There is a legend told about a spring that supposedly restores the youth of anyone who drinks or bathes in its waters. Tales of such a fountain have been recounted across the world for thousands of years, appearing in writings by the Greek historian Herodotus, Alexander the Great was said to have searched for it, and there is a story about a descendant of one of the three Magi who guarded these mystical waters in a kingdom hidden somewhere in the Orient. But for most of us these waters are mostly associated with the Spanish explorer Ponce de León who traveled to Florida in 1513 in search of the Fountain of youth. Most historians don’t really think Ponce de León was searching for the fountain of youth. It has been suggested that it was more of a joke; that people were poking fun at him because he was old as far as explorers go.

Legends and myths aside, there is something intriguing about waters that promise life and vitality. For many the idea of growing old and weak is an unpleasant thought. The ancient Greek poet Homer called old age "loathsome," and William Shakespeare termed it the "hideous winter." Mark Twain noted that "life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of 80 and gradually approach 18." Apparently most Americans feel the same way. The anti-aging industry has made billions pedaling steroids, human growth hormone injections, and “bio-identical” hormones—all promoted as “cures” for getting old.

It seems as if throughout history mankind has been chasing the fountain of youth. To be forever young is at first an alluring prospect. But when you stop to think about it, who wants to live forever? I mean really? Who wants to live here, like this, forever? I mean take a look around. We live in a fallen world, full of faulty people, with constant failure.

Here we live in a fallen world. Romans 5:12 tells us, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” As soon as Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree God had forbidden them to eat all creation became cursed with sin. The once perfect harmony shared with creation was replaced with fear and animosity. The man and woman who were created to be ideally suited for each other, turned on each other and started to blame each other for all their problems. The God that they once enjoyed walking beside in the cool of the day was now someone they ran and hid from. This curse has been passed down from generation to generation. Still today creation attacks us. The weather batters us, animals distrust us, and viruses infect us. Still today relationships fall short of the ideal. Some husbands and wives dissatisfy and disappoint each other, others fight and argue, and others betray and divorce. Still today mankind runs and hides from God. Sin is concealed, the truth is rejected, and worship neglected. Take a look around. We live in a fallen world. Do you really want to live forever in a fallen world?

Here we live among faulty people. 2 Timothy 3:2-4 tells us, “People will be[are] lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” The people we live among have a faulty view of themselves. They have a sense of entitlement that causes them to think only of themselves as they fail to take responsibility for their own actions. The people we live among have a faulty view of others. They believe that other people are not as valuable as they are and are therefore not entitled to the patience, forgiveness, and kindness that they expect to be given them. The people we live among have a faulty view of purpose. They view life as a time to amass wealth, satisfy desires, and indulge pleasures. Take a look around. We live among faulty people. Do you really want to live forever among faulty people?

Here we live with constant failure. Romans 8:7 tells us, “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” We might be able to live in a fallen world among faulty people if it were not for the fact that we would also have to live with our own failures. When our wants and desires come into conflict with God’s law and teachings we try to justify our actions by attacking God’s law and teaching as being old fashioned, out of date, and irrelevant. When our attempts to justify our sinful actions fail, we try our best to ignore our conscious, the people who call us to repentance, and the Word of God that convicts us. And here is the kicker, even when by the grace of God we hear the Word of God and desire to obey it…we don’t. We don’t do the good we want to do. We fall short of the glory of God. We fail to be holy as the Lord our God is holy. Take a look around. We live with constant failure. Do you really want to live forever with failure?

Even if Ponce de León found a fountain of youth in St. Augustine, Florida that would allow you to live in this world forever, would you drink its water? Would you go chasing after the fountain of youth so that you could live forever in a fallen world, full of faulty people, with your own constant failure?

God was concerned that Adam and Eve would do exactly that. You see there really is a fountain of youth. It is not located in St. Augustine, Florida, it has never been guarded by the descendant of the Magi, and it is not a figment of
Herodotus’ imagination. And to be technical I should also mention that it was not so much of a fountain as a tree; a tree known to Adam and Eve as the tree of life. God had placed it in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve to enjoy. But when they chose to eat of the forbidden fruit instead, God in his mercy prevented them from eating of the tree of life. In Genesis 3:22, we read, “He[mankind] must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” In his grace and mercy God would not allow mankind to live here, like this, forever.

God had a better place and a better way for mankind to live forever. It involved another tree, a tree that was raised on a hill outside of Jerusalem, a tree that the sinless son of God was nailed to, a tree where all sin from Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God to our failures to be holy like God were punished, a tree that soaked up the blood that paid our debt in full, a tree that we now look to as a reminder of the forgiveness we have been given. Galatians 3:13 tells us, “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.”

Because Jesus suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sins, the quest for the fountain of youth continues. In Revelation 22:1-2 we read, “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.” We find ourselves back once more in the place where all of history began, in a garden where the water and tree of life offer life and vitality to all. We have come full circle from paradise lost to paradise found. But before we drink from the fountain of youth we should ask, do we want to live forever? Do we want to live in heaven, as saints, forever? Verses 1-5 of Revelation 22 allow us to take a look around. In these verses we see a paradise, full of holy people, living with perfection.

There we live in a paradise. Verses 3 tell us, “No longer will there be any curse.” And as a result Verse 4 tells us, “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” In heaven harmony has been restored to creation. The prophet Isaiah was given this vision, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”1 In heaven harmony has been restored for all people. husbands will serve and sacrifice and wives will honor and obey. In heaven harmony has been restored between God and us. The sin that once caused God to say, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live,”2 curses us no more. In heaven the face of God shines on us, we bask in the light of its forgiveness and are comforted by the warmth of its providence. In heaven God will put his name on us; he will claim us as his own dear children, and we will live with him in peace. Take a look around. Heaven is a paradise. Who wouldn’t want to live forever in paradise?

There we live among holy people. Verse 2 tells us, “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” The people in heaven have been healed of their faulty vision. The people in heaven now see themselves as the ones who have been called out of darkness into his wonderful light. They see those who join them around the throne of God as blood bought saints. They see the eternity they have been given as an opportunity to thank and praise the God who called, justified, and glorified the elect. Take a look around. In heaven we will live among holy people. Who wouldn’t want to live forever in among holy people?

There we live with perfection. Verse 3 finally tells us, “his servants will serve him.” And in verse 5 that service is described with the words, “they will reign forever and ever.” In heaven we will be servants who desire to hear, honor, and herald the timeless truths of our king. In heaven we will have a perfect knowledge of God’s law and teachings and yet we will continue to find great delight in hearing them again and again. In heaven our service will be joyful; not only will we have the luxury of hearing the Word of God from the mouth of God but we will also have the ability to obey it. We will do the good we want to do. Take a look around. In heaven we will live in perfection. Who wouldn’t want to live forever in perfection?

Some exhaust themselves chasing the fountain of youth in an attempt to live here, like this, forever. Thankfully God in his mercy had a better place and a better way for us to live forever. Because of Jesus we have been forgiven the sin we inherited from Adam and Eve and the sin we commit in the here and now. Because of Jesus one day we will be the saints triumphant who will drink from the fountain of youth in heaven. Amen

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1 Revelation 22:1-5 Saints Triumphant November 10th 2013 Pastor Harmon Lewis @ Saving Grace Lutheran Church, Mobile, AL

2 Isaiah 11:6

1 Ex 33:20