

THE TELOS

Revelation 22:1-21

Seventh Sunday of Easter (Series C)

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Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The epistle lesson for the Seventh Sunday of Easter is the last chapter of the Bible, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, chapter 22, verses 1 through 21. This is a picture of the very end. This is the goal of creation. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From Revelation 22, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ 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. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ 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.

⁶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

⁷ "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, ⁹ but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

¹⁰ And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

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¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “**Surely I am coming soon.**” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

A friend of mine once told me, that when you read a really good book, probably a novel, because for this to work, there needs to be a story or some kind of journey, he said that when you finish a really good book, you should go back to the beginning and read the first chapter over again. Some books are worth reading a second time anyway, but when you do that, you put it down for a while and then come back to it, perhaps several years later. But he was talking about reading the first chapter immediately after you finish the book. This is how you see if the author had much of a plan. Usually, if it's a really good story, you can see the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end. And you can do this with movies or television series too. With a movie, you might go back and watch the first five or ten minutes. With a TV series, you go back and watch season one, episode one. It might not work all the time with a TV series, because the writers might change in the middle, or it might not even end when the writers want it to end. It probably ends when the network executives see that it's not making much profit anymore. So TV series usually don't end. They just stop. Even when the writers try to write an ending, it usually isn't a very good ending, because they probably never wrote with the end in mind. They wrote with continuation in mind. Yet, occasionally this works with a TV series too. Whatever it is, whether it's literature or film, you go back to the beginning, and then you see if the author had much of a plan at the beginning. You see the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning. And then, if it is indeed a really good story, you see everything that the author had to do in order to get from the beginning to the end. And this, in my opinion, is the difference between a writer and an author. A writer just writes. But an author gets somewhere.

And this is how it is with the Bible. We just read the last chapter, Revelation 22. And we're not going to go back and read the beginning right now, but I want you to recall everything you can about the beginning, especially Genesis chapters 1 through 3, because we see a lot of the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning. And when we see this, we also remember everything God did to get from the beginning to the end.

Genesis is a Greek word, and it literally means, “Beginning.” It comes from the first line of the book: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Genesis, especially the first three chapters, explains how this world got to be the way it is. It tells us how the earth, planets, moon, sun, and other stars came to be. It tells us how sky, sea, and land came to be. It tells us how birds, fish, animals, and people came to occupy those spaces. It also teaches us how marriage and family, the foundation of society, came to be. All of this is in chapters 1 and 2. Then chapter 3 introduces the conflict. The devil, in the form of a serpent, tempted our

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first parents to despise their place in creation. They desired to be like God. And so paradise was lost. They lost the Garden of Eden. They lost the water of life. And they lost the tree of life. That's the beginning, or "genesis," of the story. It's how this world came to be the way it is.

Now for the end. I'm going to teach you another Greek word. I don't do this a lot, because it can be kind of confusing, and there isn't usually a point except to just show off. But this is a simple word, and I'm going to take the time to explain it, too. The word is "telos." T-E-L-O-S. If you forget it, you can just look at the bulletin. You might be familiar with this word if you ever took a philosophy class. It shows up there and probably in some other subjects too. It's usually translated as "end," but the meaning is often much deeper than simply the point at which something stops. A telos, a real telos, is the completion of a thing. It's a full conclusion. It's a finish line. Or it's the intended goal of something. We use our English word "end" this way sometimes. You might be working on a degree of some sort. And someone might ask, "To what end?" That is, "What's the purpose of your degree? What are you going to do with your education?" A telos is a true end, and not merely the stopping of a thing. If a TV show gets cancelled, it doesn't really end, it just stops. If you only go to high school until tenth grade, your high school career doesn't really end, it just stops. The Wild's and Timberwolves' seasons didn't really end, they just stopped. In baseball, I'm hoping this will be the year the Twins' season actually ends, instead of just stopping. There are thirty teams in baseball, and every year, for twenty-nine of those teams, their seasons stop without reaching the telos. That is, they don't achieve the goal. Only one of those teams' seasons actually ends. That's the team that achieves the goal of winning the World Series. That's the "telos" kind of end. It is the successful completion of a thing.

So in many cases, a "telos" kind of end isn't even the stopping of a thing, but it reaches the goal, and then it opens up into something greater. Suppose you're dating someone and you break up. That's a "non-telos" kind of end. The dating relationship stops without reaching the goal. The other possibility is that you get married. That is a "telos" kind of end. You reached the goal. The dating relationship accomplished its purpose. But, of course, it doesn't stop; it opens up into something greater: marriage. That is definitely a "telos" kind of end.

And that's the way the Bible ends. God authored it with a real telos in mind. The story of the Bible is also the story of the world, from beginning to end. Genesis begins with the creation of the world, and Revelation ends with the end of the world. But it's not just the stopping point of this world, but the true telos of this world as it gives way to the new creation. The new creation is the telos of this world and of the Bible. The Bible is the story of what God does to get from the first creation to the new creation. And we see a lot of the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning. This demonstrates that God had a definite plan at the beginning, and everything in the middle was to get to this end.

So let's look a little closer at the end, Revelation 22, and especially verses 1 through 5. This is a description of the new creation. The first thing we see is a river. "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1). This is similar to the Garden of Eden, but also different. Way back in Genesis 2 (v. 10-14), we see that a river flowed out of the Garden of Eden, then it divided and became four great rivers, the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. The point is that the Garden of Eden was the source of life for the world, because that's where the water came from. In the new creation, the throne of God and of the Lamb is the source of life. The river that flows from the

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throne is called “the river of the water of life.” We also remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4, “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 4:14). So in the new creation, the source of life is Jesus.

The next thing we see in the new creation is the tree of life (22:2). This is as clear of a connection to the Garden of Eden as you can get. In the garden there were two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). The purpose of the tree of life was so that a person could eat from it and live forever. This is why God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden after they chose the other tree. If they were allowed to continue to eat from the tree of life, they would live forever, but not in a good way. Instead of living forever in righteousness, they would live forever in sin, which is really death. God needed to restore them somehow, so that when they do eat again from the tree of life, they will eat in righteousness.

The same tree appears in Revelation 22. It’s in the city on both sides of the river of the water of life. It has twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The point isn’t so much the variety of fruit, but that this tree bears fruit all year long. There is no dormant period for this tree. It is always harvest season in the new creation.

And, “The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (22:2). Another way to translate the word “nations” is “gentiles.” God’s new creation is for all peoples. It is for the entire world. God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). And when it speaks of “the healing of the nations,” I can’t help but think of all the violence and war in this world. Nations are at war with each other. Even the nations that aren’t at war still have armies, because they could be at war at any moment. This is a world of war and violence. But the new creation will not be this way. Our Lord Jesus will bring healing to the nations.

So we also can’t help but notice what isn’t there in the new creation. It’s not just about what is there, but it’s also about what isn’t there. There are two things from the Garden of Eden that are noticeably absent from the new creation. The first one is obvious, because only one tree is mentioned. In the Garden of Eden, there were two very different trees. Besides the tree of life, there was also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree is absent in the new creation.

And on a related note, the other major absence is the serpent. In Revelation 20, the devil is “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur,” where he “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (v. 10). It’s kind of interesting: three chapters into the Bible, the devil appears. And then again, three chapters from the end, he disappears ... forever. Or, at least, he disappears from God’s saints. He is somewhere, but not somewhere he can touch God’s beloved children. And the absence of these two things means something else will also be absent. No tree and no snake means no sin. And if there is no sin, there is also no death. Nor is there anything associated with sin and death. No pain. No sickness. No hunger. No poverty. No injustice. No violence. And no, this is a big one for parents, no temper tantrums.

People have asked me before, and this is a question I’ve heard multiple times, so others might have wondered it too, “What if someone in heaven sins? Will that ruin everything like it did the first time, or can God just kick them out.” Here’s the answer: “No one can sin in heaven.” The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is gone. The serpent is gone. There is nothing in the new creation that can glitch the system. It will be impossible to sin in heaven. It won’t even be a thought. The knowledge of evil is gone. It would be like rain falling up or the Vikings winning the Super Bowl. It can’t happen. Actually, those things, whether you can believe it or not, are more possible than sin in heaven. It can’t happen, and it won’t happen.

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A few other differences between the first creation and the new creation: “No longer will there be anything accursed” (22:3). The curse affected this entire creation through sin, but that curse has since been removed, and it will not exist in the new creation. And there will be no night in the new creation. Kids everywhere are in favor of this. No bedtime! I suppose this means we won’t even feel the need for sleep. Some of us like sleeping. That’s because our bodies can’t handle being awake. But our resurrected bodies will be able to handle it. And we won’t even need the sun or lights to stay up all day, because the Lord God will be our light.

And I think this is kind of interesting. In this world, we receive everything through means. What I mean is, God is the source of life, but he gives it to us through the things he has created. Light comes from the sun, water comes from rivers, lakes, clouds, and wells. But in the new creation, God dispenses with at least some of those means. Light comes directly from him. Water comes from his throne. It’s a picture of greater fellowship and greater intimacy with our God. We will see him and know him and receive gifts directly from him.

So that’s the beginning, and that’s the end, the genesis and the telos. But, like every good story, there’s more to it than merely a beginning and an end. When we consider the beginning and the end together, we see a lot of the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end. That demonstrates that God had a plan when he authored this Bible, which is the story of reality. He knew where he was going, and he knew how to get there. And this shows that everything in the middle happened in order to get us from that beginning to this end. So what’s in the middle?

It’s the story of Jesus, your Savior. He was prophesied of in Genesis 3 (v. 15). And everything in the Old Testament happened in anticipation of his coming. God was working in that time to prepare a manger for his Son. He was preparing the world to be the right environment for the Lamb of God to do his sacrificial work. And at the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son into the world (Gal. 4:4).

The work of the Son was to suffer, die, and rise again. That’s how he healed the curse. That’s how he answered and defeated the serpent. That’s how he paid for your sin and for mine. That’s how he swallowed up death in his own death. And that’s how he opened the new creation for all who trust in him. That’s how Jesus gets from the beginning to the end. But he doesn’t just get himself there. This is how he gets you from that beginning to the telos. Because this isn’t just his story. He authored it for you. This is the story of the world. This is the story of reality. And you are part of that reality. This is your story. This is the story of Jesus bringing you from that beginning to the telos in his new creation.

This is our ultimate hope in life. This world is a depraved place, and we are depraved people. It all needs an end, and not merely the “stop” kind of end, but the “telos” kind of end. And so “according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, **“Surely I am coming soon.”** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)