

the New Jerusalem has no enemies and open gates.

26-27 The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

"Nothing impure will... enter" – only those whose names show that they belong to Jesus, appear in His Book of Life, Rev. 3:5.

22:1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. 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.

• **For further study** on the river of life and the tree of life, compare Eden, Gen. 2:8-14 and the river seen by Ezekiel, Ezek. 47:1-12, and "the water of life", Rev. 7:17, John 4:10-15.

IN PRACTICE The third example of God revealing something of His eternal purpose comes from the end of John's series of visions of heaven. We can experience the kingdom of heaven as a foretaste of the order and peace of heaven. John's final picture of heaven reminds us to live for what will be very good, eternally! How do we earn our entrance into such a paradise? The devil always tries to trick us into working hard for it – and missing the point. We cannot earn by any religious means or good works, what Jesus has secured for us to receive freely. But we can choose to recognise who Jesus truly is, and trust Him with our whole lives – and then know the assurance of our names being in the Book of Life.

QUESTION *Jesus promises us that if we are truly His, one day we shall reign with Him for ever. How can we experience something of that, now?*

PRAYER Lord God Almighty, You promise us that by our receiving Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we can know the assurance of one day being in the light of your glory and seeing Your face, able to share with the Lord Jesus care and responsibility over Your creation. I turn again to Your Son Jesus, recognise my proud rebellion and my inability to make any kind restitution. I believe that Jesus, dying on the Cross, took my sin, past, present and future. I ask Him again to take my life and rule and reign in it as Jesus my Lord. Thank You so much for offering me this new life, and life eternal, through Him and Him alone. Amen.

"Down the middle" – the tree of life was central in Eden, but after mankind's fall into sin, access was lost; now the stream of blessings and joy flow through the people of the city.

3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him.

4 They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

"See His face" – Moses and others knew they could not see God's face and live, but made holy by the Spirit, God's people will look on His face.

5 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 for ever and ever.

"The Lord God will give them light" – because the glorious light of God's presence marks the end of night, Rev. 21:25, Zech. 14:7, "and they will reign", believers together with Jesus their king will all worship as priests and also reign over this new earth for ever, Rev. 5:10.

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **May 26** (Easter 6) in Bible order
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme **How vision from God guides us in His way**

John 14:23-29 – Jesus sets out a future vision of the life of the Spirit

Acts 16:9-15 – A man from Europe begs for help in a vision to Paul

Revelation 21:10, 22-27, 22:1-5 – John sees a pure and holy new community

Read also: Psalm 67

John 14:23-29 – Jesus sets out a future vision of the life of the Spirit

Spiritual coaching will enable believers to live out of love for Jesus and His Way

23 Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching. My Father will love them, and We will come to them and make our home with them."

"Loves me... obey" – reiterating v.15 (also v.21) "If you love me, keep My commands", quickly coupled with the help of the Holy Spirit, v.16.

"Make our home with them" – from the limited sense in tabernacle and temple, see Stephen's preach in Acts 7:46-48, Jesus points to the realisation of this at Pentecost, Acts 2.

24 "Anyone who does not love Me will not obey My teaching. These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent Me.

"Does not love me" – the double negative emphasises.

25 "All this I have spoken while still with you.

26 "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send" – sending is by both the Father and the Son, John 15:26.

"Will teach you" – in the Greek, "He will teach you" which does not agree grammatically with the neuter Pneuma, Spirit (also in 15:26 and 16:13-14). The Holy Spirit is a person!

27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

"Peace... My peace I give you" – Jesus gives the common greeting a special emphasis, repeating "My peace" or salvation, rest of spirit, fellowship with God; by contrast with the so-called Pax Romana.

28 "You heard Me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

"The Father is greater" – Jesus accepted a subordinate role in His incarnation, but returned to that first glory.

29 "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

"When it does happen" – His disciples would continue to be able to call on Jesus by the Spirit of Jesus.

IN PRACTICE We have grown up in a well-educated society in which we have learned to make informed choices and exercise some individual determination. 'Obey' seems to carry the connotation of blind obedience. But that is the opposite of the vision of post-resurrection life Jesus is teaching here. The original word, *tereo*, has the primary meaning of keeping or guarding or practising. So "anyone who loves Me will keep on with and practise My teaching" would be a fair translation, which also encourages us to make informed choices in life. But how do we deliver on this in a world which seeks to mould us quite differently? The answer is the divine coach, the Holy Spirit who reveals and reminds us of the Way of Jesus -- and better still, empowers us to go beyond our limited capabilities.

QUESTION *Why do we need to go beyond our own abilities to follow and hold on to Jesus' new way of life?*

Acts 16:9-15 – *A man from Europe begs for help in a vision to Paul*

Paul crosses to Philippi and finds a Gentile woman whose heart is opened to the gospel

9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

"A man of Macedonia" – this vision comes in the context of their having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from completing their plan to take the gospel west and north in Turkey, vv.6-8, so constraining them to stay at Troas, a trading port with Macedonia.

10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

"We got ready at once" – the vision was a compelling one, to go to this place of Greek Gentiles. The man of Macedonia was not Luke, because at this point he joins Paul, Silas and Timothy and embarks with them.

11-12 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that

district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

"Samothrace" – a sheltered anchorage on route to Neapolis, the port for Philippi.

"Philippi, a Roman colony" – self-governing with tax exemptions and privileges which attracted many military veterans, but home to very few Jews.

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

"A place of prayer" – clearly there being not enough Jewish men to form a synagogue, the few Jews or non-Jewish women of some faith, met for prayer on the banks of the river.

14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

"Woman from... Thyatira" – a city famous for its crimson dye, in the Hellenistic kingdom of Lydia, so her name could mean the 'woman from Lydia'.

"The Lord opened her heart" – emphasising that however wise and gifted the preacher, it is the

Holy Spirit who opens hearts and draws people to Christ.

15 When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

"She and her household" – clearly a woman of some means with servants and a house that eventually became a gathering place for Christians, v.40.

"If you consider me a believer" – suggests that she and those of the household able to voice their own response to the gospel would have been baptised. Baptism always follows declaration of belief in the Bible.

IN PRACTICE In these three examples of God-given vision, Paul's revelation is more conventional – if a dream, an extraordinarily vivid one that left him in no doubt as to how he should respond. As we "keep on with" the Way of Jesus with the help of the Helper, we need a sense of God-given vision, a sense of our trajectory and target. Often God will give us some form of specific direction – especially if we ask Him. We can assume that Paul and Silas and Timothy were persistent in doing just that. Their call to fulfil the Scriptures about Jesus and His Good News being a light to the Gentiles as well as the Jews had not yet been put to the test in a place without a synagogue. Now, as the Holy Spirit prevented them from travelling west, then seemed to block the way north into Bithynia, the port of Troas was the only way. This was time for a big step of faith for these Jewish Christians to take the Gospel into Europe. Paul's vision was appropriate for such a historic turning point.

QUESTION *How do you expect God to guide you? Has He ever shown you a glimpse of something extraordinary, which became a signpost to you?*

Rev. 21:10, 22-27, 22:1-5 – *John's vision reveals a new pure community*

Those who have chosen the lordship of Jesus will enjoy God's presence as in the original Eden

10 And 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.

"Carried me away in the Spirit" – introducing a vision of the Holy City, contrasted with the unholy Babylon.

"Coming down out of heaven" – showing God's presence and life received as a gift, not by striving to reach up.

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

"I did not see a temple" – No temple is needed because Jesus Himself is now the temple in which

God lives among His people, John 1:14, 2:19-21.

23-24 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. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it.

"Glory of God gives it light" – language which echoes Isaiah 60:19-20. Most ancient cities were poorly lit at night, but the new Jerusalem is full of light continually because God promised that in the restoration He Himself would be their glory.

"The nations" – God's promise to Abraham fulfilled, Genesis 12:3. "Kings... will bring their splendour" – recalls Isaiah 60:3,5,11.

25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.

"No day... gates... shut" – unlike cities of the Roman Empire which shut their gates at night,