

“Destination: God”

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April 24, 2016

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:1-10

New Testament Lesson: Revelation 21:1-6

The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. What’s missing in that? The middle. The present. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, Genesis tells us that God created a world of plenty for us to enjoy and use to God’s glory.

And somewhere along the line, very early in human history, we set off on our own, apart from God. We took what we wanted despite God’s instruction to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

After God banished us from the Garden of Eden, we set out to make our own way, building cities like Jerusalem (mentioned in today’s New Testament reading) and towers, like the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

But before God banished us from Eden, when God created the first human beings, Genesis tells us that God blessed them – God blessed us – and God said ..., “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion....”

That’s the middle. That’s the present – fruitful and multiply; dominion over the earth. That’s where we are now in the timeline of existence, a timeline that stretches from the beginning to the end, from the Alpha to the Omega.

So how’s it going? Are we happy with how things are. Are we certain we’re headed in the right directions? Maybe, somewhat. But really, where are we headed? How do we know we’re headed in the right direction? How will we know when we get there?

By reading the Bible and studying history, we know the beginning, as well as we can. By opening our eyes and looking around, we know the present, at least our little corner of it. But how can we know the ending, the destination, the ultimate fullness of humankind? We can’t.

We can’t know what it will be like when Christ returns to bring us into the fullness of God, at least not completely. But we do know something about it.

The Apostle John writes about it in the Book of Revelation, telling us what it will be like when Christ returns in the fullness of time. “I saw a new haven and a new earth;” says John, “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” The sea was no more. What does that mean?

Well, at the time of John, the sea represented struggle and chaos. John is telling us that in the fullness of time, struggle will be no more. When that will be, we don't know. But that doesn't mean we can't participate in it now, ahead of its arrival.

As Leon Morris says in his commentary on Revelation,¹ our efforts can't create heaven on earth, "but the heavenly city is certainly the ideal set before believers and it is their inspiration (our inspiration) to work for God and for good here on earth." – this vision of the holy city, that John talks about.

In other words, the present, today, can and should be a reflection of the promise to come, a glimpse of what that divine tomorrow will look like. Do you see that in your life – a glimpse or reflection of heaven on earth? What might that even look like?

John hints at what that looks like when he says that in the fullness of time, the separation between us and God is no more. So the only way for us to experience heaven on earth now is by experiencing God in one another and in creation, in nature. In the fullness of time, God is with us.

Now this is different than how God came to us in Christ. In Christ, God accommodated himself to us, fully God and fully human, a limited revelation of God, limited based on what we could comprehend.

But still a revelation, still enough for us to know what it will be like. And even more so, enough for us to celebrate this divine promise that John tells of, saying, "God himself will be with (us); he (himself) will wipe every tear from (our) eyes." – no more struggle.

The best way we can celebrate this promise of living in the fullness of God and all the joy and peace and security it brings is to share that joy and peace and security with one another, today.

What does the joy and peace and security of such togetherness look like? It looks like providing for one another's needs, sharing in each other's joys and sorrows, making room for others, listening to the other person, compromising, accommodating others, trusting and respecting one another.

Now what gets in the way of us doing that is our ideas of how things should be. We take what God created and we fashion it for our misguided needs and desires. We build things to our specification apart from God, apart from what's best for all concerned, whether that's the homes we live in – big, empty homes for the wealthy and small, crowded homes for the poor – or the relationships we create and maintain – one sided verses self-giving.

This habit of doing things our way goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden when we disrespected God, and then also all the way back to that first time we built and maintained things without God's blessings, when we built the tower of

¹ Morris, Leon. Tyndale: New Testament Commentaries, Revelation. Rev. Ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 1992. 236.

Babel and God brought it crashing down around us. And we're still doing such things today. Things get built and things come crashing down around us, all the time. Nothing seems to last.

And yet, those things that are built and maintained prayerfully, by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, never really end. They continue to give rise to something new, something that leads us ever onward toward our ultimate destination: the fullness of God.

In the fullness of God, everything is redeemed, once and for all. In the fullness of God, "the new Jerusalem" comes "down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." It couldn't be more perfect than that.

It's interesting that this vision of the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose is a "holy city, the new Jerusalem." Notice that we start out in a garden – the Garden of Eden – but end up in a city, the new Jerusalem. Why is that? Why would God not bring everything back to the perfection of Genesis, the perfection of the beginning?

I mean, bringing everything back to the garden would surely honor God and God's creation, wouldn't it? But bringing it back as the new Jerusalem, honors us, also. It honors our participation in God's plan and purpose.

We are the city builders. Isn't it good to know that all that we do – as flawed as it is – is and will be redeemed by God, included in God's divine vision, God's divine design?

In the fullness of time, we will be with God and God will be with us, with us like never before, since the beginning of time. We're not going back to the garden, folks. We're moving on to the city of God, a city in which all that God created in the beginning is still and always will be "very good," including us, and our creations.

As we go about our lives this week, creating and maintaining friendships, doing the work that's before us, planning for the future out ahead, let us do so in a way that honors and builds upon God's divine design. Let us do so in a way that draws us closer to God, and in that, closer to one another. Draw closer to people this week, and look for God in that closeness. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Lord, as we reflect on our lives, on the life of our world, on our life with you, it stirs in us our deepest hopes and longings.

You've promised that in you all our tears are wiped away. And yet we've wept so many tears that we can't imagine a day when they'll be no more.

We've known mourning and sorrow and pain for so long we can scarcely believe they'll drop away at the return of our Lord and Savior.

And so we pray for faith, hope and love. Faith to believe you'll do what you've said you'll do. Hope to keep the faith as we wait.

And love to care for those around us as we live out in the here and now the promise of your coming kingdom, when heaven and earth are one in you.

We pray for those who's faith is lacking. For those who have been beaten down by this world, for those who only you can raise up.

We pray in the full confidence of your presence with us, promised at the return of Christ, and shared with us in his earthly ministry, a ministry that lives on in us today.

We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray using the words that he taught us, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**