

Text: Revelation 22:1-4 Midweek Lent. **April 10, 2014.**

God's love is yours through our suffering Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Billy Mills is the only American to ever win the gold medal in the 10,000 meter run at the Olympics. He did it in 1964 in a huge upset. When asked, "Billy, how did you do it?" He responded, "I visualized myself winning the race. Not just once. But dozens of times a day. Every day. By the time the race started, I had won the race hundreds of times in my mind." Billy Mills visualized winning and won. It was so certain in his mind, he even said, "As I came into the final turn, even though I was in third place, I was telling myself, 'I've won. I've won. I've won.'" Do we visualize heaven that way, with that certainty, with that frequency? How many times a day do you picture heaven? How often do you visualize yourself crossing the finish line of life and entering the garden of paradise? I would venture to say, "None of us does it enough." So God helps us keep that picture in our mind, by helping us visualize the garden of paradise.

We are in the very last chapter of the entire Bible. God pictures heaven for us. There's a river of the water of life. Water equals life. Life can only exist where there is water. Heaven is pictured as a place with an abundant, never-ending, perpetual flow of water, keeping and sustaining life eternally. Makes us think of baptism, doesn't it? Picture that water of heaven. Visualize this wonderful water of life.

Notice where this water is coming from. From the throne of God. God is source of this water. God is the source of all life, physical and spiritual. The very best part of heaven is to be with God. Let me repeat that. The very best part of heaven is to be with God. Picture being with God. Visualize standing with your Savior.

That's hard to do. God is holy and I am not! I can't picture being with God, that's terrifying. I can't keep this image of heaven in my mind. There's too much sin on this earth to stay focused. It happened to me while I was studying for this sermon. Man, I was just in awe at this picture. It was beyond awesome to visualize this entire scene of the garden of paradise. Then I checked email. A tiny problem. Nothing God can't solve. But it was enough to erase the picture of heaven from my mind. And that's what sin does. It erases heaven from our minds. Our sinful side can't picture heaven. Doesn't want to visualize. Thinks only of this earth.

Look again. On each side of the river stood the tree of life. The tree of life! The tree that when you eat from it you will live forever! There is such a tree on earth. The cross. Jesus went to that tree so you will enjoy the other tree. Jesus hung on the cross to give you the right to eat from the tree of life! The right to eat from the tree of life. What a tree this is! It bears twelve crops of fruit, one each month! It's like watching time lapse photography! You really could sit and watch the fruit grow, if there's a new crop every month. See the abundance! See the great amount of fruit! Even the leaves are for the healing of the nations. Now don't get caught up in asking the question, "Why will there need to be healing in heaven if there's no sickness." This is a picture of how completely every problem is taken care of. Another way to think of this is that the leaves give health and strength. This tree is so life giving, that even its leaves give strength and health and life.

Can you picture that? Can you see it, this beautiful tree of life, sitting on the banks of the river of life? I realize the picture might be a little confusing, because the tree of life is on each side of the river. Are there two trees? One tree? Well, first let's say that the details in Revelation aren't always the main point. You get the picture. Maybe there are two trees. There were two trees in the first garden, the

garden of Eden. One was the tree of life. The other the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The one tree gave life. The other tree, intended by God as a good opportunity to serve him, became the tree of death. But in heaven, that tree could that ever lead to sin is gone. Maybe there are two trees of life, because life is all there is. Can you picture that? Can you visualize it? Please do. Dozens of times every day. There's a little poem I heard. "The kiss of the sun for beauty. The song of the birds for mirth. One is nearer God's heart in a garden, than anywhere else on earth." There's something to that. God chose the Garden of Eden for paradise on earth. God pictures heaven very garden like, with river and trees.

And no curse! No weeds in this garden. No curse at all. No sweat to get food. No curse of any kind. No pain in childbearing. No jerk husband who forgets your birthday. No mean coworkers who make life difficult. Work will be a joy. Serving God will be pure pleasure. It won't be work. It will be joyful service. There will be no curse. No curse at all. No curse of any kind. No curse in any way. All the effects of every kind of sin removed forever. No longer will there be any curse. Curse came into the world because of sin. But in heaven. There is no curse, at all, of any kind. Can you picture that? That's really hard to do.

So God draws our attention back to his throne. Remember the very best part of heaven is to be with God. How do you picture the throne of God? How do you picture the throne of the Lamb? The Lamb is a reference to Jesus. He's often called the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. That's the main thing to think of with the Lamb. He takes away our sin. He opens heaven and gives us his holiness. But there's more to picture with the Lamb. Think of what you see in your mind when you picture a lamb. Soft. Cute. Cuddly. No one would ever be afraid of a lamb. Lambs are docile and domesticated, not daring and dangerous. Lambs were the animals of sacrifice. God allowed innocent lambs to take the place of guilty people. God allowed the sacrifice of lambs to be the substitute for the sacrifice of people. Lambs went willingly, without complaint, silently to their slaughter, just like Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Don't be afraid to approach God's throne. The Lamb is there.

Don't be afraid to approach God's throne. You will see him face to face. That's why Jesus came to our earth, to see you face to face. That's why Jesus endured the spitting and beating and whipping and nailing and dying we read about in such graphic detail every Lent. Jesus endured it all for you, just to see your face. Jesus visualized your face in heaven with him and said, "It's all worth it! I would do it a hundred times again, just to see your face." Just to see your face. That's all Jesus wants is to see your face, in heaven, with him. Can you picture that?

Picture it. His name is on your forehead. That river of the water of life washed over you in baptism. That water tied with God's Word stamped God's name, "Christian," on your forehead. I know you can't physically see it, but can you picture it? Can you visualize walking around, every day, with, "Christian," stamped on your forehead? What better brand to wear? What better name to carry? Can you picture it?

I realize it's tough to keep this vision in your mind. You will get in your car and have homework to do and dishes to wash and maybe you will go home and just be alone. And heaven will seem so far away. Then remember Billy Mills. He visualized winning that race hundreds of times, over many long months, just for one moment of glory. You are enduring a few difficult moments for an eternity of glory. Better than Billy Mills, remember Jesus. He bled, just to see your face. He died for you, just to be with you. Can you picture Jesus? Can you visualize him, arms open, face smiling, happiest person in the world, just to see you in heaven. Amen.