

But don't we often struggle to carry out that purpose? Aren't there times when we choose to listen to Satan's voice rather than to God's? Times when we give a half-hearted effort? Times when we look back and, in hindsight, know that we could have done better? It's like trudging through the snow; it's hard work. It's like trying to find our way in a blizzard, we so easily lose sight of our goal. As noble as our God-given purpose on earth is, our performance is never perfect; it never completely glorifies God's name.

But take heart! Even though our well-intentioned efforts on this side of heaven will always fall short, because of the Lamb, God in his mercy sees what we do in his perfection. God delights in everything we believers do out of love and thanks to Jesus. And so, as you do battle with your sinful nature, keep your eyes focused on the heavenly light shining off in the distance. Remember what awaits you there. John says, *"They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."* That's a horrifying thought for those who don't love and belong to God. But for us who do, what joy to see the face of him who so loved us that he gave us his own Son. What joy to see the Lamb and count in his hands and his feet and his side the wounds that redeemed us from our sin. What joy for us who believe in him and who belong to him, for his name is on our foreheads. We are his people, a people purchased with his blood.

In heaven nothing will get in the way of our glorious purpose, for God's own glory will surround us there. John says, *"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 forever and ever."* I can't even imagine what that will be like—ruling and reigning with Jesus, who is seated *"at [God's] right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come"* (Eph 1:20, 21). All things are under Jesus' feet. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. And we will rule and reign with him forever. Wow! What a glorious purpose!

If wintry scenes of laughing children, crackling fires, and mugs of hot chocolate help us pass the long winter months, God be praised. But on a much higher level, keep John's vision of heaven before your eyes. Don't just file it away for your deathbed or for that particularly dark and dreary day. View it daily. See a life that flows from the throne of the Lamb. What a life it is! It's a life of radiant purity, a life of glorious purpose. Welcome home to God's forever family, a family that enjoys a life that flows from the throne of the Lamb. Amen.

**Revelation 22:1-5** – *Welcome Home* – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI  
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We've had quite a start to winter, haven't we? No fewer than five measurable snowfalls, and it's only mid-November. Snow blankets the ground and still covers parts of the roof. We may have gone back to Central Standard Time, temporarily adjusting things a little bit, but darkness still lasts longer each morning and creeps up earlier each afternoon. Winter cometh. Some might even say, "Winter's here!"

Yet thoughts of winter, for me at least, bring back some pleasant and heart-warming memories: Ice skating at Washington Park in Watertown, all bundled up and bubbling with energy. Warm light streaming from the windows of our big house at 809 Clyman Street, reflecting off the snow on the lawn. Candles burning, cookies baking, nine kids laughing. Sort of like a hybrid Norman Rockwell-Thomas Kinkade-Terry Redlin painting. Perhaps scenes like these will help me survive what's supposed to be a shivering, slushy, and snowy winter.

But, more importantly, isn't that why God has given us scenes of heaven—not just to get us through a few months of winter but to help us live in the cold winter of this world? Let's cherish the scene of heaven that Jesus gives us our text today. As we celebrate that in Christ we belong to a forever family, may it warm our hearts and cheer our souls as we face the cold darkness of this sinful world.

**Welcome Home to a Life  
Flowing from the Throne of the Lamb**  
**1. A life of radiant purity**  
**2. A life of glorious purpose**

1. In the previous chapter, John describes what he saw in heaven. He saw the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (v. 2). He saw the Holy City and its main street of pure gold as clear as glass (v. 21). He saw a place where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away, a place where God himself wipes away every tear from our eyes (v. 4). All this the saints triumphant are enjoying right now. [Read Mark J. Cares' description of heaven from God: The Ultimate Humanitarian.]

In our text John writes that he sees *"the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal."* There's no impurity in this river, no pollution, no dirty muck, no cloudy sediment. The water of this river is pure, for it's water that's *"flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."*

Yes, the Lamb! The Lamb that was slain but now reigns forever and ever. The Lamb that is without blemish or defect. The Lamb whose holy, precious blood purifies us of all our filth. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Yes, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, slaughtered for you and for me, now ruling and reigning for us in heaven. Fellow redeemed, without the Lamb there's no water of life, no river, no purity before God. How precious is the Lamb!

Keep this picture in mind. How often, as we slosh our way through the filth of this world, don't we get tired and grow weary? Like pigs, we settle down in the muck and the mire and the mud, and we even begin to enjoy it? We imagine that this world is all there is, that's this world is our real home, and we devote our energy and our time to making this world as pleasant as possible.

But, fellow Christian, your home, my home, our true home, is heaven. As we'll sing before the service is over: *"I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home"* (CW 417). Why wallow in the mud? Why focus on making the dirt of this world look pretty?

But, don't we have to admit that, the more we do battle against our sin, the more aware of our filth we become. The more we grow as Christians, the more we see just how sinful we really are. And it's not just our actions, our words, our thoughts; it's the very core of our being. The more we try to clean up the outside, the more we see how deep the stain goes on the inside. *"The LORD does not look at the things people look at,"* God says in his Word. *"People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"* (1 Sm 16:7). How can we ever hope to make our hearts pure before God?

Behold the Lamb. Behold the Lamb! The pure water of life, that's as clear as crystal, flows from the throne of the Lamb. It's he who washes us clean, inside and out. It's his blood that removes even the deepest stain and makes even the foulest clean. That's the promise he makes in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. Believe his promise, for the water that washes you clean of your sin is the water that brings you life, life that flows from the throne of the Lamb.

John's vision of heaven continues. He writes, *"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."* What comfort there is for us in this scene, that of the tree of life, in heaven! Why do I say that? John continues, *"No longer will there be any curse."*

This takes us all the way back to the Garden of Eden. In the middle of the garden were two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the second of these two trees, God's threat came to pass, *"For when you eat from it, you will surely die"* (Gn 2:17). The curse of death came into the world. And, sad to say, this curse has been passed down to every one of us, for God says, *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law"* (Ga 3:10). Because of the curse of sin—because we all sin—we all die.

But on another tree, the tree of the cross, many centuries later, the Lamb of God was put to death. He became the curse in our place. By his death he undid the curse that Adam and Eve brought into the world, so that God can say, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'"* (Ga 3:13). That's why John says in our text, *"No longer will there be any curse."* The blood of the Lamb that stained the wood of the cross removed sin's curse from us. Death is undone. Temporal death for us is but the doorway to heaven. Life flows from the throne of the Lamb.

What hope this gives us in the cold and dark world in which we live! As we struggle with pain and problems, failure and fiascos, as life itself slowly ebbs away from us and the grip of death tightens around us, how we need this heavenly vision before us! And not just for the day when we lie on our deathbed, but for every day. For this changes the way we live. This vision gives us life with a glorious purpose.

2. As John continues to stare agape at this scene in heaven, he says, *"The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."* What a glorious purpose awaits us in heaven! We'll worship and serve our God and the Lamb for eternity.

But maybe you're thinking, "Isn't that our purpose right now?" If you are, you've hit the proverbial nail on the head. The Bible says things like this: *"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Cor 10:31). It says: *"In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God"* (Ro 12:1). It's God's desire that, as we carry out our roles as husbands and wives, parents and children, pastors and parishioners, as we show God's kindness to others, as we speak of Jesus' love to those in our area of influence, we carry out our glorious purpose of worshiping and serving our God and the Lamb.