



Sermon Growth Guide

October 25, 2020

The Beautiful Story - Beautiful Kingdom

Revelation 22:1-13

Key Verse: Revelation 22:3

“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him.”

Big Idea: Knowing where you are headed tomorrow changes the way you walk today.

Foundations

The culmination of *The Beautiful Story* is entrance into the Kingdom of God, a kingdom completely void of curse and completely full of healing, where God dwells with His people for all eternity. Knowing where you are headed tomorrow changes the way you walk today.

With the **Beautiful Kingdom** in mind, and with a national election just around the corner, we're reminded this week in a special way of our dual citizenship, where being “Light and Life for the City” requires us to walk as “city-positive” while maintaining our first allegiance to Christ and His Kingdom.

Today is also **Stewardship Commitment Sunday**, our annual time as a church family to examine the ways in which we are coming together to steward everything that has been entrusted to us to further the cause of Christ in this city and beyond. Our commitment is one way we display our faithfulness to Christ to the watching world.

Open and close your time of further study and application in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to guide and guard your time in His Word, granting you clear vision of the **Beautiful Kingdom**, causing you to walk more purely as a kingdom citizen today.

Understanding God's Word

Verses 1-5 display the hues of full restoration by employing phrases such as “the river of the water of life” and “the healing of the nations” and “no longer will there be any curse.” Host a conversation that helps those in your circle catch the vision of the New Creation.

Verses 8 and 9 contain a wild scene of John being reprimanded by an angel. What's the scene? What is the rebuke? What is John directed to do at the end of verse 9?

Applying God's Word

This week we are reminded that knowing where you are headed tomorrow changes the way you walk today. How does catching a Biblical vision of eternity in the very near presence of God change the way you live today?

Think and share of a specific challenge you are facing where you might react differently should you better absorb your heavenly future that is just around the corner.

Witnessing God's Word

Jesus teaches us to pray, “your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Develop an action plan that you can implement this week to be God's Light and Life to someone in your life who does not yet live for the **Beautiful Kingdom**. Take a moment to close your time by praying for this person.

When I was 12, my parents agreed to send me to Space Camp. Anybody remember the movie *The Right Stuff*? It got me. Space Camp was part of a whole plan I had for my life, roughly following the tracks of Chuck Yeager. I would be a pilot, but then an astronaut. From there I figured I could do a few television commercials, make a name for myself and finally take over for David Letterman as a late-night talk show host. It was a good plan. It all started with Space Camp. So, once the registration was paid and the tickets bought, and I knew I was headed to Space Camp, well, it made me walk around school a little differently. A little more confidently. Like a boy who had the right stuff. I was headed to Space Camp.

Where you are headed changes how you walk. Friends, we are headed—it might be today, it might be tomorrow, it might be a hundred years from now—we are headed for a **Beautiful Kingdom**: eternal life with God. We have told the story of redemption, the story of everything, with our eyes looking out for beauty. Can we tell a story of the Beauty of God? The whole thing begins with a **Beautiful God**. God is awe-inspiringly beautiful—His glory, His faithfulness, His character, His peace—Beautiful God. When you get confused about the world, about your life, or about some part of Christian doctrine—we fall away when we forget God’s goodness, or we can’t trust in God’s goodness. God is good. God is beautiful. God made a world full of beauty, filled with people in the beauty of His image. When that world fell away, God sent a **Beautiful Savior**, Jesus, to bring it all back around.

Now we end here, looking forward. Where are we headed? Where are we going? When you don’t know where you are going, you lose hope. Have you ever been lost on a hike or bike ride? It’s pretty hard to push up that hill just to see if you’re going the right direction. But if you know where you’re going, you can push. Revelation is an extended vision witnessed by John, one of Jesus’ disciples, while he was exiled in old age on the island of Patmos. By the way, if you are planning to get exiled, I recommend the Greek Isles. It was a painful place for John, and in his isolation—he couldn’t visit friends, he couldn’t see family, his four walls closed in on him more and more each day, as his own health grew more frail—in that pain, in that exile, the Spirit of God opened up the future to John. “Let me show you

where you are headed, John. You are headed for an eternal city in the presence of God. You are headed home, although it’s a home you have never seen before. You are headed for a Beautiful Kingdom.”

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2)

What we have here is a city, a garden city. **The Beautiful Story** starts in a garden, the Garden of Eden, and it ends in a garden city. “City” is the Greek word polis where we get our word “politics.” Don’t you love politics? Hang on now! “City,” “politics,” is a way the Bible talks about people learning to live together in harmony. City, in biblical terms, is only possible when people come into peace and harmony with God and so can pursue peace and harmony with one another. We don’t return to solitary life at the end of **The Beautiful Story**, we walk forward into community, into City. Isn’t that something? We say here at First Pres we are “for the City;” this is what we are talking about. Actually, we refer to two things at once in that part of our mission statement. First, we proclaim, both as an act of obedient Christian discipleship and as a strategy of engagement and evangelism, we believe we are called to be a “city-positive” church toward our own city, Colorado Springs. We build this city, affirm its beauty, help its weak spots, and demonstrate that we are for it. God teaches us something about living together and seeking harmony when we participate in civitas, in city life. Second, we are saying we as a people of God, as city-positive as we are toward our current city of Colorado Springs, we are headed for another City, an eternal City, and that City has our heart, has our commitment, and our ultimate citizenship. To be a Christian disciple, as we are forming Christian disciples here at First Pres, is to be for the City in both those ways.

At the heart of the eternal city is “the river of the water of life.” Not just a drop, not



just a trickle, the water of life flows through the heart of the city like a river. Cities have a hard time finding harmony when there is scarcity. At the core of this city in the **Beautiful Kingdom** is this ever-flowing river of life in abundance. Its source is Jesus—"as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb," it goes on, "down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him" (Revelation 22:2-3). When beauty was threatened by our sin and disobedience, Jesus came, the Lamb of God, who died for us, a substitutionary sacrifice for sin. He took the curse. Now we can see a city where there is no curse. The curse is gone. The leaves on the trees are for healing, all nations, all peoples, all ethnicities, all curse or bitterness or wrong or fault can and will be healed. The leaves on the trees are for healing. The branches of the tree of life are heavy with fruit every month. The tree of life, once cut off from us because of our sin, now lines the streets and riverbanks just pumping out fruit for all to taste. Why? Because the Lamb of God is on the throne. The Lamb who died, now glorified. He won all of this for us on the cross.

"They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:4-5). What is in the city? What is in the **Beautiful Kingdom** where we are headed? Light. So much light. God is the light. Jesus is the light. There is light in the city, and there is life—a river of it, trees filled with it, healing the curse and bearing fruit in abundance to restore harmony and peace between God and mankind and neighbors and peoples. Light and life. No wonder we are First Pres, called to reflect the love of Jesus to be "Light and Life for the City." That's where we are headed. That's where we are going to be. That's our future. A **Beautiful Kingdom**.

Where we are headed changes how we walk today. That Kingdom where we are headed is already at work in us, and we can already be at work in it. While we still linger in the curse and feel the pain of disharmony, waiting for the river of life and the trees that bring healing, there is some healing possible now, and some life possible now in Christ, and some balm for the peoples possible now. The more we live into what is possible now in Christ, the deeper our connection with that future Kingdom where we will one day be. "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The job now is to live into the Kingdom come. Hold on to the vision and follow the Word. "The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place'" (Revelation 22:6). Then Jesus himself says, "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll" (Revelation 22:7). Keep the word. Hang on to the vision. Where you are headed changes the way you walk.

When are you coming Jesus? "Soon." Don't you hate that? How long? "Soon." When will COVID-19 be over? Soon. When will this turmoil at work finally end? Soon. When will the election season be over and when will honest and civil discourse be the hallmark of our government at all levels? I don't know. Let's say soon—we hope. Soon, with God's help. I am praying for our nation as we walk through this election. Remember, our primary and greatest citizenship is not Colorado Springs, or the United States, our primary and greatest citizenship is the Beautiful Kingdom. If tomorrow brings a second Trump administration or a first Biden one, even so we are citizens and participants in the Kingdom of God far over any party or political affiliation. How long? "Soon," says Jesus. He doesn't want us counting days off on a calendar; He wants us living in expectant anticipation. Soon.

Along the way, where you are headed changes the way you walk right now. Worship God. John tried to worship the angel. No! Worship God. Him only. "Then



he told me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near’” (Revelation 22:10). Don’t put your Bible away now! Keep it open. “Look, I am coming soon!” says Jesus. “My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:12-13). Jesus comes with reward, recompense, in His hand to set things right. Jesus at the beginning. Jesus in the middle. Jesus at the end. So goes ***The Beautiful Story***.

Today is what we call “Stewardship Commitment Sunday.” Three words that will get you nowhere out there in the city, not even a cup of coffee, but it is something we do in here every year. “Stewardship”—a reminder that we are not owners but stewards, of all God has given us. We have what we have on loan from God, to serve the Lord, not to amass personal gain and comfort. That’s not a popular idea, to see all your possessions as something God has given you to take care of on His behalf. But it is freeing.

“Commitment,” equally terrorizing to the contemporary mindset! Commitment? I prefer, “cancel at any time.” Monthly renewable. Back out as soon as it doesn’t work. Commitment. 2020 has been a rough year for churches. It’s easy to find a reason to break with your church. We hold to Scripture on topics that aren’t all that popular in the contemporary moment, as our values say, we Hold Fast, and that always causes a few people to turn away here and there. But on top of that 2020 laid COVID-19. People say, “my church is doing too much to cooperate with government,” or “my church is doing too little.” Then racism and injustice, “my church says too much; my church says too little.” Election year politics. There are always reasons to find to turn away from church. I’m sure you have had moments this year when you wish First Pres said or did more or less about this or that. No church is perfect, and this one is not. But today, I ask you to make a commitment. To put your name on the line and say, “This church isn’t perfect, but I see here a body, a people of God, walking steadily toward the Beautiful Kingdom; and I commit, my heart, myself, my life to walk with this group toward Jesus over this coming year.”

How do you make that commitment? Today, one way is to commit to give. We have said lately, “There are three easy ways to give,” these methods we developed because we couldn’t come put anything in the dish! But I laugh every time. Three easy ways to give. There are no easy ways to give. Giving is hard, or it isn’t giving. Giving is sacrificial, or it isn’t giving. We call mature Christian disciples to work toward a tithe, a committed sacrificial devotion of the first tenth of your income, given faithfully to the Lord. I’ve never met a person who tithed and regretted it. How do you make a commitment to walk with First Pres next year as we pursue the work of the Lord Jesus together? You look at your money, and you say, “I love my money. I really do! But I love Jesus and His work more. I commit to sacrifice, I commit to give, I commit and promise that one year from today I will be here, and I will have transferred this money of mine into the work and ministry of Jesus at this church I am privileged to stand with, in our city, in our time, and I will one year from now, Lord willing, still be walking with this body of believers steadily toward the Beautiful Kingdom.”

Where you are headed changes the way you walk. You and I, we are headed for a **Beautiful Kingdom**. The more we live into it, the better. We become what we worship. We grow toward what we long for. If we worship idols, we become ourselves lifeless, unable to do anything of any value. If we long for empty and selfish things, we grow empty and selfish. If we long for beautiful things, we grow in our citizenship in the eternal Beautiful Kingdom. Heaven isn’t just the ‘great up there’ in the afterlife. Heaven is a word for the restoration and renewal God is bringing to this world. There is a Kingdom. One which we currently participate in, currently rehearse for, and currently glimpse when we act according to its culture and values. It is a Beautiful Kingdom of love, joy, fullness, peace and everlasting life. The more we long for it, the better we will be—the longing itself shapes us, and where we are headed changes how we walk as Jesus writes us into ***The Beautiful Story***.

