

## **The Tree of Life**

May 25, 2025

### **Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5**

*<sup>10</sup> He took me in a Spirit-inspired trance to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...*

*<sup>22</sup> I didn't see a temple in the city, because its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> The city doesn't need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's glory is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. <sup>27</sup> Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is vile and deceitful, but only those who are registered in the Lamb's scroll of life...*

*<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, shining like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree's leaves are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> Night will be no more. They won't need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine on them, and they will rule forever and always.*

### **John 14:23-27**

*<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered, "Whoever loves me will keep my word. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup> Whoever doesn't love me doesn't keep my words. The word that you hear isn't mine. It is the word of the Father who sent me.*

<sup>25</sup> “I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. <sup>26</sup> The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. <sup>27</sup> “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.”



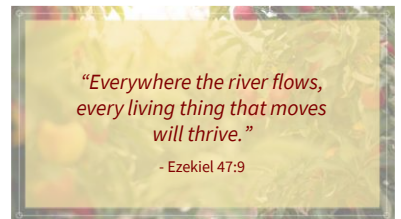
This week, as we transition to summer for our youth and students, we take a journey towards God’s ultimate plan for all of creation. In the end, all things will be made new as God returns our creation to the place where God lives among us, much as God did in the garden with Adam and Eve. Our Genesis text for this week touches on this time long ago. This vision for a new holy city here on earth is not new as we turn to Revelation. Ezekiel wrote of the tree of life in one of the visions that God gave to this prophet. This tree of life, prominent in both Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 21 and 22, is not even unique to the Bible or to God’s people. The concept of a tree of life is found across many religious and philosophical traditions. In many of these ancient contexts, the tree of life signifies wisdom, unity, nourishment, and abundance – all things we find in the passages we look at this week that point to the time when Jesus returns. In the gospels, Jesus speaks often of the age to come. But Jesus also emphasizes that the kingdom of God is here and now. As we prepare to unpack all of this, let us pray...

Please turn with me to Genesis 2 as we begin. On the day that the Lord made the earth and sky, we read “The Lord formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life’s breath into his nostrils.” God then planted a garden and placed the human in the garden. In this fertile place God grew trees with edible fruit and “he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” As the story continues, God creates a helper for the man.

They live in and tend to the garden, eating of the fruit provided by God, living in close relationship with God and with one another. This was God's original intent for our world, for the relationship between God and humanity. Soon, however, the man and the woman chose knowledge over eternal life and God's plan was disrupted. Sin entered the world as mankind began to seek to be like God.

As the story continues, God's ultimate plan to restore all things to the original creation continues to be the end game. Turning to Ezekiel 47, we enter this part of his story towards the end of a vision that God gave to the prophet. The vision spans chapters 40-47. It is subtitled "The Vision of Restoration." The Israelites are 25 years into the exile when God takes Ezekiel up and brings him to a high mountain overlooking Jerusalem. At the center of the city is the temple, the dwelling place of God for many years of Israel's history. In chapter 43 God's glory returns to dwell among the people, just as God had done in the garden at the start of creation. As the vision continues, God reveals how the people are to live in right relationship with God in this new city. As chapter 47 begins, Ezekiel is brought to the entrance to the city. He sees water flowing out from the temple. The river flows deep and wide.

Turning to verse 6, Ezekiel is asked, *"Human one, do you see?"* This is the river of life. In verse 9 we read, *"Everywhere the river flows, every living thing that moves will thrive."* The river as a source of life will not just provide enough but will provide in abundance. All will thrive. This mirrors the abundance that Adam and Eve experienced in the original garden.



On both sides of the river there will be all kinds of fruit-bearing trees. In the vision, Ezekiel is told that their leaves will never wither, and the trees will always be fruitful. There is a reason for this.

At the end of our passage, in verse 12, we first read, *“They will produce fruit in every month because their water comes from the sanctuary.”* God resides in the sanctuary and is the source of this life, of all life. And then, at the end of the verse, we read, *“Their fruit will be for eating, and their leaves for healing.”* Here we have a glimpse of God’s ultimate plan, of the day that will come when all things are made new again.



Please jump with me now to the last book in the Bible, to Revelation, chapter 21. In verse 10 we see that the physical start to John’s vision was very similar to Ezekiel’s. The angel takes John, *“in a Spirit-inspired trance to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”* It is from this vantage point that John will see this new heaven and earth with twelve gates and twelve foundations, representing the tribes of Israel and the apostles of Jesus, respectively.

To enter the context of this scene, I share a thought from a Bible Project podcast I listened to that spoke of the significance of mountains in ancient times. I invite you to close your eyes and to think of the entirety of the land that you live on. Do you picture an entire continent? Maybe you picture the shape of every continent, wrapped around a ball, floating through space, much like the picture to the left. Or maybe you pictured something else. With that in mind, if we were to ask an ancient person to think of the entirety of the land that they live on, they might picture something a lot simpler, but also a lot more profound. They'd likely picture cosmic mountains, surrounded by the chaotic sea. They'd picture themselves living on the flanks of this cosmic mountain, like the picture on the right.



And at the top of the mountains, where the peaks come closest to the sky, that's where they would imagine that the human and the divine come together. In the ancient near east, the union of heaven and earth was conceived of as a mountain, whose base was at the bottom of the earth, and whose peak was the top of heaven. The cosmic mountain was the meeting place of the gods, which provide the waters of life, that flow out into the world.

As we turn to verse 22 in chapter 21, we see that the vision in Revelation deviates from Ezekiel's vision. Here, we see that there is no temple in John's vision. This is significant. As we said earlier, in the understanding of the ancient near east, the cosmic mountain was the meeting place of the gods. It was the source of water and fertility, the meeting place of heaven and earth. The cosmic mountain motif appears in the literature and religious rituals of Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Hittites, the Canaanites, and also of ancient Israel. In this world this translated into the building of temples, pyramids, and ziggurats, depending on your culture. These buildings were the architectural, earthly embodiment of the cosmic mountain. Ancient Israel took the concept of that mountain and turned it into a built symbol, namely, the temple. This is why it is significant that Revelation's new heaven and earth has no temple.



Instead, *"its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."*

Worship will no longer be in a place but in the presence of the divine. There will be no sun or moon or stars, no day or night.

God's glory will be the city's light, and Jesus will be their lamp. The nations of the world will walk the city's streets. The vision of Ezekiel, where all peoples come into the family of God will be realized one day. All who call on Jesus as Lord and Savior, all whose name is *"registered in the Lamb's scroll of life,"* will bring glory and honor and praise to God.

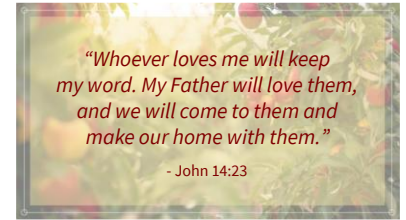
The family of God is now beginning to resemble this vision. The gospel has spread to many cultures and places. People all over the world have accepted Jesus as the Lord of their lives. So, in this sense, the new heaven and earth will resemble the kingdom that Christ is building now on earth much more so than what existed in the garden of Eden. When John's vision comes to fruition, the conflict and division of this world, the hate and violence, the hunger and marginalization, the pain and disease – these things will be no more in the new kingdom. God's peace will reign in the new heaven and earth. As we read in verse 3, "*There will no longer be any curse.*" Sin and death will be no more.

The river of life flows from the throne of God in John's vision. God's throne is the center point in the new Jerusalem. Because of its source, this water is life-giving. On each side of the river is a tree of life. And as in Ezekiel's vision, the trees "*produce twelve crops of fruit*" and the leaves "*are for the healing of the nations.*" Here John's vision is connecting into the ancient contexts where the tree of life yields wisdom, unity, nourishment, and abundance. Again, there is more than enough in the new heaven and earth. There is an abundance of food that nourishes the nations. There is an abundance of God's wisdom, leading to the unity of all peoples and nations. This is the healing that comes through God's grace and peace. From the throne to the river to the trees of life, God's peace flows out into the new world.

Turning to our gospel text, to John 14, we find the earthly embodiment of the source of life and hope and peace and grace. At the beginning of chapter 14, Jesus speaks of the new heaven and earth as a house with many rooms. Jesus tells the disciples that he will go before them, preparing a place for them. Defining himself as the center of all things, in verse 6 Jesus declares, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" After some discussion that he and the Father are one, Jesus speaks of love as revealed through obedience to the commands of God.

In verse 23 Jesus says, *“Whoever loves me will keep my word. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”* Here Jesus is speaking of the kingdom here on earth.

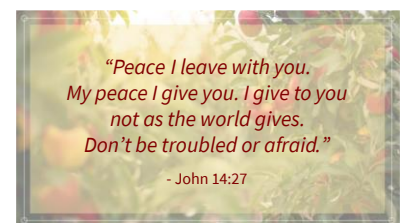
He is not speaking of the new heaven and earth revealed in John’s vision in the book of Revelation. Jesus is speaking of an active, connected, obedient relationship that is centered on loving God and on keeping God’s commands. This was the model that Jesus set for the disciples and sets for us. This is the model that Jesus calls all disciples to live out in this world.



In verses 25 and 26 Jesus explains how *“we”* will come to *“make our home”* in a disciple. In verse 26 Jesus explains it this way: *“The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.”* The indwelling Spirit of Christ will make its home in our hearts. Being a living presence within our very being, the Spirit will guide us and help us to live an active, connected, and obedient life, loving God and loving neighbor with all of our being.

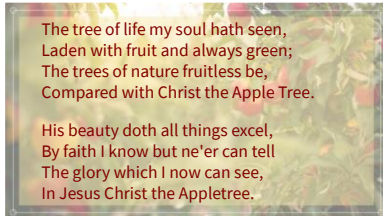
The living presence of the divine within us also brings us another gift. In verse 27 Jesus tells the disciples, *“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be*

*troubled or afraid.”* Walking in close relationship with Jesus, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, we live in a relationship where Christ’s peace flows into us like his very breath, like the very breath that God breathed into the first human back in Genesis 2. The breath of Christ, however, does not stay just in our hearts. No, as Christ intended, the peace of Christ is also to flow out of us and into the world and into the lives of those we meet. The peace of Christ can flow out of us as our faith is sustained and nurtured by the grace and generosity of our God.





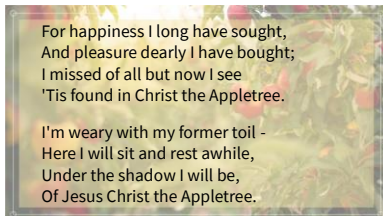
This nurturing relationship, in an analogy to the tree of life found in our Ezekiel and Revelation passages, is imagined in a poem turned hymn that was written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Pastor Richard Hutchins. The poem is titled, *Jesus Christ the Appletree*. Here it is:



The tree of  
life my soul  
hath seen,

Laden with fruit and always green;  
The trees of nature fruitless be,  
Compared with Christ the Apple Tree.

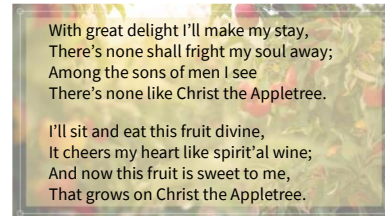
His beauty doth all things excel,  
By faith I know but ne'er can tell  
The glory which I now can see,  
In Jesus Christ the Appletree.



For happiness  
I long have  
sought,

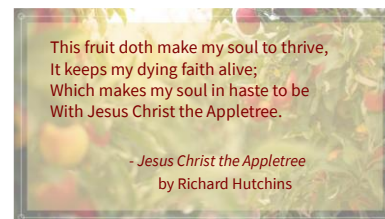
And pleasure dearly I have bought;  
I missed of all but now I see  
'Tis found in Christ the Appletree.

I'm weary with my former toil -  
Here I will sit and rest awhile,  
Under the shadow I will be,  
Of Jesus Christ the Appletree.



With great  
delight I'll  
make my  
stay,

There's none shall fright my soul away;  
Among the sons of men I see  
There's none like Christ the Appletree.  
I'll sit and eat this fruit divine,  
It cheers my heart like spirit'al wine;  
And now this fruit is sweet to me,  
That grows on Christ the Appletree.



This fruit  
doth make  
my soul to  
thrive,

It keeps my dying faith alive;  
Which makes my soul in haste to be  
With Jesus Christ the Appletree.



While the poem begins by acknowledging the ever-fruitful nature of Jesus and the exceeding beauty and glory found in Christ, in the third stanza Hutchins gets honest. He writes about seeking happiness and striving for the pleasures of this world. When this is the tree that we are trying to climb, we find anything but peace and true life. This is a struggle we all face when we misplace our focus, when we prioritize something other than our faith in the Lord of life. Climbing the tree of success, we come to a place where we wearied and we must, like the poet, sit and rest a while. There, under the shadow of Jesus Christ the Appletree, we find delight, we find encouragement, and we find a peace, we find assurance for our faith.



As we rest in Christ and partake of the “fruit divine,” our spirits are filled and our souls begin to thrive, like the trees of life growing next to the river of God in John’s vision in Revelation. Our faith is alive as we are drawn deeper into relationship with Jesus, the tree of life. With roots sunk deep, filled with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, it is there that we find peace and contentment in this life. There we also find hope for the life to come. And with that power and presence, filled with love, hope, grace, and peace, we are able to allow these gifts of God to flow out from us, into the world and into the lives of those we meet, so that they too can come to rest in Jesus Christ, the tree of life. May it be so for us all. Alleluia and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. When you have been well-connected to the Holy Spirit, how has that led to growth and depth in your walk of faith? How do you regularly connect?
- 2) *Pray*. Where in your life do you long for peace? Circle that in prayer this week!
- 3) *Study*. Read Revelation 22:16-17. What do these words say about God’s grace?