### “He Sees the Father” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 25, 2025

**Revelation 22:1–2, 5–7**

1Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb . . . 2 On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. . . . 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.” 7“See, I am coming soon!”

**John 5:2–9, 16, 19–21**

2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay many ill, lame, and paralyzed people 4waiting for an angel of the Lord to come down and stir up the water. 5One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” 7 The ill man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up . . .” 8Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath. . .

16 The Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath. . . 19 Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. 20 The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. 21 Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes.

The image found in Genesis of the Tree of Life is revived here in Revelation, with the embellishment of it bearing twelve kinds of fruit. The tree here is for the healing of the nations. What if there were a tree that could contribute to the healing of the conflicts and hatreds between nations? I find it hard to take this literally. It seems more like a symbol, a divine hope for the future. So also we are told that there is no sun, but God provides the light. It sounds like a picture of heaven, rather than of something that will literally take place on earth.

Meanwhile, back on earth, we have the story of a man who is lame, and is unable to get into the pool of Beth-zatha right after the water is stirred up by an unseen force, so as to get the expected healing effects. Jesus bypasses the matter of the pool, telling him directly to stand up and walk, and the man does so. This creates trouble because healing is considered to be work, and healing done on the Sabbath can be considered Sabbath-breaking, for those who are rigid enforcers of the law. Some of the Jewish religious authorities start persecuting Jesus after this.

Jesus explains that he is just doing what he sees God doing, and since the Father loves the Son, he shows him all that is doing, and will show greater works even than these (John 5:19–20). Finally, just as the Father raises the dead, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes (5:21). A few verses later he says “as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (5:26). Jesus is explaining that he has divine power in himself, given by his Father. And in the next chapter he says “this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (6:39). He will show this power by raising himself from the dead (John 10:17–18) and then by “bringing many children to glory,” being the “pioneer of their salvation,” as it says in Hebrews (Heb 2:10).

Jesus has God-power within him. In today’s passage, he pictures this by saying that the Father shows him everything that he does (5:20), and “the Son does likewise” (5:19). The Son gives life. In fact, this could be our main concept for *how* Jesus is a Savior: not as a sacrificial victim, but as a life-giver. He gives life and healing to numerous people during his ministry, without linking it in any way to his coming death. The Son hands on the life and health that he sees the Father giving. He says he is only doing what he sees his Father doing. This implies that life and healing are the norm in the afterlife, and Jesus is importing some of these heavenly realities into the earthly level. Jesus is the Savior because he is bringing God’s realm, God’s life, into the earthly realm.

There is no disunity or difference of attitude between the persons of the Father and the Son. The Son does what the Father does. The Son is going to remake the world into the likeness of God’s realm, heaven, however long it takes.

Jesus, the Son, is the revealer of the Father. Both are life-givers. This life can function for the healing of the nations, if the nations will cooperate. Healing does not follow from a legalistic religion, but from a transformative one. For most people transformative living was counter-intuitive, not expected. It takes an extra step, beyond mere obedience or conformity. It means a more active and creative involvement with religious truth than the usual response of obedience and submission.

Jesus tried to show that transformative and creative religious living should be expected. But it takes our active cooperation. In spirituality, it takes two to tango. The philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev wrote, “Knowledge of the Truth cannot be human knowledge alone, but neither can it be only divine knowledge. . . *it can only be divine-human knowledge*” (*The Realm of Spirit*, 29). He also says, “Love is divine-human, and it is only so that it can be human” (*Divine and the Human*, 125). “Spiritual liberation is always a turning . . . to God”(*Slavery and Freedom*, 248). “The united creativeness of man and God . . . is a result of freedom”(*Slavery and Freedom*, 252). It is this creative freedom that leads to amazing results, such as we have hardly seen on this world yet. Jesus says God “will show [the Son] greater works than these, so that you will be astonished” (John 5:20).

The law of love is in some ways harder than the law of Moses, because we have to be more prayerfully alert in the present moment. We have to be more *creatively responsive* to God. Often when we have an encounter with someone, we only think of the best thing to say after it is over, but that’s alright. It trains us to be ready the next time. We grow with experience.

The Congregationalist Lyman Abbott said salvation “was not a crown, a robe, and a harp, but character . . . truth, and love. No man could get into heaven unless heaven got into him” (Ira Brown, *Lyman Abbott*, 239).

So let’s get heaven *into* us, and shake things up. Let’s bring some heavenly realities to earth. Let’s discover the united creativity of God and human. Let’s even work for the healing of the nations, if there’s some small way we can contribute to that. Remember, when God and humans work together, nothing is impossible.