

4 June, 2000  
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**FOLLOWING CHRIST IN A FRIGHTENING WORLD:  
NO MORE CURSE**  
*Revelation 21:1-6*

Cyndi and I remodeled our home several years ago with the help of many Chapel Hill friends. There were some decisions we made that we came to regret. The steam bath unit in the shower was one of those. But there is one decision we made that we have never regretted. We installed a Jacuzzi bathtub. I'm telling you, at the end of a long day of work in the yard, there is nothing like drawing a hot bath, turning on those jets and lowering yourself into the bubbling, therapeutic water. You know the sound you make when you get into those miraculous waters, don't you? "Ahhhhh." It is the sound of pure relief.

This morning, in our penultimate sermon on Revelation, we come to the "Ahhhhh" verse. See if you recognize it when we get there.

Did you see it? The "Ahhhhh" verse? This morning's text is actually a continuation of last week's study on the New Jerusalem. If you weren't here last week, I would urge you to get the tape. Chapter 21 is one of the most glorious visions in the scriptures. It is the vision of God's new kingdom set up on earth. It is a vision of great hope, a vision of a place and time where God himself will "wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." The city has no temple because God is its temple. It has no sun or moon because God provides the glorious light. It is a place of beauty, safety, eternal security.

This morning we hear the rest. This new paradise is more than a city. It is a garden city. A river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flows from the very throne of God right down the middle of the great street, which we learned last week is paved with gold so pure you can see through it. On each side of this beautiful river is the tree of life, yielding crops every month of the year. These trees bring healing.

Do you see how this takes us back to Eden again? Remember, the Garden of Eden was watered by a river. And that is also where we

were introduced to the Tree of Life. It was one of the forbidden trees from which Adam and Eve could not eat. But not any more. Now the Tree of Life is available for all and produces crops around the year. In other words, endless life. Abundant, flourishing, eternal life.

I have been in cities that had canals. Venice, Italy. Amsterdam. Ft. Lauderdale. San Antonio. But these are nothing compared to this glorious garden city.

At it is there, in the midst of this cool and fertile setting, that we hear the "Ahhhh" verse. Where is it? Verse 3. "No longer will there be any curse." Ahhhh! After 21 chapters of plagues and judgments, after seven seals and seven trumpets and seven dishes, after famine and warfare and tyranny and death, after bloodshed and persecution, after dragons and Sea Beasts and Land Beasts, and after all of these curses, we hear these glorious words: "No more curse." Ahhhh. Finally. Sweet relief.

Except...I don't think that's what John is talking about. Certainly it will be a relief to be delivered from the curse of Satan and his minions, from the curse of plagues, from the curse of the horrible things we have read about over this last year. But that's not what this is talking about. You need to think back. Further. Much further. Remember, this is the new paradise, right? This is New Jerusalem. The new garden city. Why do we need a new garden city? Because we lost the first one.

Don't you remember what happened after Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Chapter 3 of Genesis tells us about it. They were cursed. In fact, all of God's creation fell under a curse because of their disobedience. The Serpent was cursed for deceiving them. The woman was cursed with pain in childbirth. The very ground was cursed so that Adam would have to toil in order to produce fruit. And maybe the most painful part of the curse: they were kicked out of Paradise. Why? Because, says the text, they might disobey God and eat from the other tree in the garden. Do you remember the name? The Tree of Life. Listen to what God says: "He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and eat...from the tree of life also." Why? Because then he would live forever. From that moment on, we were marked men and women. We bore the

indelible stain of sin on our souls. Nothing could hide it. Everyone had it. We were cursed.

As you will remember, last November a small group of us returned to Israel to evaluate possible mission opportunities in which we might partner. While we were in Jerusalem, we stayed inside the Old City which allowed Rick Murray, my buddy from First Pres., Yakima, and me to get up early in the morning and take walks through the vacant and quiet streets of that magical place. One morning we went to the Western Wall. The next morning, we walked to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of the resurrection of Jesus. We participated in an English Catholic Mass outside of the empty tomb. It was a profound experience as we shared communion at the very place where the broken body of Jesus was laid to rest.

Rick and I were both deeply touched. We started back, talking about the experience. As we drew close to our hotel, we began to catch up on a man who was shuffling along ahead of us. It was an awkward gait and our attention was drawn to him. As we drew closer to him, the man suddenly turned around and looked at us...as if he thought we were sneaking up on him. I will never forget what I saw. His entire face was a mass of purplish-black growths. I have seen lots of folks with birthmarks of some sort. But they were nothing. This condition was so disfiguring that we were both shocked and couldn't help commenting to each other under our breaths.

We kept walking. We drew closer. Two girls were walking towards the man from the other direction. We passed him just as the girls passed coming toward us. And we heard, "Good morning." I assumed he was speaking to the girls. Really...I HOPED he was speaking to the girls. I am ashamed to admit it but he was so hideous looking that I just wanted to keep walking and not have to look at him again.

Suddenly, as we were about ten feet beyond the man, we heard it again: "Good MORNING!" And that sinking, sick feeling hit me. I knew he was speaking to us. I knew I had to stop and respond. I knew I was a complete schmuck for being afraid to talk to him. I felt horrible. So I stopped and turned around. "Good morning!", I said. I patted him on the shoulder and introduced myself to him. I asked his name. "Emir," he

responded. I noticed he was carrying papers to sell. I asked him if he had any English papers. He did. I asked him how much they were. He said \$2.00. At that point, he could have said \$50.00 and I would have paid it, I was feeling so horrible about myself.

As we walked on, Rick and I both spoke about our discomfort, our shame at our behavior. Even as I recount it to you, I am ashamed of myself. What a horrible life of loneliness this man must have endured. Here was a beloved child of God who had been stricken with a curse all of his life. A curse of a physical deformity that could not be removed or hidden. How many times had he been ignored? How many times had he been made fun of and rejected? And here was I, a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ...the Christ who touched lepers and made them whole...returning from communion at the empty tomb, and I was too afraid, uncomfortable, embarrassed...you fill in the word---to speak to this man.

But now comes the gracious good news. The curse is lifted. All of the suffering and death that we brought upon ourselves by our rebellion against God is lifted. All of the loneliness and rejection and disfigurement of sin...is gone. Removed from us. So how was this curse lifted? How is it that, suddenly, we have our garden back? How is it that suddenly we have the tree of life back? That we are welcome to eat of it? Paul gives us a clue in 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 hung on a tree.'"

This morning we return to the communion table. We celebrate the one who became a curse for us so that the disfigurement of the curse of sin might be removed from us. So that we might discover new life, real life, eternal life. So that we might be different. I invite you to the table with me. Last time, I didn't respond very well to this gracious gift. Perhaps this time will be different. For me. And for you.

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *NO MORE CURSE!*

*Revelation 22:1-6*

*4 June, 2000*

*Pastor Mark Toone*

- *Review 21.1-22.6. New Jerusalem is described as much by what will NOT be there as what will be, concluding with the promise of "no more curses." Review what will be missing and what it means.*
- *Read Genesis 3.14-24. With this text in mind, return to our Revelation passage. How does 22.1-6 reverse the effects of that curse?*
- *How has "the curse" most deeply effected you? Give the example which illustrates why you will be so grateful to finally be in a place where "no longer will there be any curse."*
- *Pray for each other.*