

## The Church Part 13: Eternal Rest in the Garden of God

**Ezekiel 28:13; Revelation 2:7; 22:1-5**

© Rev. Nollie Malabuyo, October 15, 2023 (Big Springs Community Church)

Dear congregation of Christ: “But if you get up in the morning and read this headline, ‘Russia Attacks Israel,’ fasten your seatbelt because you’re seeing Bible prophecy fulfilled in your lifetime before your very eyes.” This is Greg Laurie harping again on false, long-discredited, repackaged, dispensational prophecies based on the unbiblical premise that the nation Israel is God's chosen people even in the new covenant. Every war in the Middle East means the Rapture is near, which is what these false prophets have been predicting for over 100 years (much like the climate change hoaxers)..

All these prophecy “experts” still teach that there are two peoples of God: Israel and the Church. This is totally contrary to the Bible's teaching that there is one people of God since our Lord Jesus Christ arrived on the scene. This one people is the Church made up of both Jews and Gentiles from all nations, tribes and languages of the world. Jesus himself prayed, “*that they may be one*,” referring to his Jewish disciples and to Gentiles, “*those who will believe in me through their word*” (John 17:20-1). Paul also wrote, “[*Christ*] *has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace*” (Eph 2:14-15). This “dividing wall of hostility” is the old covenant distinction between Israel and the nations. Peter also declares that God’s people is “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*” (1 Pet 2:9). Therefore, this “one new man” is the one, holy, universal Church made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

The current war in the Middle East reminds us of the early church, when Rome was overrun and plundered by the Visigoths in 410 A.D. Before this attack, Christians looked at Rome as “the Eternal City.” But after this attack, the great theologian Augustine corrected this error, writing in his book, *City of God*, that the eternal city is not any earthly city, but the kingdom of God, which will stand forever. All earthly cities would rise and fall because they are established and ruled by sinners.

In 1667, the poet John Milton wrote his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, lamenting the corruption and tyranny of King Charles I of England and the Anglican Church. He traces this evil state of affairs back to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve fell into sin, plunging the whole human race into sin and death. Then in 1671, Milton wrote a kind of a sequel, the much shorter *Paradise Regained*. It centers around the spiritual victory of Jesus over Satan in the wilderness. With Adam’s disobedience, Paradise was lost, but with Jesus’ obedience, Paradise is being regained.

This is what our Scripture texts teach. The Garden of Eden was God’s garden-temple, Paradise, and Adam and Eve being the first church. But Adam and all human beings were driven out of this Paradise; they and us lost this Paradise. But when Christ came, living a perfectly sinless life, dying on the cross for the sins of his people, and raising himself up from the dead, there is a now a way into this lost Paradise. In this Paradise Regained, there is the Tree of Life, who is Christ, who gives Living

Water, the Bread of Life, and is the Light of the World. In this Paradise Regained, God's one people, one church, will finally have eternal rest, dwelling with God and Christ forever.

Therefore, our theme today in this the last sermon on our series on The Church, is, **The Church Part 13: Eternal Rest in the Garden of God**, under four headings.

### **“The River of the Water of Life”**

This last sermon will take us full circle back to the Garden of Eden, where we started, and on to the future Paradise of God, the new heaven and new earth, the eternal city. As in almost all of the Book of Revelation, symbolism abounds in Revelation 22. There, we find the crystal-clear river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of Christ. It provides water for life of all inhabitants of the city. The Apostle John is merely referencing Jesus' proclamation that he is the Living Water who gives eternal life to all those who believe and trust in him (John 4:13-14; 7:37).

In Isaiah 55:1, the LORD invites you and everyone who hears, *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”* God invites everyone to come, to be united to his Son Jesus Christ in faith, who is the Living Water. And this drink is freely given to all those who come to him in faith. No amount of good works would be sufficient to receive this eternal water of life.

Friends, if you haven't done so, come to Christ and receive eternal life only by faith alone in him alone. He himself invites you, *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:13-14). He will lead you “beside still waters,” where your thirst for righteousness will be fully and perfectly satisfied forever (Psa 23:2; Matt 5:6). But to those of you who believe in Christ, your blessed hope is that beyond your earthly afflictions and sufferings waits eternal rest in the glorious eternal Living Water in the heavenly city.

And it that heavenly city, there also awaits the Tree of Life.

### **“The Tree of Life”**

Where is this Tree of Life? It reappears in the Paradise of God, a paradise that is different from the ancient paradise, the Garden of Eden. This Paradise is what John Milton calls Paradise Regained or Paradise Restored. The Garden of Eden was created in perfection in which our first parents Adam and Eve dwelt. They were also created in perfection. But this ancient Paradise is not the Paradise of God in Revelation 2:7. This ancient Eden was still susceptible to corruption, and that was what actually happened when Adam fell into sin.

Not so with the future Paradise of God in Revelation 2:7. It will be perfect for eternity; it will never be corrupted. Not only will everyone in Paradise Regained enjoy perfect holiness forever; their hunger for righteousness will also be finally and perfectly satisfied. Who will give them this satisfaction? Only Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven. Again, he invites all of you, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh”* (John 6:51).

If you come to him in faith, you will receive the Living Water and the Bread of Life forever. This is also what Isaiah looked forward to, *“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food”* (Isa 55:2). No amount of good works will suffice to receive the Bread of Life, for it is given freely to all who have faith alone in Christ alone.

This Bread of Life will come from the Tree of Life on both of sides of the river of the water of life. This does not mean that there will be two Trees of Life in the eternal Paradise. Rather, it means that the Tree of Life will be everywhere in the holy city, whether you’re on one side of the river or the other. We know this because the Tree of Life never ceases from bearing fruit for feeding God’s people in the new Paradise. And God’s one people will be everyone from all nations, tribes and languages who have been healed from sin and death through the precious blood the Lamb.

To those of you who believe in Christ, your blessed hope is that beyond your earthly afflictions and sufferings waits eternal rest in the glorious eternal Bread of Life in that blessed, heavenly city.

### **“No Longer Will Anything be Accursed”**

Adam and Eve and all their descendants came under God’s curse because of sin. Not so with Paradise Regained. It will forever be the blessed, heavenly country, for, *“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him”* (Rev 22:3). All who will enter Paradise Regained will be perfectly righteous because God will give them the perfect righteousness of the Lamb, Jesus Christ his Son. And they will forever be perfectly righteous, since Satan and all his angels and dominion will not be able to enter into this city, for he will already have been thrown into the lake of fire forever.

Who are these accursed people who will be excluded from Paradise Regained? We read in Revelation 22:15, *“Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood”* (see also Rev 21:8). These are not literal “dogs,” but dogs—and also pigs—represent whatever and whoever is unholy and unclean (Prv 26:11; Matt 7:6).

Those on this list of accursed, unrepentant sinners are a mirror of those who violate the Ten Commandments: the sexually immoral who practice homosexuality and transgenderism; murderers who abort and behead infants, who massacre everyone—men and women, children, and the elderly—who do not belong to their evil religion; idolaters who worship money, power, sex and fame; politicians, celebrities, teachers, professors, and even pastors who teach all kinds of wicked lies and heresies in order to deceive for shameful gain of money, power and sex. These are those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). Since there is only heaven and hell in eternity, and since they will not be in heaven, their destination is only the lake of eternal torment.

But you who belong to Christ by faith, in your earthly sins, sufferings and afflictions, look forward and upward for your blessed hope, your eternal rest. For, *“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”* (Rev 22:14). Their clean, white robes represent their works cleansed and purified by Christ’s blood (Rev 7:14; 19:8).

## “No Need for Light of Lamp or Sun”

Yesterday, after our Bible study, at around 9:15am, we went out the door of the church, and lo and behold! An eerie kind of light that was different from sunrise or sunset. The sun was peeking from the clouds, but it was not daylight. So, when I looked at my phone, I saw all kinds of pictures of an annular solar eclipse. Okay, so that was the strange kind of light.

All the earth, all creatures, all mankind, need light. If there was no light, the earth and everything in it will die. This is why the first act of God in creation was to create light amidst the unformed and empty darkness. In the ancient Paradise, Adam and Eve enjoyed the beauty and bounty of the earth during the light of day, and rested in the darkness of night. But we learn from Revelation 22:5 that in Paradise Regained, *“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”*

Can you imagine a world where there is no light of sun, moon and stars, where there is only day and no night? We might think it will not be as beautiful and splendid as our present world. But can there be any light that is more glorious, radiant, and splendid than light that shines directly from God and Christ? The heavenly lights are only a small reflection of God’s light, that no human words can describe its glory. In Scriptures, every time God appears to a sinful human being in glorious light, there is terror, a fear of death. But in Paradise Regained, we will gaze at the glorious beauty of God’s light forever without fear of death, because we ourselves will be perfectly pure and holy.

When our Lord came down from heaven, he was the Light and Life of all believers. He proclaimed, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Darkness will be gone forever, which means that sin, sufferings, and death, represented by darkness, will be gone forever. In Paradise Regained, we will walk in God’s glorious light, resting in the Light of the World forever.

**B**eloved Christian friends: As we close this series on the church, let us remember the words of the Belgic Confession, “This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end.” The church began in the ancient Paradise, Adam and Eve being the first congregation. It was preserved by God in Noah’s ark; in Abraham’s descendants; in Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the Promised Land; and through David’s kingdom. Then came the Son of David, who has promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church (Matt 16:16).

Our Lord confirmed this promise with his victory over sin, Satan and death at the cross and in his resurrection. This covenant promise of eternal life in an eternal, heavenly Paradise Regained is confirmed whenever we partake of food and drink in the form of bread and wine he offers to all who are united to him in faith. As our Bread from heaven and Living Water, Christ the Tree of Life satisfies our hunger and thirst for eternal righteousness in the Paradise of God, and gives us eternal rest in green pastures and still waters.

