

The Lamb of God Lives 5) To Give Me Lasting Security

Revelation 21:21-27 • May 26, 2019 • Sixth Sunday of Easter



About 2000 people live in a town on an island in the arctic circle. It is so remote that it has more polar bears than people. The sun doesn't even peek above the winter horizon until March. It is isolated and cold. That is exactly why some organizations working with the government of Norway chose it as the site of a global seed preserve. The idea is that if a global crisis or nuclear catastrophe might wipe out a supply of seeds for the future, it would be a secure storage area. This global seed vault holds about a million different collections of seeds from nearly every country in the world. To protect the supply they buried a vault deep into the permafrost earth on the island which remains frozen year-round. The seeds are kept safe in sealed packages and stored below freezing temperatures. Even in the event of a power failure they would still be stored at freezing temperatures for many years and presumably be viable for many decades. And if anyone wanted to break in and steal the seeds, they would first have to make it through a four-hundred-foot shaft into the side of a mountain. Scientist must pass through four coded doorways to obtain or deposit the seeds. This global seed vault is supposed to serve as the ultimate insurance policy for countries that use it to store precious seeds.

Why does such a place exist? Governments, scientists, and many people fear their seeds supplies might not be secure enough. They know people can break in and steal. They know famine and disease and decimate. They understand that war can wipe-out fields and supplies. They just want to be as prepared as they can possibly be. I suppose it is the same reason that some of us stock-pile food in our pantry. We want security. It's the same reason why Payson has invested millions and used tens of millions in grants and two decades of planning to do what the local newspaper refers to as "making history" with its water supply pipeline and treatment plant. The C.C. Cragin pipeline project is intended to supply far more than the current water usage. The pipeline project is intended to help the city to be prepared and have a supply on hand for when times might worsen. We want the assurance that nothing can happen to ruin our security and peace. So we store seeds, we build water pipelines, and we stockpile food, build fences, and lock our homes. We want security.

But does it work? Will we ever find lasting security? Nothing lasts. Jesus rightly warned his disciples "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19) But today we see what does last. It is a picture of what awaits you with the Lamb of God. We continue our series looking at parts of the book of Revelation with an amazing vision of security. The Lamb of God lives 5) to give me lasting security.

We've been going through the book of Revelation for five weeks now and have seen much. At the opening section we saw the living Lamb of God who holds the keys, that is the authority, over death and hell. He has secured our forgiveness. Throughout the book we see more and more of the unfolding of history from the time of Christ's ascension until his return. The book reveals many warnings and encouragements for us as we live in these end times. His victory is secure. We see how Jesus holds history in his hands, and he tramples all his enemies. He secures his victory by doing away with every evil. In the closing portion of the book we see him forever doing away with Satan's allies and every evil including Satan himself. That brings us to today's reading in chapter 21. A picture is revealed of what comes after the defeat and overthrow of every evil. What remains is only goodness and at peace. And we see that nothing can destroy that peace.

Lasting peace is hard for us to grasp, isn't it? One of the most frustrating things that can happen is a turnaround for the worse. Someone can work hard to obtain a brand-new sports car, but what do they do automatically when they park? They lock the door. There's always the danger that someone will take or damage your property. Some can afford to live in a very affluent neighborhoods which provide serene views and prominent heights. But what happens as you approach the entryway to that type of a community? There is a locked gateway. There are security forces and patrols. There's always the potential danger of someone making their way in to ruin it all. And you can find some of the top daycare centers with amazing playgrounds and play centers with padded turf with extraordinary playground equipment. But what circles the entire play area? A tall fence to keep the children safely in and the danger out. You know how this is. Whether you drive a sports car or a used rusty car, you probably lock the door without thinking. Whether you live in a gated community or in the ghetto, you lock the door of your home without thinking, you close the rusty chain link gate or latch the fancy iron gate. Nothing is safe, nothing is certain, and we purchase insurance plans for damage or loss because we expect it will not last.

"Nothing lasts forever." My children are familiar with that phrase. You have probably seen a young child carry around their precious treasure. For some it is a toy dinosaur, for others a doll or teddy bear. And few things can make your heart melt more when you see them realize they have lost their toy and miss it. Even more crushing is when they witness something horrible happen: Teddy Bear gets a tear. The dinosaur's plastic snaps apart. Or the doll ends up lost somewhere that can't be found. I've often had to deal with such circumstances. It has led me to employ a phrase over and over. I'm sure that my children are familiar with it. "Nothing lasts forever." It's not heartless to say it. It's just the hard reality we all must learn.

And don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that planning ahead or preparing is a bad thing. But everything you now hold will disappoint you. It will fail in the end. Even if it gives you food and water, it cannot stave off the grave. Food and water are no good when you take your last breath of air and turn back to dust. We need security from every sin, every evil, and all that harms! That means our own sinful hearts, the sin in this world, and all its destructive curse.

If our security becomes too focused on ordinary things, we can begin to take our eyes off of our God's plan for us because we are too absorbed in our ordinary security plans. Chapter 21 is a picture the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. There we can see what he has in store as the ultimate insurance policy for a world lost in darkness, decay, and sin.

Pictured are twelve gates of twelve pearls. You might have heard of the expression of the pearly gates of heaven. That's what John sees in his vision. And the street is of smooth and clear gold. And as John looks into the heavenly city and beyond its walls and gates, he first notices that something is missing. There is no temple there. That's because the real security of our eternal home begins with a direct access to God. There is no need for any intercession or places of worship because we will all be gathered in God's very presence. Events in the past years have clearly demonstrated that not even houses of worship are secure. But in God's new creation there will be perfect security for everyone within its walls. The Lord God Almighty himself will be our light and be with us! And note too how Jesus is described here as the light. He is the living Lamb who was slain. It is God himself who took on flesh and died for us and who now lives forever as our light.

When once we feared our possessions being taken away from us by force of threat, by taxation, or other means, here that fear is gone. Everyone, even the kings, bring their treasures and praises to God. He's got it all.

John also notes another strange feature about this amazing city. It never locks the gates. We're used to locking everything from our phones to our cars and homes. But in God's new creation there will be no need of locking or securing anything from danger. Danger won't exist! Imagine feeling so secure you never have any fear of anything ever coming to steal, harm, or ruin! That's what the new creation will be like! There will be no one and nothing to ruin it. Payson is fairly safe, despite some of the recent crimes. But could you imagine living in downtown Phoenix, surrounded by millions of people passing by, but never afraid of anything, never locking any doors? That's what the new creation will be like. Fear will be gone. John's vision notes for us that we will be secure because there will be no dangers. "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful..." Today harm comes not just from those who break and steal, but also those who set up idols for false worship and who teach lies to mislead the flock. John mentions that both idolaters and false teachers will be absent. Not only will there be no one to take or harm, no one will be able to mislead or steal away the hearts of God's people.

And rightly so! This new creation will have "only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." That's the most comforting part for us. We don't gain access to the glorious city that John sees by our own actions. You can't pay a rate-increase to get in. You can't work your way in or purchase a lot in the city. No land swap will do. The only way in is to have your name written down in the book of life.

This is your city! Your citizenship is in heaven! Your name was written down in that book. You were baptized and believe. God has placed his name on you and placed his mark on you. He knows you are his and has written your name down in his book. He has done this not because of righteous things you have done, but because of his mercy. He saved you by the washing of rebirth and renew by the Holy Spirit. The work of the Lamb who died for you has covered your guilt. And the Lamb has written your name down in his book with his own blood. You belong in this city because you belong to him. It is not by works, but by God's rescue for sinners and by faith in him that we have access to this secure place.

And that is why you can feel secure today and always. Thieves might break in and steal now. But they can't steal away the book of life with the record of your name. Disease, decay, and war might destroy this world and your body. But it can't destroy the new body he will give you in his new creation. Fears might come today that we are not safe even at times in our own homes. Today people run through town with guns which they have used to shoot people seemingly at random. But in that city, you will never fear any harm from anyone. It will be perfect peace between you and your God and all in the city.

"Nothing lasts forever." It's not heartless to say it. It's just the hard reality we all eventually must learn. Nothing lasts. Nothing except the new creation! A wise man and reformer in the church once said, "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." (Martin Luther) And today we see what truly will last. It is the kingdom of Christ and all who trust in him, a picture of what awaits you with the Lamb of God.

Recently there was a problem identified with the global seed vault. Even though it was so far removed from most people and danger they feared loss and locked it. But they couldn't lock everything out. It was reported this Spring, as the sun began to first peek upon that dark safe haven for seeds, that water was leaking inside and causing ice-dams to block the vault. Others fear the permafrost won't last forever. Nothing lasts forever. Nothing is secure. Except for what our God has secured for us. We might go to extreme measures to chase after it, but there is only one real lasting source of security. And it is one which is given to us. We don't have to ship our seeds to a faraway place. We don't have to have a 25% water rate increase to cover it. It is freely given to us! That's what we find in this wonderful vision of the new creation and the life to come. We see that the Lamb of God lives 5) to give me lasting security.