children, or injustice  
committed against people of color.  
There are no refugee camps.  
There is no one lonely.  
Beauty fills that city, the best of human  
culture—what is good and noble is  
brought into that city.  
The worship of Jesus rises from that city.

If that is the future ahead of us ... then as  
a church we begin to anticipate that day.  
Here and now.

We run around telling those estranged  
from God the good news of Jesus' love  
for them, the good news that Jesus is  
Lord. Come all who are thirsty. We feed  
the hungry. We seek justice. We open our  
homes.

We show up—using our gifts, drawing near  
to the hurting. Standing in the hard places,  
crying out, “How long, O Lord?” Here and  
now, we can experience the transforming  
love of Christ in our own lives—becoming  
the sort of people who will reign with  
Christ in God's new world.

AND watch this. We can take a nap We  
can rest. Because it's not on me. I am not  
wrangling new creation in by the sweat  
of my brow. I am joining in what God is  
doing.

If we are headed to a day, when the  
life-giving, transforming presence of Jesus  
will be all in all, then, here, now, we can  
embody that good news. Light and Life  
for the City.

I was flying with my family a couple of  
weeks ago. And on that particular day,  
the airline we were flying—Southwest  
Airlines—had computer trouble. Our flight  
out of Pittsburgh was delayed. And then  
when we went to taxi away from the gate,  
something happened and we had to go  
back to the gate. I had this thought as we  
returned to the gate: “We are never going  
to get to Denver.” Like row 34, seat C, this  
is where I will be forever and ever amen.  
Flights all over the country were canceled,

delayed. I imagined thousands of travelers  
wondering, “Will we ever arrive? Will we  
ever get there?”

These past 16 months, we have walked  
through incredible pain and loss, so much  
devastation. We can read promises like we  
find in Revelation 22 and maybe wonder—  
really? Is this just a bunch of pretty words?  
If it feels like I am being confronted with  
despair and hope; can I actually just hope?

Will that day ever come when a loud  
voice from the throne says, “Look! God's  
dwelling is here with humankind. He will  
dwell with them, and they will be his  
peoples. God himself will be with them as  
their God. He will wipe away every tear  
from their eyes. Death will be no more.  
There will be no mourning, crying, or  
pain anymore, for the former things have  
passed away.”

My friends, these words we find in  
Revelation are trustworthy and true.

Future Jesus holds the life of the world to  
come. The life we were made for. The life  
that is surely coming.

We belong to Jesus.

Jesus will do it.

And so, we can choose hope.

