

Scriptures: John 14:23-29; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

A City on a Hill

Summer's almost upon us – Annual Conference happens later this week – it's always a sign that summer has arrived. For just a minute though, I want to think about something we usually see around here in the winter. I love seeing downtown Sidney with all the Christmas lights, gearing up for the Winter Wonderland parade – especially if snow has fallen and covers the sidewalks. The lights reflected on the snow make the whole city glow.

There's something beautiful about a city glowing with light. Long before electricity connected the world, people dreamed of places where light wasn't limited to daylight hours or flickering candles. If you ever watched *Little House on the Prairie*, you know what I'm talking about. The Ingalls wanted pure, constant, illuminating light so they could do all the things they needed to do around their homestead.

In 1884, something amazing happened in Findlay, Ohio, which would have made the Ingalls' day – or night, rather. Drillers struck a huge natural gas well beneath the town, releasing a flow of gas that shot flames a hundred feet into the air. Suddenly, the quiet town became known across America as "The City of Light." Streets were lit with blazing lamps. Homes glowed. Businesses flourished. Glass companies flocked to Findlay to take advantage of cheap, abundant energy. At night, people would come from all over, just to marvel at the lights.

Findlay shined, but eventually the gas ran out. The flame dimmed, the factories left, and the city returned to something quieter. What had seemed like a never-ending resource proved to be temporary. This reminds us of another kind of light, we started reading about last week – one that doesn't flicker, fade, or ever go out. In the book of Revelation, John gives us a glimpse of a city much greater than Findlay – a city where light and life flow endlessly.

John gives us a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, a city powered by the very glory of God. In the center of this city is a river, and alongside the river stands something older than time, and more enduring than any resource we could ever drill – the Tree of Life. The leaves of the Tree of Life are for the healing of the nations. So, as we read about this today, keep in mind three promises God gives us – promises of light, healing, and life. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5. **Read Rev. 21:10, 22-22:5.**

The Light of God

Our passage this morning opens basically where we left off last week. An angel carries John away “in the Spirit” to a mountain, and shows him the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:10, paraphrased). He goes on in the next few verses of the chapter to describe the city. It’s a truly radiant sight. It shines and twinkles, like expensive gemstones and pure gold.

He goes on, telling us, “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp,” (verses 22-23). In John’s vision, New Jerusalem needs no sun or moon – no electric light or gas flame. God’s glory provides all the light. And the Lamb – Jesus Christ – is the lamp. Let that sink in, church. Jesus is the lamp. Light’s not just a metaphor here – it’s God’s presence, shining so brightly that darkness cannot exist.

We usually think of light in terms of Science, or usefulness. In Findlay, natural gas was a miracle of the Industrial Age. Its light was cheap, powerful, and abundant. It changed how people lived, worked, and worshiped. But all earthly sources of light eventually fade. Wells run dry. Energy gets used up. Cities that once gleamed with industry fall into shadows.

The light of God never dims. It never flickers with time. It doesn’t go out. You never have to worry about the electricity going out in a storm, and Pioneer having to send out line workers to get the power back on. The light of God reveals all things. It exposes every injustice, brightens every sorrow, and transforms the dark corners of human history with eternal hope. We are called to reflect that light. Jesus says, “You are light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden,” (Matt. 5:14). The city John sees in Revelation is that hilltop city – glowing – not because of what it produces, but because of Who resides in it.

So we walk in that Light now. We bear that Light in our church, in our homes, and on our country – and city – blocks. Even in the day of LED light bulbs and digital screens, the world is starving for real, healing light. It’s not about better visibility – those LED headlights drive me nuts at night – it’s about vision. It’s about seeing the beauty around us, not just more brightness. The Lamb is our lamp – and in Him, we see clearly.

Notice what else John tells us:

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, (Rev. 21:24-27).

See, the whole world is transformed by the Light of Christ. It creates a world of safety and security. In 8th Grade, I went with my class from Houston High School to Washington, DC. Washington, DC, as the capital of our country is a tourist destination. People want to see where decisions are made, where Presidents have lived, where laws have been made in Congress, and interpreted in the Supreme Court building. Someday, people will flock to New Jerusalem – to see God, to experience Jesus face-to-face – and it'll be open all the time. No Secret Service guards. No police. No weapons of any kind.

Healing the Nations

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. 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, (Rev. 22:1-2).

What a beautiful image that is. The healing offered here doesn't come from medicine, military might, or our own wisdom – it comes from the leaves on a tree in God's eternal city. The Tree of Life is no ordinary tree. It echoes back to Eden – to paradise – where humanity had perfect fellowship and relationship with God. There in the garden, the Tree of Life was barred after the disobedience of Adam and Eve – you can read about it at the end of Genesis 3. In the New Jerusalem, the Tree of Life stands at the center, and it's freely available again. God restores what sin destroyed. He offers more than forgiveness. He also offers us and all other people, the opportunity to flourish!

Notice that John records the tree bears fruit every month. That's important. We have pear and apple trees in our yard. They only produce once each year. During the winter, they wither and go dormant. But the Tree of Life, in every season, always produces fruit. And it grows on both sides of the river – a sign that healing isn't limited or exclusive. The leaves are for the healing of the nations – including those nations led by madmen.

In our world today, nations are in deep need of healing. Wars rage. Divisions deepen. Wounds – both historic and personal – fester. Even here in Shelby County, we struggle to reconcile, to forgive, and to move forward. The Tree of Life stands as another promise of God. Healing is possible, and available.

In a way, Findlay's gas boom was a kind of healing. It brought jobs, prosperity, and innovation. But it also brought challenges – overuse, pollution, inequality. All human attempts at healing fall short unless they are rooted in the justice and mercy of God. What if the Church became known not for what it opposes, but for what it heals? What if we planted ourselves,

like trees beside the river, offering shelter and healing to the broken, the anxious, and the forgotten?

Psalm 1 says the righteous are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season. The Tree of Life in Revelation is the fulfillment of that promise. It's God's ultimate act of restoration. As followers of Jesus, we must be people of the Tree of Life, offering healing instead of harm, peace instead of division, and hope instead of despair.

Life Eternal

John wraps up our passage today, telling us this:

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. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. 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, (Rev. 22:3-5).

This is the final promise – life without end. In the New Jerusalem, God's people dwell with Him, face-to-face. The curse of death is gone. Pain is gone. We live in a society – a world, really – obsessed with longevity. We chase youth, try to delay aging, and fear death. The life God offers isn't only about longevity or duration – it's also about quality. It's eternal life that begins right now, in the presence of Jesus Christ

The vision of Revelation doesn't float in some distant sky. It touches earth. It descends from heaven. It's real, tangible, and trustworthy. I said it last week, and I'll say it again – John isn't describing an escape from this world – he's describing its redemption. The garden of Genesis becomes the golden city of Revelation. It's a place where God dwells with His people – not apart from them.

At the heart of it all is the Tree of Life. It is rooted in Christ's work on our behalf at the cross, and in God's presence with us. Its fruit never fails. Its leaves never drop off in dormancy. And it invites all who are thirsty to come and drink from the clear, clean living water that flows along its root bed.

Findlay's Light, Heaven's Glory

When the streets of Findlay lit up in the late 1800's, it was marvelous. People from all over went there to see it. But no matter how bright that gaslight burned, it eventually dimmed. At Arlington National Cemetery, in Arlington, Virginia, at the burial site of President John F. Kennedy, our government placed what's called an "eternal flame." It's not eternal, friends. A pipe buried in the ground carries natural gas, and an igniter lights it as it leaves the pipe

above ground. If the pipe broke, or the government went bankrupt, that flame would go out pretty fast.

In Findlay, the gas wells were capped. The factories closed. The crowds moved on. God's city never fades. The Tree of Life is never depleted. The river will never run dry. And the Light will never go out.

And so we live in an "in-between" time, because we live with anticipation of that great city. We plant seeds of it here on earth. We carry its light into our schools, workplaces, families, and neighborhood block parties – they need to do some of those around here again, New Hope would be a good place to hold one. We offer its healing to the lonely, the grieving, and the sick. We proclaim its promise – not just for someday, but for today, right now.

Last week we heard Jesus say, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:5). He invites us to be part of that newness. So let's fix our eyes on the Tree of Life. Let's live in its light, offer its healing, and share its fruit with a world in desperate need of it.

Prayer: Glorious God, Thank You for the vision of the New Jerusalem, for the promise of light that never fades, healing that never ends, and life that flows eternally from Your throne. Help us to live today in the light of that future. Let Your Spirit move in us, that we may be bearers of healing, seekers of justice, and reflectors of Your glory. Keep us rooted in the love of Christ, nourished by the water of life, and growing ever closer to You. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.