

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Easter 6 – May 6th and 9th, 2010

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

¹⁰And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

²²I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

Dear Children of God,

Were you – or are you – the kind of person who used to ask your mom, when you went to bed, “Can I keep the light on”? Lots of children have asked their moms this type of question, especially if they want to read for a little bit before they fall asleep, or, more often, when they are scared because the hallway outside their bedroom seemed so dark, and their room seems so far away from their mom and dad – especially when it gets really dark and you start to hear all the unusual sounds.

If your mom was anything like most moms, she would have a wide array of answers, most of which amounted to either, “No, there’s nothing to be afraid of, so go to sleep.” And if your question became a little more persistent, “Sure, you can keep it on for a little while, and then she said that she would check on you to make sure everything’s okay,” if she felt you were genuinely in need of some night time assurance.

It’s that second kind of answer that gets to the spirit in which our heavenly Father addresses us in the book of Revelation. Throughout this book of unique and quite amazing visions, the Lord made it clear to the apostle John that God’s people would have many things in life that would make them truly afraid and concerned, many things that we may be “in the dark” about for the rest of our lives.. But the Lord also made it clear to John -- and all of us -- that everything was going to be okay, because we will someday live in a place where everything that happened to us in life will make complete sense, and where we will be free from the fear of having to be afraid of the dark again.

That’s the comfort which our Savior gives St. John in the last verse of our lesson for this morning, verse 23, where in this vision of the New Jerusalem of heaven John sees that **“the city does not need the sun or moon to shine in it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”** But until that day comes, I think you will agree that there will be many more times in life where we will ask our dear Father in heaven, just as may have asked our mom on earth,

Theme: Can I Keep The Light On?

1. There is a place that leads us to the light.
2. There is a place where we won’t need any light.

Let’s see how the words of this great revelation will help us see and understand God’s wonderful answer to our heartfelt question as his dear children. One answer God gives us in these words is that we never really have to be afraid that the light of his love is off.

1. There is a place that leads us to the light.

Yes, there is a way to be able to know that God's light is always on. That is what Jesus was making clear to John in this part of one of John's visions that he was allowed to see. Revelation 21 is the second last chapter of the book, so this is near the end of God's message to John. It is a very positive and comforting message, which shows that Jesus is ruling over everything in heaven with total control, even though it so often looks like it's the opposite to us. What's interesting is that the "he" in the first verse, verse 10 – the one who takes John to a high mountain to see this vision -- is an angel. This angel was one of the seven angels John had earlier seen in another vision pour out bowls of wrath and anger on the sinful world below, causing much despair and punishment for those who didn't believe in Jesus.

Sadly, those who didn't want Jesus to be part of their lives would be condemned to eternal destruction on the day that was referred to in that vision of the seven bowls of God's wrath as Armageddon, which is simply another word for Judgment Day and the events surrounding it. In other words, there's a lot of true darkness to be afraid of for all the people of the world who don't believe in Jesus, and it's that darkness that all of us were born into as sinful humans, and that we unfortunately participate in, even though we bear the title of children of God through our faith in Jesus, God's Son.

That is a truth we must never try to avoid or make excuses for. We are often guilty of many of the same things that the people of the world are guilty of, which must just make our Lord want to close his eyes and look away from us, so that he won't have to see what dark things his people are capable of. That's why we need to keep acknowledging our sins and the punishment we deserve, so that we never take for granted the grace that God displays toward us in promising that he will never close his eyes to us, and that all the sins we are guilty of have been covered by the one who accepted the guilt for us, and who is now waiting for us in heaven, and is looking forward to welcoming us to our heavenly home.

Now, what I have just done in the last couple of minutes is talk about the place that leads us to the light, which is described by John in the first paragraph of our Bible lesson. Listen as we go back to those verses. In these verses we can get a taste for what John saw and what that means to us. In verse 10 he says that the angel showed him **"the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."** In verse 11 he sees that the holy city of heaven shines with a resplendent brilliance, as he compares its shine to that of a precious jewel, like jasper. **"It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."**

In verse 12 and 13, he sees that the holy city of heaven is completely safe from being attacked by enemies, because it has a great high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates. **"It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west."** No one is going to mess with those angels. They will keep us safe forever. And on those gates John also sees written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, those twelve sons of the man named Jacob in the Old Testament, whose descendants all received a share in the promised land of Israel – people with names like Zebulun and Naphtali and Issachar and Gad and Asher and Joseph and Benjamin.

John sees that those twelve gates with the twelve names of the tribes of Israel are divided into four sections: three on each side of the city – north, south, east and west. That is a picture which would have been very common for a Jewish person who knew the history of his people in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, because there we see how, when the twelve tribes of Israel were being prepared to march toward the Promised Land of Israel, God arranged this huge group of the twelve tribes of Israel into four groups of three, just as in this vision, with a group of three on each side – north, south, east and west -- with the tabernacle church that the people set up in the middle. What verse 13 is saying is that they had made it to the Promised Land – the real Promised Land of heaven, just as God has promised all along!

And then in verse 14 John writes, **"The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."** John sees that the holy city will never crumble, because it has twelve foundations, all of which have twelve other names written on them – the name of the twelve apostles of the Lamb of God – those men like Matthew and Thomas and Peter and Andrew and James and, yes, John – the man himself who was seeing this vision. Just imagine him seeing his own name written on

one of the foundations of heaven itself, guaranteeing it is safe and a forever place! These were the men who had seen and who had written about the one who came as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises which the believers among the twelve tribes of Israel had put their faith in. These twelve apostles had walked with and had proclaimed the light of the world.

So, do you see what I mean that there is a place that leads us to the light? The promises given to the twelve tribes of Israel and the fulfillment of those promises seen by the twelve apostles were all recorded in the Bible, the Word of God, which was given to be a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. The very same Word which those people heard thousands of years ago is the Word you and I hear and read today. God's Word is the place that leads us to the light by taking us to Jesus, the light of the world and the glory of heaven. So, when you say, "Lord, I'm afraid, or Lord, I can't figure this out, or Lord, I don't know how you could still love me" -- Can I keep the light on?", know that, as you keep listening to God's Word, you are in the place that leads you to the light of God's love and God's comfort.

2. There is a place where we won't need any light

And that's what brings us full circle to the last two verses. There is a place that leads us to the light, and **there is a place where we won't need any light**. Have you gotten to the point in your life where the dark doesn't really make you afraid anymore? Some of us have perhaps gotten to that point; others perhaps are quite confident that we never will. Whatever the case of our earthly concerns about the dark, we never have to be afraid in any way that a fear of what our sins deserve, or a fear of going through death, or a fear about how to handle heartaches and tragedies will bother us ever again once we are in heaven.

That comfort is pictured in this way in verses 22-23, where John made this observation about what he saw and what he did not see in his vision, **"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."**

Do you see the point God was making to John? When we are in heaven, there won't need to be a place called the Bible or the church where we can come into the presence of God by having him speak to us in his Word. In heaven, he will be right there with us himself. We'll see the light. And, because of that, we will never again be in the dark about anything that has happened to us, because our heavenly Father and his holy Son, the dear Lamb of God, will be shining on us with all wisdom and knowledge, so that there will never be a question or a problem that will ever bother us again.

"Can I keep the light on?" Or, as some of our moms may have corrected us, "May I keep the light on?" "Yes," our heavenly Father says, "you may – and you always will – as long as you keep in the place of my Holy Word that leads you to the light of my Son, Jesus, who gives you all the light you need now until you reach the place where light will never be a problem at all." Isn't it great to know that, when it comes to that light, we don't even have to really ask about it? It's just plain always on. Amen.