

Heaven's Holy City - Part 1

Revelation 21:9-22:5

We never want to underestimate the love of God in the giving of his Word. What a privilege it is for us to come together and humble ourselves before the teaching of his Word. Would you take your Bibles? Turn to Revelation chapter 21 and in a moment I am going to read verses nine through chapter 22 verse five. This will be the beginning of probably at least a two, maybe a three part series on heaven's holy city, our future home.

But, again, bear in mind that we come to the book of Revelation which is our Lord's amazing revealing of himself in all of his glory, the revelation of those things that will transpire at the end of the age, the time in which I believe we are living right now.

In chapter one and verse 19 the Lord himself has outlined this book for us. You will recall he speaks of, first of all, the things which you have seen. John is to write about them. And in chapter one we have a vision of the glorified Christ.

And then, secondly, he wants him to write about the things which are. And in chapters two and three we have the seven letters to prominent churches that are representative of all churches down through history.

And then, thirdly, he wants him to write about the things which shall take place after these things, that is, after the Church has been translated into heaven, the great rapture of the Church, then Daniel's 70th week or the seven years of tribulation will be poured out upon the earth and in chapters four all the way through 22 you read about these final things. We studied them, the seven seal, trumpet and bowl judgments, the details regarding the rise and the fall of the antichrist and the false prophet and that global empire and false religious system that will one day consume the earth, the protection and redemption of Israel, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the millennial reign of Christ, the great white throne judgment at the end of the millennial reign and then the eternal state where we will dwell in the presence of God forever and ever in a new creation and the new Jerusalem that is detailed in our text this morning.

I have heard some of you peak with me and you say, "Pastor, I cannot wait to get to heaven and to see these things." And I agree. I can't wait either. And, I might add, that we may not have to wait much longer. Before I open up the Word to you, I wanted to draw your attention to how exceedingly close I believe, along with many others, that we are to the unfolding of these staggering events.

According to Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39 sometime just prior to the Lord's return we are told that a vast Russian and Arab alliance of nations will attack Israel from the north. But they will be miraculously defeated. They will be decimated on the mountains of Israel.

In Ezekiel 39 verse five we read:

"You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. "And I shall send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the

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coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD. And My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Behold, it is coming and it shall be done," declares the Lord GOD. "That is the day of which I have spoken."¹

That day, dear friends, could be very soon.

I was listening to a former United States Major General Paul Vallely who said, and I quote, "The summer of 2010 will be the tipping point of the whole world," end quote. He is convinced, along with many others that the Iranians already have nuclear capability. We know, according to his report and others, that the Iranians are arming Hezbollah in Syria and in Lebanon. He believes, as others do, that they are going to try a preemptive strike on Israel before Israel has a preemptive strike on Iran.

According to his report there is a Russian sub currently right off the coast of Lebanon. It is disguised with an Iranian flag and the off loaders are wearing gas masks and full hazmat gear indicating that what they are off loading is probably some form of biochemical type of armaments.

There are scud missiles that are currently being delivered from Syria to southern Lebanon. They are now being placed in houses in southern Lebanon, able to pop up and shoot out of roofs, placed in orchards and other places. And these are capable of delivering chemical weapons. In the last 30 days the Israeli defense force has distributed chemical kits to the people of Israel. They know that there are tunnels coming in from Lebanon into Israel. The revolutionary guard from Iran is very rapidly training Hezbollah soldiers in southern Lebanon. And as I speak there is a complete internet lock down in Lebanon regarding many of these things.

In addition to all of this, if you have been looking at the news at all, you can identify with what the Israelis are going through at some level with the Turks bringing in a flotilla of so called aid, trying to break the blockade that Israel has from anyone bringing in other arms into Gaza and ultimately up to the north bank. Israelis have Dolphin submarines that are patrolling their coast lines off shore. These are equipped with cruise missiles, equipped with nuclear warheads. And we know that they have stationed three of these submarines in the Red Sea and they are saying that they will always keep at least one of them off of the Iranian coast operating at all times. So the whole Middle East is a tinderbox ready to explode.

An announcement was made last week from the Rabbinical Council of Judea and Samaria and this was recorded by the Israeli national news. And it said that a council of rabbis in Israel says their nation's conflict with Turkey over a flotilla of, quote, aid ships headed to the blockaded Gaza strip controlled by the terrorist Hamas organization just

¹ Ezekiel 39:5-8.

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may be the beginning of the, quote, “Gog and Magog process where the world is against us, but which ends with the third and final redemption,” end quote. And according to Jewish eschatology, even though it is distorted at some level, what they are looking for is the return of the Messiah in the glorious kingdom. They do not understand that he has already come once, but that now he is coming the second time.

Of course, our government leaders are utterly clueless to these things as are most of the leaders around the world. And, not surprisingly, we see the Obama administration being more sympathetic to the forces of Islam who are trying to establish a global Caliphate than being sympathetic to our Israeli allies. But, beloved, this is all part of God's plan. The constellation of prophetic signs all point to a battle, probably the battle of Gog and Magog that is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

There has always been much debate as to the timing of these events. As I have gone into in great detail, I believe, as do others, that before the battle of Gog and Magog, the rapture of the Church will take place. And that, of course, will decimate the United States. It will leave Israel completely defenseless. At that time I believe that these forces will attack and, of course, we know God will destroy them. And out of that will rise the antichrist who will establish his peace treaty with Israel and that will inaugurate the tribulation of Daniel's 70th week.

Our enemies already recognize the weakness of the United States. Our economy is crumbling. All around the world if you read what others say, they admit that our leadership is utterly incompetent. I was reading some research this last week and I learned that our national debt has now hit 13 trillion dollars. And what is even more alarming, according to a president of the Federal Reserve, he indicates that the real debt figure is about 104 trillion dollars if you count all our entitlement programs including social security and Medicare and obligations including federal pensions.

Since 2008 we have seen a startling 135 percent increase in the money supply. And this drastic inflation of our dollar will eventually cripple the wealth of America because it will ultimately evolve into price inflation that we will all experience when we buy groceries, when we buy any other goods and services, gas and so forth.

Today even our enemies are appalled at our rampant spending, our over zealous borrowing and what many believe to be a planned devaluing of the dollar which is taking us to the brink of collapse. And, of course, the solution that is being proposed is to tax our way out of it. If you study what is going to happen on December 31st, you will see that our government will impose upon us the greatest tax increase in the history of the world.

Dear Christian, all I have to say is you had better wake up. You had better loosen your grip on the things of the world. We don't know when the Lord is coming, but unless you are absolutely blind and live in a cave someplace, you have to realize that these things are coming together rapidly. Our world is being prepared for the rule of the antichrist. Israel is surrounded by enemies. They are still in their unbelief. And the United States us

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staggering around like a drunk in a state of euphoria thinking, “everything is wonderful, everything is well. So let’s keep drinking some more.” And eventually—and I believe very soon—the United States of America, like a foolish drunk is going to pass out and fall face down in its own vomit.

How sad to see so many Christians today who are indifferent to these things; like the first century Pharisees and Sadducees whom Jesus condemned for their inability to discern the times in which they live. He said, “Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky,” he asked them referring to their ability to basically predict the weather. Then he went on to say, “But you cannot discern the signs of the times?” In Matthew 16. You know how to read the weather, but you don’t realize all of the Old Testament prophecies and now the kingdom is before you. Your Messiah is here. Yet you are indifferent to all of that? Jesus called them blind guides leading the blind. That is how many of us are today.

The disciples in Matthew 24 asked Jesus about the sign of his coming and of the end of the age. And in summary he said, “Before I return you will be hearing of wars and rumors or wars. Nations will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold,” referring to their phony love for Christ.

Beloved, is this not a picture of the world in which we live today?

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Timothy four and verse one, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”² All you need to do is turn on your television and you are going to see the doctrine of demons. Go to your Christian bookstore and you can read on the best seller lists doctrines of demons.

Scripture indicates that the season of the very end of human history will be characterized by a world that is obsessed with peace, a world that is moving rapidly towards a one world government, it want a one world economic system that even is passionate about some kind of a one world ecumenical religious system that will put down all of the rivals that will some how do away with all of the things that separate us so that we can all be one big happy people of faith.

Is that not what is happening today? Like we have never seen it before.

In Ezekiel chapter 34 verses 11 through 31 God predicts that just prior to the Lord’s return he would restore his chosen people to their land, the land that they had been promised. We have seen that happen back in 1948 when Israel came back to her land. Now she still exists despite unbelievable odds against her. And then, of course, in

² 1 Timothy 4:1.

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Ezekiel 38 and 39 we read about these hostile nations that are going to attack Israel from the north. And we see that set out before us today. It could happen at any time.

Beloved, Jesus is coming soon to snatch away his bridal Church and finalize his judgment upon the nations and his covenant people Israel and ultimately reconcile a remnant of them back unto himself. He is going to renovate the earth as we have studied. He is going to establish a glorious millennial kingdom. He is going to judge the unbelieving dead and then he is going to uncreate the heavens and the earth and create a new heaven and a new earth. And then beyond the remotest regions of our universe in the third heaven of God's abode there will descend the crown jewel of heaven, the new Jerusalem, the holy city, a mammoth holy of holies that will contain the glory of the Lord.

In Revelation 21 and verse two we are told that this holy city, the new Jerusalem "will come down out of heaven from God made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."³ This will be our home. And in verses nine all the way through chapter 22 and verse five we have amazing details of this future home, this new Jerusalem.

So let me read this passage of Scripture to you beginning in Revelation chapter 21 and verse nine.

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;

³ Revelation 21:2.

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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 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.⁴

Dear Christian, hang on. Fasten your seat belt, because we are about to go on the most magnificent, breath taking—and I love this word—awesome journey that you can possibly imagine.

You know, when we go on a vacation what do we do before we go? Well, we determine our destination, where we are going to go. And we want to see the accommodations and now we on the internet and we have these virtual tours and we can pick out the rooms and all of the things that we want to do and, of course, also the recreation. We are going to determine all of those things. And even more so, if we are planning to move to another state.

Beloved, this is going to be the ultimate destination when we go to heaven. Better yet, may I add? This is going to be home. Not a home where it will take us a while to kind of get used to it and to really feel at home. No, this will be a place that when you get there, you will experience something that causes you and me to say, "I have never experienced anything like this." Every aspect of our being will be completely and perfectly satisfied, unlike anything we have ever experienced.

In 1 Peter one you will recall Peter addressed his letter to "those who reside as aliens." I love that, "as aliens." Don't you feel like an alien in this world? And this referred to more than people that were living in foreign lands that were exiles in foreign lands, but

⁴ Revelation 21:9-22:5.

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those whose true citizenship is in heaven, those of us who are just sojourners on this earth. One day, beloved, we are going to finally be home.

Today we are like Abraham who, according to Hebrews 11:9 lived by faith as an alien in the land of promise as in a foreign land. And in verse 10 it says that he was looking for the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God. And later in verse 16 this longing for a heavenly home is expanded to include even his wife Sarah and all of the saints who in verse 16 desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Isn't that what you desire? I desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.

It goes on to say, "therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them." And in chapter 13 verse 14 we read, "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."⁵ And also in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 22 there is a brief description. It is called the city of the living God, that heavenly Jerusalem.

So here in Revelation 21 beginning in verse nine and chapter 22 and verse five the Lord is so gracious to us because he knew that we would be curious about our eternal home. Imagine if we didn't have any to this in holy writ, if we had no clue what awaited us; and even now with what he has revealed to us we just have a glimpse because it is going to be so far beyond what we could ever imagine.

But in order for us to have some grasp of at least the elementary essence of our future home, he describes it to us in what I believe are three categories and we will look at some of them this morning. Number one, we are going to see the splendor of its appearance. Number two, the symmetry of its architecture. Thirdly, the stateliness of its accommodation. So let's look together at this holy city that the Lord has prepared for us.

Number one, the splendor of its appearance. Verse nine. "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.'"⁶ Now, throughout John's vision, the Lord has used various angels to reveal certain events and to fulfill certain judgments upon the world and it would appear here now that John recognizes this angel.

I believe from this passage and others that we will actually be able to recognize angels in glory, that we will be able to know them distinctly, probably by name, each one having its own identity. And this one is probably one of the angels that spoke to him in chapter 17 verse one regarding the harlot of religious Babylon. You remember there the angel said, "Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters."⁷

But here we have a stark contrast from that, a contrast between that wicked and defeated system versus the holy city, the difference between Babylon the great of chapter 18 and the new Jerusalem.

⁵ Hebrews 13:14.

⁶ Revelation 21:9.

⁷ Revelation 17:1.

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So now this angel summons John on the Lord's behalf and invites him to come with him on a tour that is absolutely mind boggling. Verse nine at the end he says, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."⁸

Now why would he call the city "the bride"? Well, because it contains those who have been united to God by Christ through faith. You see, this is the whole of the redeemed people down through the ages, the glorified, sanctified saints. This is now, as the apostle Paul said in Ephesians five, "The Church in all her glory having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, the Church that is blameless and holy."

And, again, what a contrast. The capital city of Satan's world system was called a harlot, but the capital city of God's heaven is spotless, holy, blameless, upright, the wife of the Lamb, because according to chapter 19 and verse seven the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Isn't this magnificent imagery? What a wonderful hope that he gives to all of us who love Christ. Beloved, here we are reminded again of the relational intimacy that we have with the lover of our souls. We are his bride, and some day we are going to dwell with him in unobstructed glory beholding him face to face.

It goes on, verse 10. "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."⁹

Now here John is, once again, transported in some supernatural state of ecstasy, some state of prophetic trance that is beyond the realm of human experience, certainly like nothing we have experienced. It would have been what Paul experienced in 2 Corinthians 12 when he was taken into the third heaven.

But I want you to notice that John here now is taken to a great and high mountain. And here we have yet another contrast to his previous experience in chapter 17 where he was transported not to a great and high mountain, but to the wilderness to behold the religious Babylon, chapter 17 verse three, "the woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names."

So now from this supernatural vantage point John has an unobstructed view to be able to behold the bridal city. And here is where it really gets interesting. And, I might add, this is as close as we can get to an internet virtual tour of a city. Here is where we get a virtual tour through the revelation of the Word of God of our future home, a place from which we will come and go and traverse the universe to do God's bidding. So the angel guide is going to show him the appearance of the city, its structures, dimensions, materials, of its construction and so forth, all of which I have summarized under the heading: the splendor of its appearance.

⁸ Revelation 21:9.

⁹ Revelation 21:10.

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Now before we look at these details, I want to jump ahead of the word just a little bit here and remind you of the dimensions of the city so that you will have some perspective.

According to verse 16 it is 1500 miles in a cube. Someone has done the math. That is 2,250,000 square miles. That is a big city. Imagine a city as big as from the tip of Florida to the tip of Maine and as wide as San Francisco over to Kansas City, Missouri in a cube. That's a big city. We are going to get into more of the dimensions of that and an estimate of how much room we will all have the next time we get together.

But in verse 10 we see that John sees it coming down out of heaven from God and verse 11 says, "having the glory of God."¹⁰ This must have been absolutely magnificent for him to see. And it is going to be magnificent for us to see one day, to think the dazzling splendor of God himself, his shekinah glory is at its very core, and this glory now is radiating throughout the city, the glory of his presence now, the presence of God who will be dwelling with his bride.

Now remember there have been others down through history who have witnessed a little glimpse of the glory of God. In Numbers 9:15 we read that on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of testimony and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle until morning. And later when the temple was erected it was, according to 2 Chronicles five verse 13 and 14, "filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God."¹¹ You see, the glory of the Lord is always representative of the presence of God. And that is what we are going to see in the holy city.

Also, the glory of God, this brilliant light of his shekinah was something that Paul saw on the road to Damascus. It is what enveloped the shepherds on the mountainside there in Bethlehem when the angels came to tell them the good news of Christ's arrival. It was what came forth from the Lord Jesus on the mount of transfiguration when he peeled back his flesh and his glory, the effulgence of his glory just shot forth from him. It will one day also fill the millennial temple according to Ezekiel chapter 43 and verse five. And here we see that it is now emanating from the holy city, the new Jerusalem.

Now notice the description that John gives us at the end of verse 11. "Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper."¹² Now, the term "brilliance" in the original language is φωστήρ (foce-tare'), and it means that which gives light, that which illuminates, something from which light radiates. Think of a massive light bulb and you get the picture, ok? And so we have this brilliance here and it is like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal clear jasper, ἴασπις (ee'-as-pis) in Greek. It is not like the jasper stone that we think of today, but it was a crystal clear type of stone like a diamond and it probably is referring to a diamond. And here we see that because it is a

¹⁰ Revelation 21:11.

¹¹ 2 Chronicles 5:13-14.

¹² Revelation 21:11.

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costly stone, it is therefore one without any impurity, without any blemish. It is what we would call a perfect stone.

I remember when I was a young man and I went to some Jewish diamond cutters downtown Chicago when I was at Moody Bible Institute to purchase an engagement ring for the love of my life and I was looking for a perfect stone. And they showed me all these perfect stones until finally they found one that I could afford. That is the idea here. So John sees this huge, brilliant diamond like city with the glory of God, with the presence of his light emanating from within. And you can imagine it now refracting every color of the rainbow in every different direction.

When I meditate upon this, I find myself amazed at how God gives us little samples of his glory this side of heaven. I believe he does that in order to whet our appetite for the majesty of his glory that we will one day bask in for eternity. And I would encourage you all to take a little bit of time and be like a little child who is absolutely obsessed with a lightning bug. And just look at the things that God has given us. Take time and to just marvel at a rainbow, to marvel at sunlight and sunsets and the myriad of colors that we see in plants and rivers and oceans and on animals and even the light that refracts off of a diamond. However, keep in mind, here he will not be light refracting off and through a diamond, but it will be light that emanates from a diamond, from within. Well, all of these things are but a foretaste of what we will one day see.

Physicists tell us that the human eye cannot see light, that light is completely invisible. And all we are able to see is light interacting with tiny particles of matter in the air that reflect light. The colors that we see in light, they tell us, depend upon varying wavelengths in the light spectrum. In fact, visible light occupies only 1/1000th of a percent of the spectrum. And it is only in that minute portion of the light spectrum that we see all of the magnificent colors that we see. Can you imagine when one day we see the full spectrum?

Think of the energy spectrum of light. They tell us that it goes from radio, microwave, infrared and then in the middle visible light, and then you have ultraviolet, x-ray and gamma ray. Now I don't understand all of that. I am going to take the physicists at their word for it. But, again, it is staggering to think of all the beautiful colors that we see in that 1/1000th of one percent of that light spectrum.

It reminds me that God has only allowed us to see just a little bit of his glory, just enough to give us a sample, even in this minuscule range of light that we can see. Likewise, God has only revealed a minuscule portion of himself through creation, through his Word, through his Church. And isn't light, therefore, a fitting metaphor of the Lord Jesus Christ, one that is steeped in Old Testament allusions?

We have only been allowed to see a small fraction of the glory of God. What will it be like when we see him face to face? The apostle Paul speaks a bit about this in 1

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Corinthians 13. He says, "When the perfect comes," in other words in our glorified eternal state, "When the perfect comes the partial will be done away."¹³

Ok? Everything now is just partial. Just little glimpses, little samples. The partial will be done away. Later on in verse 12 he says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."¹⁴ In other words, in this life even with the Word of God, even with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we just see in a mirror dimly. In our human state we are incapable of seeing more of the glory of God or in any way understanding it. But one day when we enter into the presence of his glory and see him face to face, we will behold the full panoply of his resplendent glory. Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."¹⁵ Again, now we can only know in part, but then we shall know fully just as we have been fully know.

And here John sees the ineffable, dazzling light of the divine presence radiating from within the holy of holies, the new Jerusalem, our future home. So here the light of the world, the Lord Jesus, is also the light of heaven. Again, in verse 23 of chapter 21 we read that 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.

Who is the Lamb? It is the Lord Jesus. This is all in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 19 where we read, "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory."¹⁶ How sad to know that so many today love darkness rather than light. And because of that rebellious attitude, outer darkness will be their prison for eternity unless they repent and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

First we see the splendor of its appearance. Secondly, we will look for a moment at the symmetry of its architecture.

Now, may I remind you that Scripture teaches that God is a God of order, not a God of chaos? We see this in the precision of the erection and the dismantling of the tabernacle in the Old Testament. We see this in the orderly arrangement of all of the furnishings and even the elements within the tabernacle and later on the temple as well. We see this in the order of his commands regarding how he is to be approached, how he is to be worshipped, how he is to be served.

In 1 Corinthians 14:33 we read that God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. And in verse 40, "All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."¹⁷ That is why we don't have people running around in here and jumping over seats and rolling on the floor

¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:10.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

¹⁵ Matthew 5:8.

¹⁶ Isaiah 60:19.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:33.

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and screaming and yelling and all of that type of chaotic stuff. That is not consistent with the God we serve. We are also to have a well disciplined mind. We are told in 2 Timothy 1:7, one that is self controlled, one that is properly prioritized and orderly.

So all through Scripture we see that God is the God of order, of harmony, of precision, of clarity, of purpose, of balance, of harmony and so forth. And all of these things are obviously reflected here in the symmetry of the architecture of the new Jerusalem. He is not a God of darkness. He is not a God of disorder, of chaos, of confusion, of conflict, of dissonance and of turmoil, all of which characterize our culture today. Don't you see that in the music of our day and the art, if you want to call it music and art? And even at times you look at some of the hair styles and some of the attire. It is like the more unkempt, the more chaotic, the more slovenly the better. It is all reflective of a heart that is not orderly.

Now, I want you to notice the symmetry of the architecture here beginning at verse 12.

“It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.”¹⁸ Note also that verse 18 reveals to us that the outer wall is also made of this diamond jasper as well as the foundation as we read in verse 19. So bear in mind that none of the materials of the new Jerusalem will in any way inhibit the effulgence of God's glory.

The wall around the city will not be for the purpose of defense because certainly there will be no enemies there, but rather, I believe—and this is pure conjecture on my part—but I believe that the wall basically symbolizes our eternal security in Christ as well as to frame the beauty of the holy city.

But then John adds in verse 13, “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.”¹⁹ Well, this shouldn't surprise us because this is reminiscent of how the 12 tribes were commanded to arrange their camps around the tabernacle during the days of their sojourning. You can read that, for example, in Numbers chapter two. There were to be four camps of three tribes each stationed on the north, east, south and west part of the tabernacle all facing the tabernacle so that they could see the presence of God emanating from the holy of holies and covering over the tent of meeting. So the city walls, now, have these 12 gates or it could be translated gate towers.

Now, before we examine these, let me ask you. What is the purpose of a gate? Well, the purpose of a gate, as anybody knows, is allows people to go in and out, to allow access. Beloved, this is what we will be doing throughout eternity. I have to pause here for a moment and ask you to abandon those foolish and fleshly notions that would have us believe that somehow we are going to be—can we say it—incarcerated in this city. No, not at all, not at all. It will somehow descend from heaven and rest upon the newly

¹⁸ Revelation 21:12.

¹⁹ Revelation 21:13.

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created earth. It will be our new home and it will be a place from which we will come and go as we serve God throughout eternity.

This is an important digression I need to make here for a moment. I will confess that when I was a young man I didn't look forward to heaven a whole lot, because I didn't like harps that much. I wasn't too impressed with church services. I got kind of bored with choirs and I saw heaven as just this long, boring church service. And, quite frankly, I didn't like cities. To this day I still don't, but I know God is going to change my heart. This city is going to be very different. And I never liked being around a lot of people. So I was going to have a hard time in heaven. And I would never tell anybody this, but I struggled with that and, you know, frankly, for a young man, streets of God just didn't impress me much. As I got older I thought, "you know, if you just give me a good horse and a pack string of horses and a remote mountain range and I will be happy."

Well, I have to have adventure. I have to have variety. I have to have a challenge. Do you know what? You probably are the same way. And there was a part of me that said, "You know, Lord, I am sure I don't understand all of this, but I am not really ready to go yet because, after all, I want to get married. I want to have a family. I want to do all of these things in the world." Beloved, that is stupid beyond stupid. That just shows you how little you understand and how little I understood the glories of heaven. As we will discover later, heaven will exceed the joy of anything that you have ever experienced in measures beyond calculation.

You know, the same God that wired you the way that you are and that put all of those desires in your heart, he knows exactly how to fulfill those things and bring joy to you. Why do you think God gave us an imagination? Well, he gave us an imagination to whet our appetites for heaven. I believe with all of my heart that heaven will exceed science fiction. I believe that it will surpass star wars. I believe that it will outstrip Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. Just let your mind go wild and there is going to be things that God will have us do that are beyond our imagination. Whose to say that our infinite God does not have an infinite number of other galaxies, perhaps other magnificent plans to glorify himself in unknown solar systems with unknown creatures that we know nothing about, that are just awaiting our entrance in the service of the most high God.

Oh, dear Christian, never ever underestimate the creative love of God on our behalf. Did not the psalmist tell us that, "in thy presence is fullness of joy? In thy right hand are pleasures forever," Psalm 16:11. Beloved, never underestimate the infinite reaches of our omnipotent God. Never underestimate the limits of our glorified state to fulfill magnificent purposes that infinitely exceed our puny little preferences. It is the height of arrogance to assume that we are the only creatures with whom he has chosen to glorify himself.

Beloved, heaven will be anything but boring. The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 was caught up to the third heaven. The text says that he was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak. Is this not what he had in

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mind when later on in Romans 8:18 he wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."²⁰

Well, with that, we return here to the gates of our heavenly home. Notice, again, in verse 12, at each gate there is stationed an angel as the watchman, probably reinforcing this idea of our security. Perhaps they will be greeters as well as servants, just like we would have at upscale hotels downtown Chicago, or New York, whatever. I can hear them now as I leave, "David, have a great adventure today." I don't know maybe they will say, "David, have a great hunt today." I don't know what they will say. But they will be there and notice, "And names were written on them," referring to these gates, "Which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel."²¹ Now, this is interesting. In Ezekiel chapter 48 we learn that the names of the 12 tribes will be individually inscribed upon the gates of the millennial Jerusalem as well. But here we have it in the new Jerusalem of heaven.

Now, why would God do this yet again in the new Jerusalem? The answer is quite simple. You see, these inscriptions serve as an eternal memorial to the unique role that his covenant people, the people of national Israel, have played throughout human history in his plan of redemption. This is a memorial to them. In fact, jump over to verse 14. There we read that John sees "the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."²² You see, here now the church is memorialized. Isn't that fascinating?

John MacArthur says, and I quote, "Those stones commemorate God's covenant relationship with the Church of which the apostles are the foundation, Ephesians 2:20. At the top of each gate was the name of one of the tribes of Israel. At the bottom of each gate was the name of one of the apostles. Thus, the layout of the city's gates pictures God's favor on all his redeemed people, both those under the old covenant and those under the new covenant," end quote.

What stunning symmetry in this architecture, perfectly reflecting the magnificent purposes of God in redemption, all of which he has ordained for his glory. Frankly, I grow weary, though I will never diminish my love for those who insist in spiritualizing the Word of God and telling us that there is no distinction between Israel and the Church, that God is somehow finished with Israel and that the Church now is the new spiritual Israel. As we have studied at length in the past, there is absolutely no biblical support for that position. And, beloved, here again we see the amazing distinction between the two being permanently inscribed in the new Jerusalem. How can you miss that?

Well, there are many more fascinating things the Lord has revealed to us about our heavenly home that we will continue to examine in days to come if the Lord tarries.

But may I challenge you? Dear Christian, since God has gone to such incomprehensible lengths to glorify himself through us, since he has done these, just unimaginable things to

²⁰ Romans 8:18.

²¹ Revelation 21:12.

²² Revelation 21:14.

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prepare for us a place in which we will dwell with him forever, may I challenge you to do whatever is necessary to loosen your grip on this world and become a little bit more consumed with the God who loves you and with the home that awaits you?

I was talking with a friend before church service and you sometimes hear people say, "You can be so heavenly minded that you are not earthly good." Well, you have got to be careful with that. I think you need to reverse that. You are no earthly good unless you are heavenly minded. And we need to be heavenly minded. Not arrogant and condescending, but humbled by the glory of his grace and all that he has in store for those who have placed their faith in him.

My friend, if you are here within the sound of my voice and you don't know Christ, heaven is not going to be your home. Hell will be your home. So I plead with you as a minister of the gospel, to examine your heart and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. May today be the day that you experience the miracle of the new birth that God might be glorified in you and you might be saved from your sins.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these incredible truths. Use them to motivate us to live for your glory knowing that some day we will bask in it for eternity and, Lord, for those who are lost and dying in their sins, especially those who have deceived themselves into thinking that somehow they know you, but, in fact, in their heart they really don't, they really have no desire to serve you. They really have no desire to study your Word and be conformed to your image through it. They have really no desire to glorify God, no prayer life, no secret devotion. Lord, it can be just such a sham, especially in our culture. Oh God, please bring conviction. Save those who are lost. Glorify yourself in so doing. We pray all of this in the precious name of Jesus and for his glorious sake. Amen.

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