

“THE NEW JERUSALEM.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 21:9-27

Introduction.

Remember how I started last week’s sermon with some people’s idea of heaven being wearing white robes, playing harps on clouds. I came across a wonderful C.S. Lewis quote I want to read:

“There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of ‘Heaven’ ridiculous by saying they do not want ‘to spend eternity playing harps’. The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them. All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold, etc.) is, of course a merely symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible. Musical instruments are mentioned because for many people (not all) music is the thing known in the present life which most strongly suggests ecstasy and infinity. Crowns are mentioned to suggest the fact that those who are united with God in eternity share His splendour and power and joy. Gold is mentioned to suggest the timelessness of Heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it. People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, He meant that we were to lay eggs” (*Mere Christianity*).

We are most definitely in the realm of the symbolic in this great and final vision of John on the Island of Patmos. But just because it is symbolic, doesn’t mean it isn’t real or true. It just means that human language is employed here to try to capture something that can’t be expressed with human language. This is an earthly glimpse of a very real heavenly reality.

As has happened three times before, John is carried away by the Spirit to be shown something. In Revelation 17 he was carried away by one of the seven angels to a wilderness to be shown a woman, a harlot, the great whore of Babylon. This vision is meant to be a great contrast to that vision.

The Great and Final Vision, vss. 9-11.

What we saw a glimpse of last week in verses 1-8 is now unfolded in vivid detail. And angel says, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And the first thing he sees is the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God having the glory of God.

The Bride, the wife of the Lamb

The bride is a new city, the new city is a bride. This is the scene that shows us the fulfilment of what was promised in Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:25-27 Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The Glory of God.

The fundamental feature of heaven is the glory of God. In the OT God's glory resided in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in the temple. Now we see God's heavenly glory and splendor spill over into the whole new heavens and new earth.

God's glory is the sum of His divine nature, it's what you see when His light shines through all that He is and has. "God's glory is His holiness gone public" (Piper). The glory of God is His splendor, His majesty, His awesomeness, His beauty, His brilliance, His magnificence, His grandeur on full display.

Scientists announce last week the discovery of what is believed to be the biggest and brightest supernova ever. A supernova is a star that has blown up. This one is about 3.8 billion light years away. It's not 570 times brighter than our sun, not 570 thousand times brighter, but 570 billion times brighter than our sun. 20 to 50 times brighter than all the stars in our Milky Way galaxy. There is a category of supernova called super-luminous supernovae, and this one is at the top of that scale. It is twice as luminous as the previously brightest supernova.

It is pushing the envelope of everything scientists thought even possible. The amount of power and energy released by this one is straining all the limits of known calculations and possibilities. They are having trouble explaining how this one is possible.

Yet God made this, God made all the galaxies, all the stars, all the objects that fill the heavens. They are only a small reflection of His glory, His glory outshines them all.

Heaven is the radiance of God's glory on full display.

The Heavenly Architecture, vs. 12-21.

What is it about this city that John is supposed to notice and why? What is important about this vision and what is he and we meant to take away from it? We had the answer last week in verse 2:

Revelation 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

This is a picture of how God has prepared the bride for the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The New Jerusalem's Walls and Gates, vs. 12-14.

In ancient cities walls and gates were the most important feature for protection. This is a picture of eternal security and safety of the city and of all who go in and come out.

The twelve angels guarding the twelve gates ensure that never again will anyone ever succeed in spoiling God's city or God's people. It is undefilable. God is in her midst.

We have already talked about the symbolic significance of the number twelve. The 12 tribes represents the OT people of God and the twelve apostles the NT people of God. Together they represent the one people of God, all believing Jews and all believing Gentiles.

One note as an aside. We know the stories of the 12 sons of Jacob, a sordid mix, and we know the stories of some of the 12 apostles, not much better. The hope in this is that if they are building material for the new city, then God in His grace can redeem and use us and He delights to do so because it increases His glory and the glory of His mercy and grace and compassion.

The New Jerusalem's Measurements, vs. 15-17.

We encountered measurements in Revelation 11:1 and in Ezekiel 40-41.

This symbolizes the care and precision and structural integrity of the great city. No detail is overlooked. God knows every square inch. The perfect symmetry is a picture of the cities perfectly proportioned holiness. Everywhere there is balance, harmony, wholeness, order. Everything fits and is exactly right.

The dimensions of the city are immense. 12,000 stadia is almost 1,400 miles. If the distance is literal this city extends from the Canadian border to the Mexico border and from here to Bismarck, ND. Two million square miles. That's a good bit larger than India.

But the city isn't just square, it's a cube, 1,400 miles high as well. The Holy of Holies in the temple, was a perfect cube, a symbol of perfection. As the Holy of Holies was the dwelling place of God, so now the whole city is the Holy of Holies.

The wall is 144 cubits. Some think that is its height but that's not very high in a city of this proportion. 220 feet versus 1,400 miles high. More think it is its thickness, about 220 feet thick. But 220 feet thick isn't very thick for a 1,400 mile high wall. So most likely it is symbolic and not literal. Just another multiple of twelve to indicate completion.

The New Jerusalem's Building Materials, vs. 18-21.

We are given a list of the building materials, the precious metals and stones used to build this immense city.

The jewels correspond to many of the twelve precious stones in the High Priest's breastplate. What once belonged exclusively to the priesthood now belongs to the whole city.

The precious stones aren't about cost, but about brilliance, beauty and glory; about reflecting back in brilliant color the surrounding glory. We will see colors we never knew possible, dazzling hues and tones and textures.

All of this is not meant to make us think of wealth and riches, but rather of the transcendent beauty and splendor and holiness of God's character. This is isn't about money, it's about God.

The beauty of the city is staggering, walls filled with precious jewels, every gate made from a single pearl, streets of unimaginable quantities of gold. The glittering splendor out shines every human imitation. Nothing comes close.

Everything about God is extravagant. Who can even imagine a pearl large enough to make a gate? And how can pure gold be clear as glass?

This completes God's preparation of the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. He has clothed her in absolute matchless beauty.

The New Jerusalem's Temple: The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, vss. 22-23.

Again, we ask, what is the purpose of this part of the vision? There is a powerful summary of doctrine here, of the Gospel. God will dwell with His people and He will be their God and they will be with Him where He is.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Didn't Jesus say that?

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me.

The temple was the place where the people of God gathered to approach God and be near His presence.

Exodus 25:22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you

Since God's presence fills the city there is no need for a temple. Just to be in the city is to be with God. God's shekinah glory fills every square inch of the city, there is no where He is not.

And since God's glory fills the city there is no need for sun, moon and stars. This doesn't necessarily mean there will be no stars in the new heavens, just that their glory will be nothing compared to God's.

For us the sun, moon and stars are a glimmer and glimpse of the splendor of God. But in the new heavens and new earth God will be the everlasting light that outshines ten thousand suns, indeed even ten thousand supernovae.

Isaiah 60:19-20 The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.
20 Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself;
for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

John says it just a bit different, "for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb."

Jesus is the light of the world and the light of the city.

The New Jerusalem's Residents, vss. 24-27.

This represents redeemed humanity, saints drawn from *every tribe, tongue, people and nation*. Cultural identity apparently isn't obliterated. There will be distinctiveness and diversity, yet all in redeemed harmony. A reverse Babel as the scattered nations are reunited and reconciled, all serving not their own glory but the glory of God.

Heaven will be the most international and cosmopolitan diverse city you can imagine. People of every skin color, every nationality, white might be a minority. God will be glorified as the only God who is worshipped by every kind of people from every kind of place.

The prophecy of Isaiah 60:11 will be fulfilled.

Isaiah 60:3,5,11 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

5 ... the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

11 Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession.

There will be no night. God's glory is never veiled or hindered, it never fades or wanes. There is no darkness to dim God's glory. His presence never ceases. Cities close their gates at night, when there is danger. It is never night and there is never the fear of danger. All is secure.

Finally, notice and remember, this city is a holy city. There is nothing impure, stained, polluted, defiled or perverse here. There is no sin here.

Only those who repent and trust in the crucified Son of the Living God for the forgiveness of all their sins will have their name in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Implications and Applications.

Everyone's attention has been on the lottery this week. And everyone has spent a little time daydreaming what they would do with it if they won. How would winning that kind of money transform your life?

If you found out you were going to inherit a billion dollars what would that do to you? If you knew your Father was so wealthy that He built a city 1,400 miles long and wide and high and it was built out of gold and precious jewels, what would that do to you?

Can you imagine the incalculable value and splendor of our God and His riches in glory, the very glory of His presence?

Your inheritance makes the Powerball winnings look like bubble gum allowance, like what the tooth fairy leaves under the pillow, not even enough to buy an hour on a parking meter.

The greatest treasure in the new heavens and the new earth is not the building materials, it's God. Heaven is God, filled with God's glory, utterly safe and secure, without threats or darkness or sin. Heaven is about God and our perfect, unhindered fellowship with Him.

Notice how what human hearts most value is so casually used in heaven. The biggest pearls you can find are made into gates, all the gold you can find is used for asphalt, the most rare and precious jewels that humans spend a lifetime trying to find are made into walls.

What is treasure on earth is nothing in heaven. There real treasure is God Himself. If we don't want God, if we don't want to be intimately close to God, then heaven is not for us.

Make God your inheritance, make God your treasure, make God the desire of your heart. So much so that nothing on earth distracts you or interests you as much.

Can you believe how great is God's love and grace that we should be adopted and called His children and inherit all this when we had nothing and deserve nothing?

Can you believe what Jesus has done for His bride and the lengths He has gone to make us pure and prepared to receive this gift?

He has put His name on us, and has prepared a place for us with Him.

Isaiah 65:17-18 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.
18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.