

The Mystery of New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-27

Last week we walked through the beginning of chapter 21 of the book of Revelation, which describes a new heaven, and a new earth, but focuses the most on this concept of a new Jerusalem. And I love how Pastor Dave emphasized the idea of this newness being a *renewal*, a *redemption* of things already in existence. Paul speaks a little on this subject in Romans 8, where he speaks of not only us as followers of Jesus awaiting the day in which our bodies will be redeemed and renewed, but he also says that “*creation*” is awaiting to be set free from corruption- *creation* is waiting to give birth to a new existence, a “freedom of glory of the children of God” is how it’s described. This Romans 8 passage says that the children of God and creation *both* presently groan through the current sufferings that the world has been subjected to, likening the experiences of our present world to labor pain leading up to childbirth. The idea is that followers of Jesus along with creation, are presently enduring birth pains, awaiting the future day in which new life will come into existence. And that new life, is what Revelation 21 is describing. Life is painful now in some ways, but if we endure, our present life will eventually give way to *new, renewed* life.

Concerning verses **1 and 2 of chapter 21**, I think in my mind, I had always equated the new heaven and the new earth as being the same thing as the new Jerusalem. It *could* be that John is using different words that are all referring to a single Heaven place that will remain for all eternity, but I think most Bible scholars see the new heaven, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem as being 3 distinct things. There is a little mystery to it, verse 2 describes New Jerusalem as descending down from Heaven, and as we’ll see later, it is also described as being a cube- so, does the cube land on the new earth after it descends out of Heaven, or is it one and the same as the new heaven and earth, or does the cube hover in Heaven and is thus separate from the new

earth; if everyone is either in the New Jerusalem cube OR in the Lake of Fire, then what purpose does a new earth fulfill; does the new earth really have no more oceans, or is most all of this language really just supposed to be figurative and symbolic rather than literal? You see, I have lots of questions. I'm really curious to see what it will all look like. But the thing that we can be sure of, that Pastor Dave really stressed last week, is the fact that this is describing a safe, amazing, glorious place in which God Himself, will dwell/tabernacle/temple with US- His people. Sin and death are destroyed, no more struggle, no more separation between God and mankind, no more stress, no more disappointments, no more unfairness, no more frustration of trying to find where we belong- everything will be made new.

We'll pick up where we left off last Sunday- verse 9 through the end of the chapter continues to describe this New Jerusalem, with language that might to a degree add a little more to the mystery and marvelousness of it all, but overall I think this passage from God's word will give us hope and expectancy in awaiting a world prepared for us that is very different than this current world we know. Look at just **verse 9** with me, before we read the bulk of the passage...

Ok, there's 2 things I want to point out in this verse before we read more about the description of this new city. The first is that I think it's interesting that it's specifically the angel who is described as delivering the 7 last plagues, the worst of the worst of the Tribulation plagues, the angel who delivers those bowls of wrath, is the *same* angel described as inviting John to take a close look at the New Jerusalem. I think maybe we sometimes associate these angels in the book of Revelation to be more like grim reaper demonic characters unleashing chaos on the earth, right? You've seen artistic drawings, right? But the book of Revelation paints the picture more so of the world coming to end being an act of goodness, righteousness, holiness- the world being purified, brought back into a state of goodness, chaos being ended, the bad

burned away so that only goodness remains. God decrees the angel to bring the plagues, so that the same angel can declare the newness.

The second thing that is interesting in this verse is the mention of the bride, the wife of the Lamb. What's interesting, is that previously in the Bible, passages like Ephesians 5, and 2 Corinthians 11, even Revelation 19 define Christians- *the church* as being the bride of Christ. But here, in Revelation chapter 21 verse 2, and in the verses that follow after verse 9, these verses describe *New Jerusalem* as being the bride of Christ. Now, just make a mental note of this for right now, we'll circle back and attempt to make sense of this after we read a little bit more.

Verses 10-14...

Ok, so verse 10- John, in his vision, is taken to a high mountain, so that he can get the best view possible of this bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven. And, verse 11, it's radiating this shiny newness glow, John describes the brilliance to be like a crystal-clear jasper stone, and later we'll see that is because the walls are actually made of jasper stone. Jasper is a variety of quartz known for vibrant colors and unique patterns. It typically features colors like red, green, yellow, or brown and is not translucent/see through, but the stone is able to take a very high shiny polish that brings out it's rich colors, and so, we don't know for sure, but it seems that John is not describing the city walls as being transparent as in looking through glass, but rather he is using what has been translated as "crystal-clear" to describe the clarity of the shiny polished brilliance that the city walls emit. Whatever he's describing, it's like the extreme opposite of dingy old graffiti and dirt coated concrete surfaces of modern day cities.

Verses 12 and 13 tell us the wall of the city is great and high, conveying the idea to us that this place is protected and safe from any outside attacks. There are 12 gates, 3 gates on each wall, and each is protected by an angel. Each gate is named after one of the 12 sons of

Israel. I think my favorite is the tribe of Judah- that's the gate I think I'll have to use for entrance- you know why? Because Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, in the lineage of David, and it's because of *Him* that I have access to this city. Romans 8 that I mentioned earlier, also talks about us as followers of Jesus being sons and daughters of God and therefore co-inheritors with Jesus Christ. Can you picture the angel guarding the gate saying, "Hey- you're Jesus the King's brother, I recognize you, come on in through His tribe's gate!"? That's an amazing thought, right?

In Ezekiel 48, there's similar language describing 12 city gates named after the sons of Israel, but the measurements are very different than the measurements for Revelation's New Jerusalem. In Ezekiel, the wall of the city is described as being 18,000 cubits, which equates to a perimeter of about 5 miles, and here in Revelation 21, as we'll see in a moment, the city wall is described as being 12,000 *stadia*, which is about 1400 miles, but that is assumed to be just the length of *one* side, so we're really talking about 5,600 miles total wall perimeter. So Ezekiel's description is 5 miles, this description is 5,600 miles, and just for curiosity sake, current Jerusalem's wall has a perimeter of about 2.5 miles long. So this New Jerusalem is well over 1000 times bigger than what current Jerusalem is or has ever been.

The names of the sons of Israel written on the gates pay respect to the patriarchs of our faith- who were some of the first who placed their faith in the Creator God. And those throughout history since, including us today, have followed in their footsteps- trusting in God, as He continues to reveal more and more of who He is and more and more of what His plan is to redeem mankind and create a select people group with whom He can dwell. In chapter 7 of Revelation, we already read that those who will one day dwell with Jesus, are a great multitude consisting of people from every nation- people from all the tribes, peoples and languages. Romans 11 describes the nations of peoples,

through Jesus, being grafted into this Israel family that God started with Jacob and His 12 sons. God started this community family of people that He wanted to dwell with- and some along the way were cut off from that family because they showed they didn't really want to commune with God in that way, and others were thus added in that weren't apart of the original group, and now what Revelation conveys is that this idea culminates in people from all different nations pledging allegiance to Jesus and being a part of the eternal, new Jerusalem- God dwelling with His people.

Verse 14, describes foundation stones of the city wall honoring the 12 apostles. I'm kind of curious if the name Judas will be there, or if that name is replaced with Matthias or Paul. But either way, there were 12 tribes of Israel, and also 12 disciples/apostles, and neither seems to be elevated above another in honor- gates provide access, but are also part of the wall, resting on the foundation- the nuance is subtle but I think the idea is that the Bible is consistent through the Old and New Testaments- God lived among the 12 tribes, Jesus lived among the 12 apostles, both are being honored equally and all of history is now culminating in the purest realization of God's desire to dwell with mankind. That was the concept behind Israel and the 12 tribes, that was the concept behind Jesus and the 12 disciples, that is the concept now of the New Jerusalem- God dwelling with mankind. The Biblical theme of God wanting to dwell with mankind, and what is thus required in order for mankind to dwell with God- and that is faith alone in God (whether you know His name to be Yahweh or Jesus) -that concept is consistent from Genesis all the way to Revelation. **Verses 15-21...**

Ok, so I mentioned this earlier, the city is described as a cube- the measurement of one side is recorded in verse 16 as 12,000 stadia, which is the equivalent of almost 1400 miles. That 1400 mile length is each side- each length, width, and height. Just for perspective, around 1400 miles is the distance from Miami Florida to Boston Massachusetts.

The surface area of this “city,” if it were to land on the current earth, would take up 2/3rds of the continental United States. Verse 17 gives us another wall measurement, it doesn’t say specifically, but logically it would seem to be the wall *thickness* being described as 144 cubits, and that would equal to about 216 ft. And I like the little foot note John gives us here, that the human measurements he’s listing are the same measurements the angels use. 216 foot thick walls. That’s some serious engineering.

But verse 18 tells us the walls don’t appear to be engineer constructed, they are rather carved out of jasper stone- think of beautifully colored and polished brand new kitchen granite countertops, and then multiply the shininess by like 10 times and then imagine them as 4 different 1400 mile long, 1400 mile tall, 216 foot thick slabs, together walling in a city that has buildings made of gold. It says the city is pure gold like clear glass- again we know gold is opaque, not transparent, so I think the idea here is that the gold shines and sparkles as does clear glass in the sunlight. That Greek word for “clear” is actually translated everywhere else in the New Testament as clean or pure. So the meaning of the word clear here is probably best understood as pure and clean, rather than clear as in see-through transparent.

Verse 19- not only are the foundation stones named after the 12 apostles, but each one is a different gemstone. Now I’ve seen some pretty fancy cities, and pretty fancy city structures, but can you imagine a 5600 mile perimeter structure that is built upon 12 different rare gemstones? According to the math, each gemstone would be like 400 something miles wide. That’s some serious, God-sized bling. We’re flashing rings “bling,” and God’s like “Blinnnnnnnngggggg!” We got finger bling he has Miami to Boston bling.

Ok, so the apostle named foundation is made from gemstones, and we learn in verse 21 that the tribe named gates are pearls. I've seen big pearls before, but can you imagine a pearl city gate? We don't know how big the gates are, but in current Jerusalem, the doorways alone at the gates are each around 12-15 feet wide, and it's probably safe to assume that these gates would be much much much larger.

The buildings are pure gold, but also the street is pure gold, and here's a 3rd place where I think the translation might give us the wrong impression. This time it actually says *transparent*- and the Greek word is different than the words crystal-clear and clear like used before, the word is Diaugazo, and it's really the combination of 2 Greek words- Dia, from which we get our English word "day," and augazo- which I believe is probably the word we get our English word "gaze" from. And the combination of these two words- day-gaze- is used to convey the brilliance and glimmer you are able to *gaze* upon, when the sunlight appears over the horizon at the break of a new *day*. *That's* how the streets of gold shimmer. That's really beautiful, right, that this is the word chosen by John to describe what he saw when he looked at the street of the city. It glistened and shone like the light of a new day. So again, I could be wrong, but I really don't think "transparent" makes much sense, I think that's a mistranslation to English, it probably makes more sense to imagine the street as pure shiny glistening solid gold.

Verse 22 to the end...

John notes that there is no temple in this new city- here's another place that differs from what Ezekiel describes. Ezekiel describes dimensions for a new temple, and land divisions according to the tribes of Israel, and city gates with the tribes names, and a river of life flowing from the throne of God bordered by trees bearing healing fruit, which we'll also see this river and healing trees mentioned next week in chapter 22; but scholars have debated for years on why or how Ezekiel differs from Revelation, and I don't think anyone knows for sure, but I'll

offer to you 2 different theories that have been and are currently being debated.

Some interpret Ezekiel to be referring to a time period that takes place before Jesus returns, a time period that could even take place in modern, right now day, in which Israel will build a 3rd temple and Jesus will return to rule from it, and will continue doing so into His millennial reign. This understanding seems a little problematic to me in fitting in the Tribulation and Anti-Christ descriptions that are presented as leading up to Christ's return. Like, would Jesus come to dwell in the Temple, and then the Anti-Christ appears on the scene, but then Jesus comes again from Heaven and slays the Anti-Christ, or does the Anti-Christ first rule from the temple, and then Jesus returns and slays Him and then at that time He takes the throne? I don't know, there's some logistical questions that seem to be problematic. And then I guess it would be a little odd to have a 3rd temple built, that would then not be needed anymore when the New Jerusalem arrives, as described here in chapter 21, and the river from the throne of God becomes available in chapter 22. I personally have a hard time logically walking through this interpretation, but I'm open to learning more about it.

Others interpret Ezekiel to be referring to what was supposed to have happened when Israel returned to the land after being exiled in Babylon- as in they didn't build the temple that Ezekiel described like they were supposed to, and as we read at the end of the Old Testament, they had a lot of struggles as a people remaining true to Yahweh upon their return, and thus didn't bring about God dwelling again amongst them with a river of healing flowing from the throne of God on earth. Hence *Jesus* came- He lived, died, and resurrected, and Jesus will still fulfill the Ezekiel prophecy after His return, either during the millennial kingdom reign or in the New Jerusalem, but at that point the physical temple concept will have already been long rendered useless, as Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice for mankind, and the

dwelling place of God (the real temple) is now with God's people in a new city rather than in an earthly building structure. I think *that* interpretation makes a little more logical and logistical sense, but again, I'm open to learning.

Verse 23 says there's no more need of the sun or moon- so, will the sun and moon literally get rolled up with the sky as mentioned earlier and they won't even exist anymore, or was that more figurative language and they *will* exist, but they just won't be needed? I don't know. But either way it is stated that God's glory is the light, that Jesus the Lamb is the lamp. In Exodus 34, we read about Moses meeting with God, and when he would return to the people, his face had somehow absorbed light from being in God's presence, and his face radiated that light to the degree it was necessary for Moses to wear a veil on his face when he was around the people. It would seem that once we are in God's glorious physical presence in this new city, we will have renewed bodies that will be able to handle the brightness of God without needing to squint, and that His radiating brightness will illuminate the whole place.

Verses 24-27 describe the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy contained in Isaiah 60 that speaks of a coming day in which Jerusalem will be blessed with the wealth of nations because of the name of the Lord, gates open continually, kings entering the city, violence and sadness ending, the sun and moon not giving light because the Lord will give everlasting light. This fulfillment has not yet happened, at least in a literal sense, but there are many who assume Isaiah 60 will be fulfilled literally *before* Jesus returns, but here's another place where it probably makes more sense to see this as not being fulfilled until *after* Jesus returns and it is fulfilled in the way that Revelation 21 describes it's fulfillment.

Ok, so now I want to circle back to the concept that this new city is being personified and presented as the bride of Christ. As I mentioned, Ephesians 5, 2 Corinthians 11, Revelation 19 define Christians- *the church* as being the bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5, Paul gives marital advice for husbands and wives, and then points us to the idea that an earthly marriage represents, is symbolic of, is pointing to- an even greater mysterious relationship- and that is the marriage relationship of Christ and the church. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes to the church in Corinth who had all kinds of spiritual issues going on at the time, and he justifies his serious instruction to them by letting them know that they are to be presented to Jesus as a “pure virgin.” He says this in **2 Corinthians 11, verse 2**: *“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”* And in the verses that follow, he then expresses his concern that they have been lead astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ alone.

In **Revelation 19**, in anticipation of Jesus’ return described in verse 11, **verse 7** states *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has prepared herself.”* And then the following verse describes the clothing for the bride as righteous acts of the saints.

So why now, all of a sudden, is the physical new Jerusalem city being personified through metaphor as the bride of Christ? Well, here’s what I think is going on. Without a doubt, the church body of believers is the bride of Christ, but because we are so intrinsically linked to this perfected home prepared for us, that home is thus personified as the bride. We are so a part of this city, our citizenship is so solidly confirmed, our identity is so secured as *us* being the dwelling place of God- His temple- that there is no longer any need to distinguish between a people and a place where God dwells for eternity. The people and the place where God lives are *one in the same*.

We spend a lot of time during our days here on earth searching for our identity, wrestling with where we fit in and belong, we consider heavily where we should live, who we should live with, how to maintain life, how to pay a mortgage or rent, finding the right house in the right area, then protecting and maintaining that living space- and what God's word tells us here is that one day we won't have to worry about any of those things. Can you imagine it? I don't want anyone to miss out on this city, nor do I want anyone losing hope in this life as they wrestle with all the details of life we have to deal with as we await this coming day. If you are a follower of Jesus, I want to tell you this morning that you belong! You have been adopted into an amazing family, you have a place that will be secure forever. King Jesus loves you so much that he wants to room with you, He's even going to provide the house, and it is swank! He has made this possible through His sacrifice on the cross, providing forgiveness- if we only chose to receive Him as our King.

When we receive Him as our King, the transaction is already settled, but there is still a waiting period before we get to enjoy all the newness and goodness He's prepared for us. And part of what we try to do as Christians, as we await our relocation to this new city, is to already practice being the dwelling place of God- together, here on earth. And it's messy and difficult at times, but we try to implement here in this imperfect place, what will one day in the new city be perfected. We try to consider each other as family, we forgive and are gracious, we support each other well, we hang out and encourage one another, and together attempt to already be some form of housing, for some form of God to live in. We don't yet have the walls of jasper, doors of pearl, gemstone footers, buildings and streets of pure gold, and we don't yet have Christ in the fullness of His physical glorious presence- but you know what part of the city we do have right now? *Each other.*