

Heaven's Holy City - Part 2

Revelation 21:9-22:5

We return once again this morning to Revelation chapter 21 as we continue to make our way verse by verse through the **APOKALYPTIS IESOU CHRISTOU**, the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the second part of a discourse on heaven's holy city, and I would like to read the text before us this morning beginning in Revelation 21 and verse nine through chapter 22 and verse five.

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And

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on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.¹

What a breathtaking description of our future home, heaven's holy city, the new Jerusalem.

In Matthew chapter six and verse 20 Jesus commanded us to lay up our treasures in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal."² Why should we do that? He answered that in the next phrase saying, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."³

You must understand. It is not our treasures that the Lord wants. It is our hearts. Rather than devoting our time and our energy amassing personal wealth for this life only, we are to use it to glorify God. Rather than hoarding our possessions and using our possessions for our own pleasures, we are to use them to serve others. Beloved, we are to take all that we are and all that we have and use them for the glory of God, to generously devote ourselves to the building up of the kingdom. You see, no thief can possibly steal that away from us.

Jesus told the rich young ruler, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."⁴ "Come follow me. Devote yourself to me completely. Learn what it means to serve me and to obey me. Learn what it means to cultivate the hidden man of the heart. Study me and become more like me." That is the idea.

But, beloved, when we do this we are laying up treasures in heaven. People will be saved. God will be glorified. When we enter into heaven I am sure many of those redeemed of which we have been a part of will come to meet us and to thank us. You see, as a result of all of this kind of thinking, with this kind of attitude, with this kind of living we are putting our treasures in heaven and therefore increasingly devoting ourselves to the Lord and increasingly longing for that time when we will see him face to face. That is what the Lord wants for us.

So for all those who are laying up their treasures in heaven, we once again come to this staggering description of our heavenly home and I am sure you will join with me in praising the Lord for what he has prepared for his bride, the redeemed of all ages.

¹ Revelation 21:9—22:5.

² Matthew 6:20.

³ Matthew 6:21.

⁴ Matthew 19:21.

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I might also add, if this material is boring to you, if it doesn't ignite your heart to praise and it does not stir you to a deeper longing to go home, you are either unsaved or perhaps you are saved, but you are not storing up your treasures in heaven. You are committed to storing them up here on earth and therefore, dear friends, you are forfeiting blessing in your life. You are probably living in the pathway of divine chastening.

But think of the difference for those who are excited about what we read here. And I hope you are excited. I am. In fact, I get thrilled when I study this material. It is so much easier to talk about heaven than it is to talk about hell. But to be able to come here and think, "Oh, the rewards that await the redeemed." Beloved, may I encourage you to press on and serve in Christ? And as you do, you will be filled with inexpressible joy. And part of that joy will be enhanced when you come to the Word of God and you get a glimpse of what you have to anticipate in heaven.

Jesus promised in Luke 6:23, "Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."⁵ Maybe we need to do a little more leaping around here. But that is the reason why. "Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."⁶

Now with this in mind, let's return, again, to the sacred text and examine what the Lord has for us here. He has, again, been so gracious to us to give us a detailed description of our eternal home, knowing full well that we are not going to be able to grasp a small inkling of what awaits us, but even with that inkling, it is both motivating as well as it is magnificent. And here as we began to study last week, he describes heaven's holy city. And I like to think of dividing this into three categories. We see the splendor of its appearance, the symmetry of its architecture, and the stateliness of its accommodation.

Now last week, by way of review, we looked at the splendor of its appearance. You will recall the angel guide now takes John and shows him the structure and the dimensions and the materials that are used for the construction of this massive, diamond like, translucent holy city that descends from God from some unknown universe, some region that we can't imagine. And it comes down and it is attached somehow to a newly created earth.

We learned that it is a cube. According to verse 16 it is 1500 miles in every direction. Those that have worked out the math tell us that that is 2,250,000 square miles. You can liken this to the distance of the size of the western portion of the United States. That would be from the Pacific coast in California to about the Mississippi River, from the tip of Maine, all the way down to Florida if that gives you some perspective.

And emanating from within the city is the effulgence of the glory of God that is refracting in every direction, the glory of God that produces every imaginable color of the rainbow

⁵ Luke 6:23.

⁶ Ibid.

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in every direction. Whenever I think of that I remember Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."⁷ And later on John said, "In him is light and there is no darkness at all." Beloved, one day we are going to see what he was talking about.

So we looked at the splendor of its appearance, but also we began to study what we will finalize this morning and that is the symmetry of its architecture. Keep in mind. We are still looking here at the exterior of the city. We learned last week that this symmetry reflects the glory of God. He is a God of perfect order, a God of perfect purpose in all that he does. We learned that the great and high wall has twelve gates, three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, three on the west.

And it will have an inscription of the 12 tribes of Israel on the top of each gate which will serve as an eternal memorial to the unique role national Israel played in God's plan of redemption. And at the bottom of each gate is an inscription of the name of the apostles, each having been a part of the foundation of the Church. So the symmetry of the gates reflect the magnificent purposes of God in redemption where he memorializes all of his redeemed, those under the old covenant as well as those under the new covenant.

Now, let's examine some more of these amazing truths pertaining to the symmetry of its architecture as revealed to John through his angel guide.

Look at verse 15. "And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall."⁸

Now, why would God have his servant perform such a task? Well, I think the answer is rather simple. He is demonstrating here to John—and, therefore, to all of us who read the details of this revelation—that what he is witnessing is not some baffling, ethereal apparition of some sort, not some mysterious spiritual symbol that somehow transcends the realm of literality, but rather that the city is a real, measurable, quantifiable, tangible reality.

Now, admittedly, the details of these descriptions suggest many very precious symbolic meanings as we will continue to learn. But we must not allow the symbolism to eclipse the literality of the city. For example, our holy communion service is filled with very powerful, very precious sacred symbolism. But it would be foolish to therefore argue that it is of no consequence whether or not the bread and the cup are literal. Obviously they are. So, too, with the new Jerusalem despite all of the symbolism that is there. To make sure we do not miss this critical point, it is interesting we are told in verse 17 that the angelic measurements are the same as the human measurements.

Beloved, to say this city is not literal but is rather to be understood, as the note tells us in the new ESV study Bible, that it is merely a complex, quote, "symbol for the light and heaven of the Lamb's redeemed people," that runs perilously close, I fear, to violating the

⁷ John 8:12, 9:5.

⁸ Revelation 21:15.

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Lord's prohibition against tampering with the text that we see in chapter 22 verses 18 to 19. There are many dear brothers that share so much if not the majority of what I would share in an understanding of Scripture, but when it comes to this I find myself being baffled at the way they ignore the literality of what we have before us.

For example, one of the leading Amillennial theologians argues, quote, "When the book of Revelation tells us that the holy city, the new Jerusalem will come down from heaven to the new earth, that God will now have his dwelling with me and that the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the new Jerusalem, it is teaching us in figurative language that in the life to come, heaven and earth will no longer be separated, but will have merged. In the final state, therefore, glorified believers will be both in heaven and on the new earth since the two shall then be one," end quote.

Really? All of this detail to tell us what is already exceedingly obvious?

Another theologian puts it this way, quote, "This chapter, referring to chapter 21, contains an account of the happy state of the Church consisting of all the elect both Jews and Gentiles which will take place upon the first resurrection and will continue during the 1000 years reign mentioned in the preceding chapter. The seat of the Church in these happy times will be the new heavens and the new earth. The Church that will dwell there is described by its names the holy city and new Jerusalem," end quote.

So as you go on to read and as you understand here, he would see this as merely a symbol, a very elaborate symbol of the Church in heaven.

Another theologian who would spiritualize these texts says this, quote, "The whole of chapter 21 and the first five verses of chapter 22 relate to scenes beyond the judgment and are descriptive of the happy and triumphant state of the redeemed Church when all its conflicts shall have ceased and all its enemies shall have been destroyed. That happy state is depicted under the image of a beautiful city of which Jerusalem was the emblem. And it was disclosed to John by a vision of that city, the new Jerusalem descending from heaven. So Jerusalem was regarded as the peculiar dwelling place of God and to the Hebrews it became, thus, the natural emblem or symbol of the heavenly world," end quote.

So, again, this is not a literal symbol or a literal city, but rather a symbol of the Church. And, of course, whenever I read these things I want to ask the question: By whose authority?

I don't know about you, but if I were to read this and someone came to me said, "Hey, be careful, don't get too excited here. Don't take all that stuff literally. The new Jerusalem with all of its dimensions and all of its details here in these verses is really a complex symbol for the life in heaven of the Lamb's redeemed people. It is a picture of life in heaven. It is merely an illustration of the happy and triumphant state of the Church."

If I heard that, I would say, "All of this amazing detail to say that?" Plus, we have these

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descriptions of the city in Hebrews 11, Hebrews 12, Hebrews 13, Abraham and all of the rest were merely anticipating a symbol? Are you kidding me?

“I don't have a clue what any of that symbol stuff really means, but, my, there for a minute I actually thought this was the place that Jesus was going to prepare for me. I guess I was wrong. How foolish of me to think that since the King of the new Jerusalem is literal and since its inhabitants will be literal, I was just kind of silly enough to think that the city would be literal, too.”

Well, I don't mean to be unkind. But I do want to emphasize and underscore the point that, beloved, when the Scripture goes to such lengths to describe this, I think we would be wise to take it literally. And, seriously, what possible symbolism could there be in the statement in verse 17 when he says, “And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements”⁹ I searched, by the way, about 30 commentaries and I could not find any of those who would spiritualize this to give any explanation of that particular text. Well, it is as if the Lord deliberately wants to make a point here to underscore the literality of these magnificent details. I would also ask: What more would God need to do to communicate to us that these things are literal?

So what do these measurements reveal? Notice verse 16. “And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.”¹⁰

So we have these equal dimensions indicating that the city is a perfect cube. What a colossal structure, a bejeweled city with all of these magnificent stones, rising up above the earth. Perhaps it will be an earth that is much larger than our current one. We don't know. We know it will be a new one. Maybe it is larger to better harmonize the vast proportions of this holy city, but whatever the size, the new Jerusalem, dear friends, will stand as the crown jewel of heaven with the new earth in the center of our heavenly universe where the redeemed will dwell with the lover of our souls.

Now, once again, this cube shaped city is really a greatly expanded version of the holy of holies that we read about in 1 Kings six and verse 20 that existed in Solomon's temple. Of course that one was only a mere 20 cubits, not 1500 miles. So bear in mind that the entire new Jerusalem will be a massive sanctuary of God himself. His tabernacle is now brought to earth.

It is hard to imagine a city rising 1500 miles, again, from the Pacific coast to the Mississippi River. Imagine that turned up and rising above the earth. That is a surface area of 2.25 million square miles. Now, again, imagine the city arising that far above the earth. That would literally extend beyond our current earth's atmosphere which is about,

⁹ Revelation 21:17.

¹⁰ Revelation 21:16.

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what? One hundred miles? Of course, the new heaven and the new earth will replace all of the things that we are familiar with. But it will be magnificent indeed.

Now notice verse 17. We read, "And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements."¹¹ Seventy-two yards is obviously the width, not the height of this wall, because this wall will be at least as high as the city with these massive gate towers that will run the full length of the city from top to bottom, thereby allowing access into every level of the structure.

Remember now, our glorified bodies will allow us to travel in any direction including vertically as well as horizontally. I guess you could think about it like a bee hive. We can go in any direction, any way we want. And even the streets of the city will be arranged both vertically and horizontally.

Now the question often arises concerning whether or not the structure, as massive as it is, is sufficient to house all of the redeemed. I asked that question, I remember, in my younger days. I got to thinking about it. I think, boy, yeah, well, that is big, but I just wonder if it is going to be big enough. Isn't it funny how we tend to doubt God about these things? I suppose every bride wonders about the space of her new home, concerned that it is going to be adequate. And, of course, it really is silly to think that somehow God's forethought on this matter might not be sufficient.

But others have done some calculations that I believe help us here, calculations pertaining to both space as well as occupancy, combining geometry with some reasonable conjecture. Regarding the 1500-mile cubed city, theologian and scientist Dr. Henry Morris says this. Quote, "This kind of geometry makes it easier to understand how all the redeemed of all the ages could be living in a single city. Although there is no way to know precisely how many people would be there, one can make at least a somewhat accurate guess. It can be calculated of the total number of people who have lived between Adam's time and our time is about 40 billion. Then assuming that a similar number will be born during the millennium because of the conditions and allowing another 20 billion who died before or soon after death and never really populated the earth, it is reasonable that about 100 billion men, women and children could have been members of the human race past, present and future."

He goes on to argue, quote, "Assume for the sake of argument that 20 percent of these will be saved including all of those who die in infancy. It is obviously only a guess, but the Lord Jesus did make it plain that the large majority will never be saved, right?"

And of course he is right in Matthew seven there is a description of that. There is going to be the few and the many. He goes on to say, "If this figure is used, then the new Jerusalem would have to accommodate 20 billion residents. Also assume that 25 percent of the city is used for the dwelling places of the inhabitants with the rest allocated to streets, parks, public buildings, et cetera," end quote.

¹¹ Revelation 21:17.

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Now he goes on to make some calculations and at the end of his calculations—and, again, this is conjecture, but I think it is worth considering—he determines that the average space assigned to each person would be one over 30 cubic miles. This translates into what we would consider a cubical block that would be equivalent to about 75 acres on each face of the cube per person. So this is a little over a third of a mile in each direction. Well, whatever the ultimate dimensions, dear friends, we can rest assured that we will not be complaining because we are cramped for space.

We are not told what we are going to do in this translucent, cubical block that will be ours within the royal palace. We are not told about any furnishings. There is not going to be any need for privacy. Perhaps we will entertain others from time to time. Again, think about it. We will know every saint and we will know every angel by name, with all of us retaining our individual identity so that we will be able to recognize one another. But no doubt we will spend much of our eternity serving God in the infinite reaches of heaven.

So I guess you might say that probably at some level we won't be in our cube a whole lot of the time. We won't need a place to sleep. Of course, it is never going to be dark. We will not have a family there. And, I might also add—and I know many people ask this quite often. I get this from our internet listeners, especially—there will be no marriage in heaven. 1 Corinthians seven verses 29 through 31 the apostle tells us that marriage, weeping, earthly rejoicing and ownership will all pass away. We won't have that in heaven.

Let me digress here for a moment because this is important. The institution of marriage is an earthly union only. It is a living picture of Christ's love for the Church. It is an opportunity for people to exercise and enjoy deep oneness of relationship and covenantal love. It is a picture of the perfect oneness of the triune godhead. And on earth we know, according to Scripture, that man needed a helper and the woman was needed to complete him as well as to bear children. But, again, folks, none of those things will be necessary in heaven.

The Lord Jesus addressed this issue about marriage in heaven, you will recall, in Matthew 22. You remember, there the Sadducees had this absurd hypothetical moral dilemma that they presented to Jesus to try to trick him. It reminds me of some of my students that I have taught before and I am sure they are thinking, "Ok, we have got him now."

Here is what they said in Matthew 22 verse 24.

Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES, HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP AN OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER.' Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third,

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down to the seventh. And last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection therefore whose wife of the seven shall she be? For they all had her."

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."¹²

Now, for those people who are in bad marriages, this may be the best news they have heard in a long time. For those of us who are deeply in love with our wives, this might cause us to feel a bit sad. But, beloved, think of it this way. As wonderful as the relationships that we enjoy with our spouses, what we will experience in heaven will exceed anything that we could have ever imagined, anything that we have ever experienced in this fallen state. Every relationship will be equally perfect forever. No wonder Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."¹³

I must emphasize, again, dear friends, that when we come to heaven it will instantly be, as we would put it, "home sweet home" in every sense of the word. It is not going to be some foreign place that is going to take a while to get used to. Do you realize that the Lord God himself is going to welcome us like a reunion that a father would have with a long lost child?

There has been going around the internet a very precious video of soldiers returning home from duty and surprising their children from young to older children in classrooms and at home and so forth. Some of you have, perhaps, seen that. And I just wept as I watched it because suddenly a child would look up and see the father that they haven't seen in a long time and you just see them absolutely come apart. That is going to be the sense that we will have, I guess, without the tears. But the point is, when we see our Father, when we enter home, it is not going to be a sense of, "Why we need to take a little time to get used to things here." We are going to be home. We will understand what the psalmist said in Psalm 116:15 where we read, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."¹⁴

One more very important consideration. Sometimes believers will ask me about how we will exist in heaven. And, of course, we don't know for sure. But there are some things that we do have a sense of. And certainly we are not going to be like some think that we are going to be kind of floating around with some ethereal kind of... again, some type of an apparition . . . an apparition that bears no resemblance to any of our humanness here.

I want to make it clear. Although certainly things are going to be radically different, it is going to be a new heaven and a new earth. We know that. It is going to be a place that transcends time. It transcends space and gravity and electromagnetic force and all of those things that we are accustomed to. And it is even going to be, as we have studied, a

¹² Matthew 22:24-30.

¹³ Philippians 1:21.

¹⁴ Psalm 116:15.

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universe that is not water based which is just in and of itself incomprehensible to us. But, dear friends, nevertheless, we will maintain certain aspects of our humanness which is consistent with being made in the image of God. We will have a makeup that will function like Christ's glorified body which he still possesses.

Theologian A A Hodge describes it this way. Quote, "Heaven, as the eternal home of the divine man and of all the redeemed members of the human race must necessarily be thoroughly human in its structure, conditions and activities. Its joys and its occupations must all be rational, moral, emotional, voluntary and active. There must be the exercise of all faculties, the gratification of all tastes, the development of all talent capacities, the realization of all ideals. The reason, the intellectual curiosity, the imagination, the aesthetic instincts, the holy affections, the social affinities, the inexhaustible resources of strength and power native to the human soul must all find in heaven exercise and satisfaction," end quote.

So, indeed, we will maintain certain aspects of our humanness as image bearers. However, minus all of the effects of the curse we will have a totally glorified body like the Lord Jesus.

Well, let's return to the subject at hand here, namely the amazing symmetry of the architecture of our future home. Notice in verse 18, "And the material of the wall was jasper."¹⁵ That, you will recall, as we studied verse 11, is a diamond like material, probably a diamond, certainly a crystalline translucent material that will allow the emission of the glory of God. And we read that "the city was pure gold like clear glass."¹⁶

Now, obviously this exceeds anything that we have ever seen with respect to gold. This gold is pure. It is transparent and it is also, interestingly enough, the same material that is used to describe the streets in verse 21. Now bear in mind that all of the materials used in the new Jerusalem will be translucent. They will be transparent unlike the unlit inner chamber of the holy of holies, concealed behind the veil. The Lord's new sanctuary, our home will allow the radiance of the glory of God to be displayed unrestricted. I can only imagine such dazzling brilliance and yet one day, beloved, we will bask in it.

Next he returns to the foundations of the city wall. Notice in verse 19 he says, "The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone."¹⁷

And now John is going to list 12 of the stones, some of which may refer to a different color or even compound today than they did in the first century, thereby making an exact determination impossible in every instance. But I would also add—and this is very important—the term "adorn" here in the grammar in the original language indicates that this does not mean that these walls are just decorated by these particular stones, but rather that each of the foundations literally consists of these stones.

¹⁵ Revelation 21:18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Revelation 21:19.

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Now, while we cannot know the full meaning of all of the symbolism of the stones, it is fascinating to note that eight of these precious gems are the same as those found on the breastplate of the high priest in the Old Testament. The other four are stones, literally words that are never used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, namely, chalcedony, chrysoprase, jacinth and sardius.

Now, Robert Thomas makes a very interesting observation, quote, “The symbolism is rich in meaning. The old covenant confined the privilege of direct fellowship with God to the high priest. But in the new city the privilege will belong to all of the people of God,” end quote. Well, perhaps there is merit in that observation. We don't know fully. We probably will know when we get there.

But let's look at these stones of the foundation, verse 19.

The first foundation stone was jasper [in other words a diamond]; the second, sapphire [which would be a brilliant blue or perhaps a sky blue that is flecked with gold]; the third, chalcedony [this, we believe is possibly a green silicate of copper or an agate from near Chalcedon which is now modern Turkey. It would be sky blue with colored stripes in it] ; the fourth, emerald [which is a bright green]; the fifth, sardonyx [which is a red and white striped stone]; the sixth, sardius [which is a red stone like a ruby]; the seventh, chrysolite [which is a transparent gold]; the eighth, beryl [which is similar to an emerald, but it would have more of a blue or a sea green color to it]; the ninth, topaz [which is a brilliant yellow green color]; the tenth, chrysoprase [which is a golden green]; the eleventh, jacinth [which is a blue or a violet colored stone, at least it was in the first century]; [and then] the twelfth [and finally], amethyst [which is a purple stone].¹⁸

Absolutely magnificent. And please notice here the beauty of the bride's holy ornaments are in stark contrast to the tawdry jewelry worn by the blasphemous harlot that we read about in chapter 17 and chapter 18. We constantly see these comparisons between the bride of the Lamb and the wicked, blasphemous harlot that represented Satan and his system.

Beloved, can you imagine the panoply of color that will be splashed across the skies of the new heaven and the new earth, just amazing to think about. The ineffable light of the glory of God radiating throughout these magnificent foundation stones.

Verse 21. It says, “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl.”¹⁹ Now this is... I mean, it is all incomprehensible, but this is over the top incomprehensible. And therefore the tendency is to somehow diminish the description into something that we can comprehend and to, thereby, reduce it to some mere figurative

¹⁸ Revelation 21:19-20.

¹⁹ Revelation 21:21.

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expression or some spiritual symbol that we end up concocting. You have got to be careful with that.

Why can't these gate towers be carved from 1500 mile pearl? The same God that made the little pearl made the big one, didn't he? Obviously these would not be produced by oysters. Or maybe so. We don't know. But it is certainly created by the creator of the oyster. You see, my God would have no problem with this. Would yours?

Pearls were little known in the Old Testament, but later the Asiatic Greeks learned about them through the Persians and they became very valuable. They became ranked among the most valuable of all of the precious gems because they were made exclusively from nature. No human hands were instrumental in somehow shaping or perfecting the gem. It was impossible to improve upon its beauty. In fact, in John's day pearls were considered to be among the most treasured ornaments of the rich and famous. In fact, one of the primary reasons why Caesar tried to conquer Britain was because of the reports of the great pearl fisheries in the region. So it should be no surprise that God would include this amazing gem that has for centuries become a metaphor for something extremely rare and valuable.

John Philips offers some additional spiritual truths that are illustrated in the pearl. Here is what he says, quote, "How appropriate. All other precious gems or metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster, the only formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or a wound and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. The pearl we might say is the answer of the oyster to that which injured it. The glory land is God's answer in Christ to wicked men who crucified heaven's beloved and put him to open shame. How like God it is to make the gates of the new Jerusalem of pearl. The saints, as they come and go, will be forever reminded as they pass the gates of glory that access to God's home is only because of Calvary. Think of the size of those gates. Think of the supernatural pearls from which they are made. What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl. Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ. Those pearls hung eternally at the access roots to glory will remind us forever of one who hung upon a tree and whose answer to those who injured him was to invite them to share his home," end quote.

As I reflected upon these gates of pearl I thought also of what verse 12 tells us that in each pearly gate will stand an angel, angels, I am sure, we will know by name. And to think, beloved, that together with all of the cherubim, with the whole society of holy angels, we will join in eternal awe forever captivated by the mystery of Christ that is so perfectly pictured by these gates of pearl.

It is amazing to think that his wounds produced the perfect pearl of the redeemed. Moreover the gates of heaven will never be entered by anyone who does not first enter through the narrow gate of repentance and faith in the one who suffered on his behalf.

Oh, child of God, to think that in all of heaven has been purchased by the blood of Christ, the glories that we are examining here are free all because of Christ.

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The great Puritan theologian Richard Baxter speaks of this with such penetrating insight. He says, quote, "Oh, the everlasting admiration that will surprise the saint who think of this freeness. What did the Lord see in me that He should judge, me meet for such a state, that I who was but a poor, diseased, despised wretch should be clad in the brightness of his glory. Oh, who can fathom unmeasurable love. There is no talk of our worthiness or unworthiness. If worthiness were our condition for admittance we might sit down with Saint John and weep because none in heaven or earth is found worthy. But the lion of the tribe of Judah is worthy and has prevailed and by that title must we hold this inheritance. Here our commission runs. Freely ye have received, freely give. But Christ has dearly received yet freely gives."

He goes on to add, "The pope and his servants will be paid for their pardons and indulgences. But Christ will take nothing for his. The commutation of penance must cost men's purse's dear or else they must be cast out of the synagogue and soul and body delivered up to the devil. But none are shut out of the church for want of money nor is poverty any eye sore to Christ. An empty heart may bar them out, but an empty purse cannot. His kingdom of grace has always been more consistent with despised poverty than wealth and honor. And riches make entrance to heaven far more difficult than poverty can ever do. That is why it is the poor of the world, rich in faith, whom God hath chosen to be heirs of that kingdom which he hath prepared for them that love him," end quote.

Oh, dear Christian, think of the glory that awaits us. And if this doesn't motivate you to serve Christ I don't know what can.

Back in the late 1800s the great English minister J C Ryle once wrote this, quote, "Oh, Christian brethren, what is our light affliction when compared to such an eternity as this? Shame on us if we murmur and complain and turn back with such a heaven before our eyes. What can this vain and passing world give us better than this? This is the city of our God himself and he will dwell among us himself. The glory of God shall lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof." He went on to add, "Surely, brethren, it is worth a little pain, a little laboring, a little toil. If only we may have the lowest place in the kingdom of God," end quote.

Beloved, in light of the sheer bliss that God has prepared for us. Compared to the torment in hell that we deserve, would it not seem reasonable to show our love and gratitude by giving ourselves as a living sacrifice to Christ?

I ask you. What percentage of the week is dedicated to serving the Lord on your calendar? I don't just mean coming to church. I am not saying that isn't important. But I am talking about sacrificing your time and your treasure for the Lord. I am talking about rolling up your spiritual sleeves and serving others, discipling others, sharing Christ, teaching, praying, giving. James one verse 27 we are told that, "Pure and undefiled

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religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”²⁰

Show me a Christian who lives to himself, show me a Christian who seeks only after his own pleasure, one who never commits himself to any kind of service in and through his church. Show me a Christian who lives as an island to himself, one who has no appetite for the Word of God, one who has absolutely no habit of prayer and I will show you an ungrateful hypocrite that is laying up his treasures here on earth. And, sadly, what I have just described applies to some of you. Dear friends, examine your heart. Get serious about your walk with Christ.

The apostle Paul tells us in Colossians three verse one:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.²¹

Beloved, may I challenge you to these ends?

Well, we have examined the splendor of the city's appearance, the symmetry of its architecture. Next week we are going to go inside and we will look at the stateliness of its accommodations.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these glorious truths that stir our spiritual affections and cause us to just be ignited with praise, to give us a sense of exhilaration knowing what awaits us solely because of your grace. Lord, I pray that you will motivate us, therefore, to serve you, to walk with you, to lay up our treasures in heaven, not on earth. And, Lord, for those that do not know you, who therefore hear these things and kind of roll their eyes and find them to be merely the dreams of twisted men, I pray, Lord, that by your grace you might show them the truth of the gospel. Lord, release them from the prison of their own sin. Give them eyes to see and ears to hear for today is the day of salvation. We ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus whom we await.

And all God's people say amen.

Transcript Explanation: Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited

²⁰ James 1:27.

²¹ Colossians 3:1-4.

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document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

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