

The Celestial City

Revelation 21:9-22:5

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There is a key text I want to draw your attention to. It's Revelation 21:5. The Lord says, "Behold, I make all things new." That's the theme not only of the last two chapters of Revelation but of the last two chapters of the Bible. This is the last two chapters of God's revelation, the unfolding drama of redemption. So it is the capstone of all Scripture.

What is God making new? In verse 1 of chapter 21, we have "a new heaven and a new earth," and in verse 2, we have "New Jerusalem." It's a new celestial city, the holy city. So there are three clear statements about what is going to be new in the eternal state: a new heaven, a new earth and a new city, New Jerusalem. We've been through the tribulation, we've been through the kingdom age, the millennium.

In this eternal state, there will be the merging together. It's hard for us to fathom or comprehend, but heaven and earth become one. During the millennium, we have a renewed earth, and during the eternal state, we have a new heaven and earth and New Jerusalem. Jerusalem comes down from heaven and is wed to earth for all eternity.

The writer of Hebrews 12:22-23 says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect." This, I believe, is a description of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city. It's going to involve angels, the general assembly of the church, it's going to have the presence of God and it's going to have the saints of all the ages or all the Old Testament saints and all the New Testament saints.

Think about it: when you get to heaven, you're going to be able to say "Hi" to Moses. You might say, "Hey, I read your first five books. They're awesome! Good job, buddy." You're going to be able to say "Hi" to King David. You'll be able to say "Hi" to Joshua and Caleb, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to all the great patriarchs of the Old Testament. They'll be all there together in the New Jerusalem.

Jesus said, in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions." Some translations say "apartments." No thank you. I can't wait to die to go to my "apartment" in heaven. "Mansions" is based on the Greek word which means "abiding places."

In the ancient world, when the kids got married, they would just add on to the home and bring their wife to that home, and they would all live together in one big house. They would just keep adding rooms. I think that's a pretty cool idea.

So when we get to heaven, it's going to be the "Father's house." Heaven is a real, prepared

place. It's prepared for you and me, who love Him and have been redeemed. Now we'll read about that new, heavenly city called "New Jerusalem."

There are two main points, with a lot of subpoints. We have a lot of text to cover, but because of the nature of the text, the prophetic word of describing heaven and the delights of heaven, there is no need for a lot of exposition or commentary. So I'll only make some light comments on these verses.

The first main section is the description of the new city. Then we'll see the delights of the new city in the next section. We first saw the city descend from heaven. Now we will see it described, and then we will look at the delights of the New Jerusalem.

First of all, we see the description of the New Jerusalem, in verses 9-27. The first subpoint is that we see its appearance, in verses 9-10. "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city..."—notice its description—"...the holy Jerusalem..."—and where was it coming from?—"...descending out of heaven from God."

Now back in verse 2 of the same chapter, we had the holy city described as "a bride adorned for her husband." And when a bride gets ready for her wedding, she starts preparing for it hours ahead. She has her makeup and her hair done, puts on her dress and everything is perfect. Because it's her day. All focus is on the bride.

What it means is that this city is going to be glorious and beautiful as "a bride adorned for her husband." In verse 9, she's called "the bride, the Lamb's wife," the holy city of Jerusalem. She is "coming down out of heaven from God."

One of the seven angels of the bowls of the wrath of God that is poured out is given the assignment to show John these things. So he was carried by the Spirit to a high mountain. It was a vision that he was taken into the spirit, and he saw and heard these things.

We saw the Lord loose the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments and then the bowl judgments, which are in chapter 16. So God, in His grace, allows this angel, who had been given the job of pouring out wrath, to now show the blessings of this heavenly Jerusalem.

The second description of New Jerusalem is its brilliance, verse 11. "...having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

We will read about all the stones and the material of the New Jerusalem. Some of them are kind of hard to fathom and understand. There is some discrepancy over the color of the stones, but they're going to be glorious.

The jasper stone is quite common in the New Jerusalem. It's believed to be like a diamond but a little more opaque in color but clear like crystal. So it's bright, white and clear with some

opaque mixed in. It pictures the glory of God coming from the light of God in heaven and the precious stone, starting with this jasper stone.

So the overall appearance of the New Jerusalem is diamond-like. It's like a clear, somewhat opaque, diamond city. What a beautiful place it will be!

The third emphasis is on its construction. It has a wall, gates and a foundation, verses 12-14. "Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates." In all the references to the gates and "the pearly gates," there is not one reference to Peter standing at the gates, checking out people and letting them in. So all this humor we have of Peter at the pearly gates letting people in heaven is not taught in the Scriptures.

Continuing, "...and names written on them, which are the names of..."—this is significant—"...the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." So the distinction that on each of these gates will be listed one of the twelve tribes of Israel indicates that God's purpose and God's plan for Israel has been fulfilled. God is still working with the nation of Israel; He hasn't replaced Israel with the church, which is evident from verse 14.

In verse 13, we see the focus on the gates. In verse 12, we had the wall that God built. He closes in the city with the wall. Starting in verse 13, "...three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west." Later we'll see that these gates are never shut. There is no night there, they are always open so we have continual access to God. In verse 14, we have the foundation: "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." So at the end of verse 12, you have "the twelve tribes" of Israel, and at the end of verse 14, you have "the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

The apostles are tying us in with the church. They are the foundation of the church, Paul says in Ephesians. God laid the foundation of the church with the apostles and the apostolic doctrine and their apostolic authority.

By the way, I don't believe, in the primary sense of the apostles in the Bible, that there are any apostles left today in the church. Generally, when people claim apostolic authority, they're trying to divert focus from the Scriptures to themselves. The focus today is on pastors, teachers and evangelists. As far as the office of prophets, yes, people can prophesy, but there are no "prophets."

In all the years I've been a pastor, to all the people who have shown up at my church and said, "I'm a prophet. Let me speak to your congregation," I've said, "We're a non-prophet organization." I've met Moses, Elijah and Daniel and other prophets; they've all shown up on our doorstep.

But what they do have in the New Testament is the writings of the apostles. So that has apostolic authority. No one today has the authority to write Scripture or continue the Scriptures. We are to "contend earnestly for the faith," Jude said, "which was once for all

delivered to the saints.” That’s found in the apostolic writings in the New Testament. That’s our faith and practice.

So there are going to be the names of these twelve apostles on the twelve foundations, verse 14.

It’s interesting in Bible prophecy that Israel, verse 12, and the church, verse 14, have separate and distinct roles. I don’t believe in the doctrine of replacement theology, that the church has replaced Israel. Romans 9, 10 and 11 shows us that God has a future and a prophetic plan for the nation of Israel.

Fourthly in the description of the holy city, we move to the measurements, verses 15-17. “And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.” A reed was about 10 feet long. It was a standard-size measuring rod. “The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.” So most likely, this New Jerusalem is a six-sided cube. It comes from heaven to earth.

Some Bible students feel that the New Jerusalem was here during the millennium, but it was suspended off from the earth. I’m not really clear how that works. And we, in our glorified bodies, could travel from earth out to the New Jerusalem, which we know to be heaven. And then it descends during the eternal age. It’s all interesting but not clearly laid out or delineated in the Scriptures. But the Scriptures do tell us that in the new heaven and the new earth there will be the New Jerusalem, which will be the habitation of the redeemed saints of God.

The city is a cube and is 1,500 miles square; each of the six sides measures 1,500 miles. That’s a very large area. Verse 17, “Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.” So the wall in height would be about 216 feet high.

Some have taken calculations to determine how many people can live in the New Jerusalem. Henry Morrison’s commentary on Revelation suggests that the city will include both horizontal and vertical avenues; that the city blocks could be cubical blocks rather than square blocks, as in our present-day cities. He estimates that a total population of the world—past, present and future—would be about 100 billion people. If just 20% ultimately became residents of the New Jerusalem, then the city would have to accommodate 20 billion people. If the residential areas of the city represent 25% of the available space, then 75% of the space would be for avenues, parks, public buildings and other uses. I’m not so sure that’s how it’s going to work. Morrison says that each resident or cubical block would be about one-third of a mile on each face of the cube. That’s a pretty big area to dwell in.

I’ve actually had people really concerned and ask me, “Can we really all fit in there? Is there going to be enough room? Am I going to have to share my apartment with someone else?” They seem to be freaking out about it. So I just remind them, “Is anything too hard for God?”

There will be room for everyone. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions" or "many abiding places." God, in His omniscience, knows all who will be redeemed—past, present and future. He dwells in the eternal state. The New Jerusalem will be glorious, and there will be plenty of room for us when we get there.

The fifth description is the material the city is made out of or garnished with, verses 18-21. "The construction of its wall was of jasper..."—like a clear diamond with a slight yellow, opaque hue to it—"...and the city was pure gold, like clear glass." So the golden city of New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, like a bride for her wedding day, is golden opaque. This is why we get the idea that the streets will be lined with gold and not asphalt. So you want to go barefoot when you get to heaven when you walk on those golden streets. But the city is actually all of pure gold. What an amazing thought!

Verse 19, "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper..."—which again is clear diamond—"...the second sapphire..."—that's a blue stone—"...the third chalcedony..."—that is a stone believed to be sky blue—"...the fourth emerald..."—that's bright green. It's one of my favorite colors—"...the fifth sardonyx..."—which has a red-white mixture—"...the sixth sardius..."—which is red—"...the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl..."—which is sea green—"...the ninth topaz..."—this would be a yellowish, opaque green—"...the tenth chrysoprase..."—which is green—"...the eleventh jacinth..."—a violet-colored stone—"...and the twelfth amethyst," a purple-colored stone. "The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl." Not multiple pearls but one pearl, one, giant pearly gate. "And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."

What can you say about this? This is going to knock your heavenly socks off! It's going to be amazing! We're going to be in awe. I do believe that we'll be blown away when we get to heaven. The Scripture says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit." This is speaking of Biblical revelation. God has revealed these things in His Word.

We get a taste of heaven when we gather and worship. This is why it's so awesome to be together in church. There's no substitute for being in God's house with God's people worshipping. What a blessing!

And there's going to be no substitute for the presence of God in heaven and worshipping around the throne for all eternity. When you get to heaven, you'll probably have a good voice. So you won't make "a joyful noise" anymore. You'll be able to worship to your heart's content with a clear, powerful, strong voice and redeemed body.

The beauties of heaven are amazing. I've always marveled about the colors in nature that God paints with. Something as simple as low tide on a sandy beach shows all the different hues of brown, gray and silver. Look at all the patterns and colors on the beach at low tide. Look at the

birds that God designs and the colors that He puts on them. Look at the flowers. We have a bunch of hummingbird feeders outside our kitchen window. We watch the hummingbirds and the way the light shines on them, we see the beauty of their translucent feathers in the light. When we get to heaven, it's just going to blow us away all the glory, the splendor and the beauty of God's heavenly city.

The sixth description, in verses 22-23, is the relation of this new city to God Himself. "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."

Any time I read and study this and preach on it, I always feel so inadequate. This has been one of the hardest series for me to preach, because how do you convey these eternal things in human language? It's so transcendent, so marvelous, so beautiful.

And since there is no temple in the holy city, what God does is He tells us what heaven will not have. There will be no temple in heaven. You say, "Well, why would there not be a temple?" The answer is that it's because God's there. There is no need to meet in a place where God is worshipped, because God is present in the city and the Lamb, the temple of it.

And there will be no need of the sun or moon. Some are disappointed with that; they like the sun and the moon. They're awesome, but there's no need of the sun or of the moon. The question is whether that means there will be no sun and no moon. It doesn't say they won't be there; it says they won't be needed. But I tend to believe they won't be there, because of the glory of God, the light of God. The Bible says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." So there is no nighttime there. Darkness and night are eternally banished. Praise God!

It doesn't take long before children become afraid of the dark. There will be no darkness there; there will be eternal light. So my theory—and it's just a theory—is that there will be no more sun and no more moon, for the glory of God gives it light. "The Lamb is its light." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

So verse 22 says there is no temple there, and verse 23 says there will be no sun and no moon there.

The seventh and last statement in the description of the New Jerusalem, verses 24-27, is the relationship to the nations and kings of the earth. "And the nations..." We get our word "Gentiles" from it; it has the idea of ethnos or ethnicity. So it could be a reference to the different ethnic groups, as opposed to nation groups. But we're not sure. Continuing, "...of those who are saved..."—or all those who have been redeemed—"...shall walk in its light." So it could be saying that all ethnic groups from these different nations will be gathered together in this holy city. "And the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." What a fascinating statement that there will be different ethnic groups represented there. We'll still be who we were on earth, but we'll be new and improved with glorified bodies and the glory and honor of it.

Verses 25-27, "Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

So the Bible tells us what will not be in heaven, and it tells us who and what will be in heaven. Verse 24 says that nations and kings will "bring their glory and honor into it." Verse 25 says there will be continual access.

This is one of my favorite verses of our study today. In the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned, they were driven from the Garden, and there were angels placed at the entrance to the Garden to keep them from going back into it where God was. It was to prevent them from eating of the tree of life. But that has now been eliminated; we have access to God and to the tree of life.

When God had the Israelites build the tabernacle and the inner sanctuary, the holy of holies, God was separated from man by a large veil. And only once a year, on the day of atonement, could the high priest, as the people's representative, enter through the veil, with blood sprinkled on the mercy seat, to bring the people into God's presence where His glory dwelt.

But when Jesus died on the Cross, His flesh was ripped, and at the moment He died, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. That indicated that access to the Cross of Christ had now been made available.

So when we get to heaven, this is represented by the gates always being open, and we can have access to God anytime, anyplace, anywhere. We don't have to go once a year through a priest, and we don't have to be shut out of the Garden. It's interesting that man starts in a garden, where he is excluded from the presence of God, and he ends in a city dwelling with God. What a glorious hope that is!

Verse 26, "And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

Verse 27, and for all eternity, there will be no sin, no wickedness, no defilement in it. So there will never, ever be in heaven again a rebellion by Satan; he's banished forever. Darkness and the devil are banished forever. There is no sin in this holy city.

But the inhabitants of this holy city are "those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." So it is a holy city with God's holy people, the saints throughout all the ages.

Now we move from the description of the city to the delights, in chapter 22, verses 1-5. So we have the descent of the city, the description of the city and now we have the delights of the New Jerusalem.

"And he..."—that is, "this angel"—"...showed me a pure river of water of life..."—no beer cans floating down this river—"...clear as crystal, proceeding 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, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing..."—or literally "the caring" or "the health"—"...of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever." Praise be to God! So here we're getting the delights of the city.

I like what the psalmist says: "In Your presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." You're not going to be bored in heaven. There will be sounds and sights galore. What a blessing that will be!

There are seven delights about this holy city. One is that there is "a pure river of water of life," verse 1. I like that. Notice where it comes from: out of "the throne of God and of the Lamb." So we'll be able to drink from this river, this water of life. Psalm 36:8 says, "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house. You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures." I like that. When we get to God's house, we're going to drink from the river of pleasures. So this river symbolizes fullness of life, joy and refreshment.

Blessing or delight number two, in verse 2, is the tree of life. So Adam and Eve were banished from Eden and the tree of life, but now we will have access to the tree of life, and it will have a different fruit on its branches every month. Who doesn't love fruit trees?

A lot of people are confused by the statement, "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." They're confused because when we're in heaven in our new bodies, why do we need healing? But the word that is translated from the Greek into "healing" could also be translated "caring for" or "health of." So it doesn't mean there will be sickness in heaven; there won't because we'll be in glorified bodies. But it means we'll have health and caring from these leaves.

Then, thirdly, there will be "no more curse," verse 3. "And there shall be no more curse." In the millennial age, the curse is reversed on planet earth, but there are still sinners on the earth. There is a rebellion at the end of the millennium. But in heaven there is "no more curse." Darkness is banished forever and the curse is no more. What a glorious truth.

Notice the fourth delight in the city is "the throne of God and of the Lamb," verse 3. "But the throne of God..."—this is God the Father—"...and of the Lamb..."—this is God the Son—"...shall be in it." We'll be there with God forever.

Then, fifthly, we see the bliss of the redeemed. This is marvelous, verses 3-4. "His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." So this is the blessing of the redeemed in heaven. In heaven, there can be no curse, because God is there. They're mutually exclusive; where God is, there is no curse.

Notice the three things that are going to be the bliss of heaven. Number one, we will serve Him,

verse 3. When we get to heaven, we won't just be sitting on a cloud playing a harp, bored stiff for all eternity. Instead, we'll be serving Him. I think our service could be based on our faithfulness to our service to Him on earth. When we get to heaven, the Lord's going to say, "Well, done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord." So if you are faithful in your sphere of ministry that God has given to you now—not that you created or devised for yourself but what God has allotted to you in His providential care—and you do it faithfully to God with the right motive for His glory, when you get to heaven, God is going to let you serve Him.

What blesses me is that this will be unfettered service for all eternity; no bodily weakness, no bodily pain, no sin, no circumstances are going to keep you from serving the Lord for all eternity. Have you ever thought, "Lord, I'd love to go on a mission trip, but my health won't let me do it"? Or, "Lord, I'd love to be able to serve You, but I don't have the finances or the strength to do that"? Or, "Lord, I've lost my mental capacities, so I can't serve You the way I'd like to"? How blessed it's going to be when we get to heaven and have a new body. And we'll be able to serve Him without any hindrance. Without getting weary. It won't be, "Oh, Lord, I'd love to serve You, but I have to take a nap right now."

I'm hinting at what I'm going to do this afternoon. If I'm going to preach tonight, I'm going to take a nap this afternoon. But I'm not going to have to be concerned about that anymore in heaven. There will be no more pain, no more weakness of our flesh. It's unfettered, unhindered service to God.

The second delight in this text, which I love, is the statement, in verse 4, that they shall see Him. "They shall see His face." This is why we need new bodies; we can't look on God and survive. We're going to see the face of God. You can take all the jewels, all the gold streets, the river of life, the tree of life, all the angels—they're cool—but if there was just the presence of God and I could see His face, that's enough. But we "shall see His face." We're going to be able to reach out and touch Him. We're going to be able to look on Him who died for us. I believe that Jesus will still bear the scars of our redemption.

Then notice the third delight: they will be sealed with His name. Verse 4, "His name shall be on their foreheads."

When you get saved on earth right now, what the Holy Spirit does to you and for you is He seals you. He is the sealer. The word "seal" indicates two things: ownership and security. This gets passed over a lot of times in Bible study. People don't realize that the moment you were born again, you are not only regenerated, given new life, not only indwelt, not only taken out of Adam and placed in Christ, but you were "sealed for the day of redemption."

In the ancient world, a letter would be sealed and would be sent. We know what it would be like to put a wax seal on a letter to secure it. And we pay for security on letters. In the ancient world, only two people were allowed to break the seal: the sender and the recipient of the letter.

In God's redemption of us, He is both the sender and the recipient. We are "sealed for the day of redemption." So He seals us here and He receives us there. So sealing speaks of ownership and it speaks of security.

I have a bunch of books in my library, and they all have my name in them. If there ever is a question whether it is Pastor John's book, just open it up and if you see my name in it, it's my book. I don't put my name in books that don't belong to me; when I borrow your book, I won't write my name in it. My name is my seal and it indicates that this book belongs to me. So it's safe in my library.

So God is going to put His name right on your forehead, and there will be no question that you belong to Him for all eternity. Praise the Lord for that!

The sixth delight or blessing, in verse 5, is there will be no night in the holy city. "There shall be no night there." This is, again, a bit of repetition. There is no darkness. There is no sun or moon, but there is no night. Darkness is banished forever for God is light.

Charles Swindoll, in his commentary on Revelation, lists 12 "no mores" of heaven. No more sea, no more tears, no more death, no more morning, no more crying, no more pain, no more thirst, no more wickedness, no more temple, no more night, no more closed gates and no more curse, for "the former things have passed away."

Then, in conclusion and number seven, the saints will reign forever, verse 5. "There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they..."—that is, "the saints, the redeemed"—"...shall reign forever and ever."

Psalms 23 is one of the psalms we all love. And who doesn't love the concluding sixth verse? "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Every time I read Psalm 23 in a cemetery at an open grave—I can't tell you how many caskets I've seen lowered into the ground—and I come to Psalm 23:6, my heart is thrilled. There is hope in Jesus Christ.

You ask David, who wrote the psalm, "How can you be so sure? You say, 'I will dwell.'" You might have your fingers crossed when you read this psalm. You say, "I hope, oh, I hope I make it. I hope Peter lets me in those pearly gates!" God says, "I will." Psalm 23:1 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Everything I need is found in my shepherd, Jesus Christ; everything I need for life, for death and for eternity.