

"HEAVENLY CITY"

Rev. 21

In this passage, we come to one with rich meaning - that really is indescribable. It is like a diver going down into the depths searching for pearls, and gems on the floor of the ocean. He finds so many treasurers - he wonders, which jewels shall I take. And which, shall I leave behind. What shall I place in this sermon - what shall I leave out. The riches of God in Christ Jesus are past finding out. And this is a most comforting passage. And yet, it is not the easiest one to deliver.

One world famed preacher said, out of all the subjects in the Bible - the most difficult to speak on is the subject of Heaven. When we think of the many chapters in the book of Revelation, we would think that this last chapter would be easy. But it is not easy.

For example, Paul says in describing the celestial experience in 2 Cor. 12:1-4, that he was taken up to Paradise - into the third Heaven. Can Paul describe his experience. Can he say what he heard. And what he saw. No, all the Apostle can say is, I have been taken up into the third Heaven. He heard words that are unspeakable, and are not lawful for a man to utter. This tells us that the weak language could not bear the weight of the glory of the experience.

We all feel the inability to describe the glory of the Lord. Moses, who asked Jehovah, that he might behold his glory. The Lord said to Moses, you come and stand by me on the rock. And in the cleft of the rock, I will hide you and cover you with my hand. Until my glory shall pass by. Then I shall take away my hand, and you shall

see my back part. But no man can see my face and live. How would any mortal man describe the presence of God then. For no man has ever looked into the face of God.

I Cor. 2:9 - Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. We cannot enter into it - our spirits, our minds, we can only imagine. I Cor. 2:10 - Paul says that God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit. These things, that the eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear, and the heart cannot imagine. Only the spirit can speak in the language of the soul.

In coming to this vision, following the vision of the doom of the wicked, we now come to a vision of bliss and blessedness. Now this idea has been taught all the way back from Isaiah 65:17. I will create a new Heaven and a new earth. And the former things shall not be remembered. Nor come to mind. Isa. 66:22. Now this is God's promise. And we have in this chapter, at least two special visions.

We'll divide them up into two - first, verses 1-8, Framing the Future. Second, V. 9-27, Forecasting the Features.

I. FRAMING THE FUTURE - V. 1-8

Now John has a vision. And we are going to do just like a carpenter. Who takes and frames the (structure) of this city, of this building. And he puts the siding and the frame work, the lathes, and works it together. Now let us note how John takes this in this vision - and what he has to say.

V. 1 - I saw a new Heaven and a new earth. And the first Heaven and earth had passed away. And then he adds - there was no more sea." The text speaks of a re-creation here. And John pictures the new birth of the world as proclaimed in the Old Testament - Isa. 65:17, 66:22. There was something of the idea that the world would be not only renovated - but something new. It would be regenerated really and come with a new design, and transformed.

He says there is going to be a new Heaven and a new earth.

Notice here, that the Bible speaks of three Heavens. The first Heaven is the atmosphere. The world around us. The Heaven through which the birds and the clouds float. And then there is the second Heaven described in the Bible, where the stars are and the Milky Way. The universe - all that you see - when you stand at night and look into the sky. And the third Heaven is the Heaven of Heavens. It is the throne and dwelling place of God.

Now when the Bible says there will be a new Heaven - it refers to the Heaven immediately above us, the Heaven of the atmosphere which brings the storms. And the Heaven of the lightning and the thunder, and it also includes the Heaven of the stars and the sky, and the universe.

So the whole universe about us would be remade. Now, I do not have really the knowledge to tell you, or imagine what God will do, with the firmament of remaking this under His hand.

But John continues to tell us how this is going to be remade. It is going to be made. And he said, I saw a new earth. And the miseries of this present earth - as deep and dark as they are, and blitted, where floods wash away villages and earthquakes, tear down things. Disease and death come in and waste life. And where the wages of sin brings death. No longer, he says, will this world be torn by these things. And no longer will it be upset by thorns and briars. No longer will this world be cut up into graves and plots in the cemeteries. No longer will the ground be moist by showers of human tears. No longer will it be stained with the human blood. No longer, will we have the broken hearts and the bereaved. It is going to be a redeemed world. Restored to its whole beautiful creation that God is going to remake. And he saw, he says, a new earth coming.

V. 2 - I, John, saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem coming down. From God out of Heaven. So the Lord is going to create a new Heavenly city. In the center of it is God's government. Now this is going to be a marvelous, wonderful thing, that God is going to purpose to do here. Isa. 54:55-60. Ez. 40:48 bear this same pathetic belief. A city of people - a city symbolized redeemed humanity of the church.

Now the likeness of a bride adorn for her husband. Here is a sacred bond between God and his people. As we see this taking place.

Now I wish we could understand all of this. That the things that we know, the future of this world, as it is framed - these things are going to sweep away. John means somehow - does he mean that the Heavens are going to be destroyed and the planets - is that what he means. Or does he mean that the same Heaven is going to be redeemed.

Well, the idea of John here is - that this earth might well be our home forever and ever! Into the ages and ages to come. And the Heavens and the earth are everlasting. In fact, really they were here before sin ever entered in. The Heaven and the earth beneath us. And they are going to be swept clean of a curse that has wasted them. And I think the new Heaven and new earth are going to be redeemed and regenerated.

Now in Matt., it says, lo, I am with you always - even unto the end of the world. What does that mean - the end of the world. That means, this earth, this ground - this geography, this world will look. We will look at a well ordered universe. Eventually things will be redeemed and there will come a new world. The Lord said, for example, Matt. 28:20 - Lo, I am with you always. When history finally reaches its ultimate goal - Christ will still be with us at the end of time.

Now the situation does not change. For example, here is a ship going through the sea. It passes off Virginia Beach, and it goes out over the horizon. But listen, now that ship is not extinct. It passes over the horizon and it is not seen anymore. As a man goes through a door - he goes outside. I cannot see him anymore. It is not that he is extinct. So the primary meeting here is - the first Heaven and the first earth are passed away. It does not mean that they are extinct. But it means they may change their condition. So the Heaven is still here and the earth is still here. But they are changed, they are redeemed, they are regenerated. Under the hand of Almighty God.

2 Peter 3:6 - Whereby the world, that then was, being overflowing with water - perished. Peter is talking about Noah's flood - in the day of the terrible flood. The civilization of man, overflowing with water, perished. The cities were wiped away. The old-fashioned civilization and culture was done away with. But the earth

did not perish. The planet did not cease to exist.

Now the remaking and the rebirth, and the regeneration - all described in Matt. 19:28, Rom. 8:19 - in which Paul says for the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestations of the son of God. For God's creation has been under the ruin of sin. Our humanity - look at it, from childhood, to youth, to manhood, to age. Look at the stars - they burn out. Look at the vegetable where it is cursed. Look at the animal world, it is cursed. All of this creation groans, Paul says, and prevails in pain. So this human world is filled with disappointment, pain, and tears. And it will remain this way - everything that God created. And when sin is cursed - God will remake.

How do you explain, someday the lamb will lie down with the wolf. The leopard with the kid will dwell together. The child will put his hand in a cockatrice's den, and play in the hole of an asp. No one will hurt or destroy in all of God's holy mountain. Now that is beyond the imagination - that is why I say this is really something when we try to pick the framework up for the future. God is not going to destroy all of this work but he is going to recreate it. Even this present world in which we live. Our eternal home may well be here. 2 Cor. 5:1. For we know that if our earthly house of the tabernacle be dissolved, if this house which I am living in turns back to dust, and to the ground - and have a building of God. A house not made of hands - eternal in the Heavens. So, Paul is speaking about the resurrection of the body of this house. Now, the resurrection has no meaning. Unless this house is rebuilt - unless that house which I now live in, goes back to dust. And God raises up something else - that wouldn't be the resurrection. Resurrection refers to the raising up of this body. This is what resurrection is - the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead. And it is to raise us also.

When the Lord Jesus was raised - he was the same Lord Jesus. He said, Thomas look at the scars on my hand, put your finger on them. Touch my side and see this scar. John 20:27. That is resurrection.

V. 3 Well, I kind of like the prospect of Heaven. Even if it was going to be right here on this earth. V. 3 - He says, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people. And God himself shall be with them and be their God. What a glorious prospect of having one be present. This is the place where God revealed himself and dwelt among his people. Ezekiel described this and promised that God would dwell in the midst of Israel. In the 43rd chapter - verse 7. So, Jesus, Immanuel - which means God with us. Matt. 1:23.

Now this means that he is going to tent among us, and this - as we frame the future. Discover perfect fellowship. That here is absolute security - God is going to be with man.

V. 4 - Some of earth's sorrows are going to be gone as you frame the future. These things will not be put in this new city that you are building. For God eliminates sorrow, pain, and death from their lives. Isa. 25:8, 35:10, and 65:19. They will have passed away - the experience of death shall be no more. The original creation will be fully restored in redemption he says. And I like the prospect that we have here - even if this world is going to be created into a new place to live. That God, only the things that we do not like, like the tears, the separations, the funerals, the graves, and the heartaches and the despairs. There will be no more funerals. There will be no more telephone ringing. And saying, my boy has just died. Or my little girl is sick unto death. No more agonizing pleas. Will you ask God to give me strength for this trial that lies ahead of me.

There will be no more of that.

We will all break bread together in that new and happy land. We will dine together throughout the world - without end. And some people will say, that is kind of materialistic - isn't it. Well, I don't know who invented eating. God must have. He said we are going to be eating in Heaven. You know the resurrected Jesus said, do you have something to eat here. And they broiled a fish and a honeycomb and they did eat before them. Luke 24:36-43. God is going to prepare a banquet and a marriage supper of the lamb. I really like everything about this because it speaks of the good things of God. And you know, the book of Psalms promises us to inherit the earth. They that wait upon the Lord shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37:9. V.11 - Says the meek shall inherit the earth. Matt. 5:5, says the meek shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37:29 - the righteous shall inherit this earth.

And won't that be something - as we frame the future. God says that he will wipe away all tears from their eyes - V. 4. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying. That as long as we are in this life - there will be tears. Not until we enter that New Jerusalem will God wipe away all of these tears from our eyes. The hurts, the trials, the diseases, the afflictions, even Jesus wept.

He bowed his head in sorrow. Paul speaks of his tears. By day and by night. Though we are going to escape all of these things, as we build that new city.

As the hymn is written --

Oh, joy, oh delight
Should we go without dying
No sickness, no sadness, no dread, no crying
Caught up through the clouds
With our Lord into Glory
When Jesus receives his own.

Yes, Jesus, suffered. He died, he was buried. But he knew something of the power of the resurrection. And God is going to wipe away all of these tears - just as he did for Martha and Mary at the tomb of her brother. And there will be no more death.

V. 5 - He says, and God speaks himself. Behold, he says, I make all things new. And he told John to write these words down because they were true and they were faithful. And, when he says there is going to be no more death - even today there is not a home without a shadow. There is no flock, however, watched and tended. One dead lamb is there. There is no fireside - howsoever defended, but has one vacant chair. The words of Longfellow.

The cemetery plot with the little grave and the little headstone. The little baby who died early will be in Heaven. Now that little one, does she grow - is she still a child. Well, there is much that is not told us. But we are told that there will be no graves on the hillsides of Heaven. And there will be no columns in the newspapers of the dead.

How many pillows at night are wet with the tear drops that this world never sees, never knows, is only known by our Lord. A preacher in the pulpit talking about his early childhood in a mountain cabin. His father was killed when he was a little boy. His step-father was vile and vicious. One day at breakfast, in his anger, he picked up the plate of biscuits - displeased him so much and threw the plate into the face of his mother. He cursed her - he doubled up his fist and he beat her. And he left the cabin. The little boy said to his mother, let's leave, let's leave. I don't know how, but I will make a living for you. But the mother said, no, son, there has never been a separation in my family and I shall not live very long. Soon I'll be with the Lord Jesus, and I am going to pray to God to take care of my boy.

She died soon after that, and the little boy went to live in the city. According to the prayers of his mother, and he was saved, and he became a preacher.

There is so much sorrow, grief, and disappointment. But God is going to wipe away all of these tears from our eyes.

V. 5 - He says, and I saw the one to sit on the throne. Now, it made all things new. He said, write down these words - they are true and they are faithful. And then, he said, unto me - it is done. I am the alpha and the omega - the beginning and the end. And will give to him that is a thirst of the fountain - the water of life freely. Which is God himself speaking to John. And he says if any man wants to be a new creature - I'll recreate him. The alpha, that's the beginning. The first letter in the Greek alphabet. I am the omega, the last

letter in the alphabet. The beginning and the end. Not simply meaning first in time or first in a series, the origin of all things. It means that God is the source - the origin. The word end means - not simply the point of time, or in the last series. But it means the goal or the consummation. The complete ending of all things in life. Man comes from God and man goes to God. So it is impossible to say anything more magnificent about God here than this. That without Christ - he will give those that are thirsty water from the fountain of life. That is part of God's greatness that he offers here.

He goes on to say, that they might drink of this river that will never go dry. There is a song - I will sing you a song of that beautiful land. The far away home of the soul. Where no storm ever beats on the glittering strand. While the years of eternity roll. Oh, how beautiful it will be, in that beautiful land. So free from all sorrow and pain. With a song on our lips, and with hearts in our hands - to greet one another again.

That is something of the blessed goodness of God. Which is just about indescribable.

V. 7 - And those that overcome shall inherit all of these things. I will be his God and he will be my son. We are framing the future.

V. 8 - He says here in this verse, there are eight classes of sinners. And he goes on to list those that are condemned at this point. Listen to the roll he calls. The fearful, the cowards - they are afraid to confess Christ and identify with the Gospel.

Unbelievers - the most numerous class of any. They refuse to accept the offer of

Christ.

The abominable - well, it denotes all that is morally and religiously filthy.

Murderers - how that class increases. It is a solemn thing to take a human life.

Fornicators - he points to a sin that is awfully prevelant. The ruin of female virtue. And is received in our society. With respectability - that God here reverses the judgement of man. And he co-signs it in the lake of fire.

Sorcers - those who profess intercourse with spirits. The appointed penalty under law is the lake of fire. Deut. 18:10-12.

Idolators - all who worship other Gods. Countless millions today. Where God has been given up.

Last, all liars of every degree - time and character. They will be assigned to the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. And he declares this is the second death.

So the word here is, to the Christian, you can never relax. All who are disloyal, immoral, superstitious, and worship false Gods - he says has the condemnation of God upon him.

II. FORECASTING THE FEATURES

Now we have talked about framing the future. Now we want to forecast some of the special features that go with the building of this Heavenly city which we have been talking about.

Now John has been giving us something of the framing of the future. We have been looking at the outside of the city. Now we are invited to kind of come inside. And take a look at the amazing things. They are described here on the inside of this city.

V. 9 - An angel, one of the seven angels - that had the seven viles full of the seven last plagues - came down invited John to come up and to see this bride. Now this angel, had been one to carry out one of God's judgements upon the unredeemed. Now every person makes a choice. Babylon the harlot - or Jerusalem the bride. The message is just that simple and clear as we come inside the city. And John says the angel came and invited to show me this bride.

And in V. 10 - he kind of picked me up in my spirit - to a great mountain - and showed me a great city. The holy new Jerusalem. Descending out of Heaven and from God. Now this is a beautiful sight. We discover. John getting the vision here of what is coming down. He is in the spirit where he can see great and wide and lofty views. You remember, one vision, John was in the wilderness and here he is on a great mountain. Where he can see this new Jerusalem - right down inside. And John was told by the angel that he would show him the bride. And show him the faithful ones.

V. 11 - one of the first features that is forecast here is the glory of God. Having the glory of God and her light was like unto the stones more precious -

than like even the jasper stone - clear as crystal. Now this is the glory of God. The reflector of all of this world is right here in this Holy City. And John gets to see how God's glory fills the place. And it is just like the brilliance of special stones - the radiance that he denotes here. That radiates over the whole city. It is kind of dazzling in brilliance - and God's presence is radiated through the whole city, the whole church. Now he is forecasting the delightful, glad, and glorious prospect which is going to be the home of the redeemed for all time.

V. 12 - He forecast the wall and the gates and the protection. And they had a great wall that was high. Twelve gates - and the gates of twelve angels written thereon. Which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. We find that the city is the home of the redeemed and that there are twelve gates. And this, we discover, with this great high wall. It is described as a place of security in Isa. 26:1, Zach. 2:5. Twelve gates from every direction and from every part of the world, citizens may come. And find easy admission into the city. And the twelve angels who guard the gates signify that nothing improper or evil will find entrance into the life of the redeemed community.

V. 13 - He elaborates on these gates. 3 on the North, 3 on the South, East, and the West. So that it will be easy and open for people to come from all directions. If time permitted and we could discuss these gates - the ones on the East - the side of the rising sun. The beginning of the day. It represents the way to the Holy City. You find Christ in childhood - you can find him in the early part of life - in youth.

The ones on the North, is the cold land. Where there is a certain chill in it.

Well, these gates are open by those who have intellect, and who are intellectual - and once search with their minds.

There are those on the South - the warm land. Where the wind is gentle and the climate is soft. And that's where people can come with their emotions when their hearts have been moved. By reason of the cross. And then the gates on the West, the land of the dying day - the evening and the setting sun. They could stand also for the way in the closing days of a person's life. He needs to open his life to Christ in the evening and find comfort and hope.

Now in V. 14 - We have another feature - the foundation, of this city. Which is - 12 foundations. That stands for completeness, perfection in supporting the wall. Isa. 28:16 says. The inscription of the twelve apostles on this. Here is the church - the true fulfillment, in its completeness. So we have the foundation, the foundation is so perfect that it could not be shaken.

V. 15 - We find that there is a measurement to be taken of the golden reed to measure the city in forecasting these features. And the gates thereof and the walls thereof.

V. 16 - The city lies foursquare. And the length of it is as wide as the breadth. And the measurement of the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length, the breadth, and the height of it are equal.

To make this into a literal number - may destroy the symbolism that twelve thousand

furlongs equal 1500 miles in present day measurements. But I really don't know how much meaning that has. There have been the effort of many to determine the number of people who could live in a city this size. And how much room each would have. Taking the number 12,000 as the multiple number - from two perfect numbers - 12 and a 1000. And it is used to create the impression of perfection and completeness. There will be perfect room for all the redeemed. The city, when measured, and the way people measured - two billion, two hundred fifty million square miles. The vast perfect cube is a pattern for the holy of holies. Which was perfect. Now, in other words, here is a perfect measurement of this city. Which says there are two million, two hundred fifty thousand square miles. And when they figure this out to cubic miles, - it goes up into the trillions. So, I think the idea here is - that this is a perfect measurement. Forecasting the feature that there will be ample space for all of the redeemed in glory.

V. 17 - The measure of the wall thereof was a hundred and forty and four cubits. According to the measure of a man and of the angel. So the wall - 250 feet high - set on a vast solid foundation.

V. 19 - The foundation of the wall of the city were covered with precious stones. Jasper. And the next two verses tell about the precious stones. That were here. These stones are named in the passage here, are every description that we find here. Diamonds, and others. Some of these stones were found on the breastplate of the high priest. And may have some meaning here.

V. 21 - The twelve gates, or twelve pearls - and think about one pearl. How big and large it must have been here. As he described the magnificent size. Much of this symbolism comes from Isa. 54:11-12. And on the breastplate of the high priest,

Ex. 28:17-20.

V. 20 - We find that the streets were made out of pure gold. That displays something of the fine nature of our wonderful God.

V. 22 - There is no temple. Why? Because God, the Lord God, and the man - they make up the temple.

V. 23 - There will be no sun. No need for the sunshine or the moon - because as we have said, there is the glory of God. It is going to be independent of that light. His glory is going to fill the beauty of it.

V. 24 - He says something about nations and kings.

V. 25 - He says the gate - there will be no night there. The gates shall not be shut at all by day - for there will be no night there. That within itself is symbolic and speaks to us - one of glory of God. Within, without. And he will never fail. No clouds are going to cross the sky. No night - no darkness, no tears, no fears, no evil.

V. 27 - There will be nothing there that defiles. No defilement there. So whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, or is not written in the book of life - shall not enter into. So the gates will be open and the lamb will welcome and the church will be safe forever. Now this is forecasting the future.

The features of this city. As we have focused on these, and tried to bring them to you - as one old preacher said, help me through the gate. That was his thought. Someone has written, death is only an old door. Set in the garden wall. On quiet hinges - it gives the dust when the late birds call. The lintle, along the lintle are green leaves. Beyond the light lies still. Very weary and willing feet over the sill. There is nothing to trouble any heart - nothing to hurt at all. Death is only an old door. Death is the garden wall.

So here we have the Heavenly city framed for the future. And we have tried to forecast some of the features of it. The special things - to focus on the fabulous things and get some foresight. On his deathbed, Dr. Robert G. Lee had a vision of Heaven. He had his daughter there. Even though his eye sight was failing, he had a glimpse of the other world. He lifted his hand and his daughter said, Papa, what do you see. Oh, he said, I see a bright light. Such a bright light, he said. What else do you see. It is Heaven, I see Jesus. Then he said, oh daughter, I have tried to preach on Heaven. I've tried to describe it. Words were so woefully inadequate, it is so beautiful - I wish that I had been able to tell people how beautiful Heaven really is. And then he said, oh, I see someone. I see someone. Oh, he said, it is mother. And she is beautiful. God gave me a glimpse of glory.

The Lord did give him a glimpse of glory.

Marked the vision of