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Revelation 21:9-22:5 “The Heavenly City that Shall Come to Earth”

Read 21:9-19a, 21

Intro. In a much beloved Scripture, Jesus said in John 14:2-3, “In My Father’s house are many mansions [or dwelling places]; if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, [there] you may be also.” I believe that Jesus especially had in mind the New Jerusalem that we read about in this text of Scripture. He is in heaven right now overseeing the greatest construction project in history—the New Jerusalem, a real place we will call our eternal home. It will also serve as the capitol city of the New Earth, and even the universe. Hebrews 11:10 says that Abraham “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker [is] God.” As I preach about the New Jerusalem this morning, I hope you long to go there someday. Hebrews 13:14 says, “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” I do not want anyone to miss going to this city that will truly be a beautiful paradise.

Some interpret the detailed descriptions of the New Jerusalem symbolically or allegorically. I believe it is best to interpret this Scripture literally, but recognize that God creates the city to convey symbolic spiritual meaning, which I will bring out in my message today.

Some scholars believe that Christian believers will begin to occupy this city to some extent after the return of Christ (Jn. 14:3) and during the millennial kingdom. If so, they believe this city will be somewhere in the sky or solar heavens above the earth and we will be able to travel between this city and the earth, where Christ will reign.¹ However, based on the chronology of John’s “I saw” statements, it seems more likely that we will not inhabit *this* city until God creates the New Heaven and New Earth that I will talk about next Sunday.

The fact that this city comes down from God means that eternal blessedness is not an achievement of man but a gift from God. James said, “Every good and perfect gift comes from above...” (1:17). Man has built some great cities, beginning with the one Cain built (Gen. 4:17²), but they all have crime, pollution, and other problems. However, the city of God will be a perfect city. So let’s see what the book of Revelation has to say about this wonderful city. I hope you will catch a vision of how beautiful and wonderful this city will be.

Now as I reviewed this Scripture text again, I was struck by the fact that one of the main lessons of this Scripture text is that:

¹ Hebrews 12:2 says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem....” It certainly exists in heaven before it comes to earth.

² Also, Gen. 11:4 says that prior to the Flood, a group of people said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top [is] in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves...,” but God stopped them when He caused humanity to be divided into many language groups. The first cities we read after the flood were Sodom and Gomorrah! (Gen. 18:24ff). Man builds cities to achieve independence from God. God builds His city to enable us to be close to God, and close to one another.

I. THE NEW JERUSALEM MANIFESTS THE GLORY OF GOD

God is a God of glory and so the city that shall be His special habitation shall manifest His glory. His glory rested on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:16), in the tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:34; 2 Chron. 7:1), in the person of His Son Jesus (Jn. 1:14; 2:11) and His glory will certainly be manifested in the New Jerusalem. Notice what first impressed John as he saw the city. In vv.10-11 we read, “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light [was] like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” So it will be a glorious, splendid city that will glimmer with radiance like a diamond. No city built by man will compare to this city. In the description of the New Jerusalem, the glory of God is primarily manifested in the light (v.11) and beauty³ (v.2) and magnificence (vv.12-16) of the city. Such manifestations of glory point to the praiseworthy attributes of God, including His omnipotent power (cf. 4:11; 5:12-13; 15:8; 19:1), authority (1:6); riches (cf. 5:12), wisdom (cf. 5:12; 7:12), creativity, and holiness (4:8; 15:4; 21:2).

Now let’s see some specific ways the glory of God will be manifested in the New Jerusalem:

A. In the Construction of the City - As we read John’s description of the foundations, walls, gates, buildings and streets, he describes the glory of the riches and beauty of God. For example, in the last of v.2 this city was described as “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” What a fitting description of the beauty of this city, for a woman is typically most beautiful on her wedding day.

Then in v.12 we read that the city that John saw “had a great and high wall.” In v.17 we find out how “great and high” the walls will be, about 216 feet high, or about 18 stories high, which would be extremely high by ancient standards.⁴ These walls manifest the glory of the greatness of God. Then in vv.18-19 we read, “The construction of its wall was [of] jasper; and the city [was] pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city [were] adorned with all kinds of precious stones...” and he names them, including jasper, sapphire, and emerald stones. These stones correspond generally to the 12 gems set into the breastplate of the high priest and convey the beauty of a wide variety of colors, including green, blue, red, white, gold, and purple. God must like color and these foundation stones convey the glory of the indescribable beauty of God.

Furthermore, both the city (buildings, v.18) and the streets (v.21) of the city will be of pure gold. That because in Scripture, gold is often associated with deity. Israel’s tabernacle and temple contained furniture of pure gold. This city is the dwelling place of God, so it is made of purest gold, constantly reflecting the glory of God. In fact, in the last of v.18 John describes this gold as being “pure” or “without impurities.”⁵ John remembered the temple in Jerusalem that was covered with gold. It is said that the first rays of the morning sun reflected off the gold so

³ In Ex. 28:2, 40 glory was associated with beauty.

⁴ This is why v.10 says that John was “carried ... away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain [to] showed [him] the great city.”

⁵ That word is repeated in reference to the description of the gold as being like “clear or pure glass.” The word “glass” is based on the Greek word for rain. Apparently, this gold is translucent, though the main emphasis is on the purity of the gold. Evidently with this feature, the glory of God on the inside will be able to shine through the buildings and wall to the outside.

brilliantly that those who looked upon it had to turn away their eyes. So the gold conveys the glory of the riches of God. The wealth of Elon Musk is nothing compared to God!

Then v.21 says, “The twelve gates [were] twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl....” All other precious gems in this city are made of stone, but the pearl is formed by living flesh, and it is sought and highly valued for its beauty. These gates of pearl will be special creations of God to manifest His glory.

I’m reminded of a little boy that was out walking one night with his grandfather. It was a beautiful night, and it seemed like a million stars were on parade. The little boy pulled at his grandfather’s coattail and said, “Grandpa, if heaven is so beautiful on the outside, I wonder what it looks like on the inside?” Well, we are going to see for ourselves someday! As we enter that city our mouths will fall open when we see the beauty and majesty of that city.

His glory was also be manifested:

B. In the Never-Ending Light of the City – V.23 says, “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.” Likewise, 22:5 says, “There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light.” [Cf. Isa. 60:19]. 1 John 1:5 says, “...God is light and in Him is no darkness at all,” so it is only fitting that this city be a city of light, constantly manifesting the glory of God.

By the way, in light of this truth, I don’t understand the trend to have Christians worship in the dark! We will worship in bright light in that city.

I believe God’s glory will also be seen:

C. In the River of the City – In 22:1 John says, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The word “clear” (*lampros*) may better be translated “bright” or “shinning.” Perhaps “sparkling” is the idea. This river will sparkle and shine, reflecting the glory of God that emanates from the throne of God.

Haven’t you seen the setting sun or moon reflect off the ocean? That a picture of what will be seen as the glory of God reflects off that clear river.

Finally, the glory of God will be seen:

D. In the Face of Jesus – V.4 says, “They shall see His face....” Surely, the glory of God will shine from His face much like it did on the Mount of Transfiguration, and to Paul on the Road to Damascus!

So the New Jerusalem will manifest the glory of God in such ways, and His glory calls for praise. Eph. 1:12 & 14 mention “the praise of His glory.”⁶ In the book of Revelation there are 11 references to ascribing glory to God in response to the manifest glory of God (1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12-13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 15:8; 19:1, 7) and one rebuke for failing to give glory to God (16:9). Let us not be guilty of that! Do you regularly praise the glorious attributes and works of God? We will certainly praise God in the New Jerusalem.

Furthermore, we should reflect the glory of God in our own lives. 2 Cor. 3:18 says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” This verse recalls when Moses beheld the glory of the Lord on Mt. Sanai and then he began to manifest the glory of the Lord in his face. Even so we should manifest the glory of His love, grace, kindness,

⁶ Isa. 42:12 says, “Let them give glory to the LORD, And declare His praise in the coastlands.”

strength, wisdom, creativity and so forth in our own lives. Then the last of v.24 of our text says that “the kings of the earth [will] bring their glory and honor into” the New Jerusalem (see also v.26). Kings have the glory of riches, authority, strength, and honor but the day will come when they will acknowledge that their glory comes from God and they should give all the glory to God for what He has bestowed upon them. We should do the same!

So the New Jerusalem manifests the glory of God. Secondly:

II. THE NEW JERUSALEM SHOWS THAT SALVATION COMES FROM GOD

Do you want to go to heaven and this New Jerusalem someday? Even in the way God constructs the city shows the way of salvation. First, it is:

A. By the Sacrifice of God’s Son - This is pictured in the fact that you enter the city by way of the gates of pearl. V.21 says, “The twelve gates [were] twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl....” A pearl is a gem formed within the oyster. The humble oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. Without the wound the pearl is never formed.

Isn’t it fitting that the way of access to this city is a gate of pearl? The Son of God was hurt and wounded by wicked men. As we see those gates of pearl, we will be forever reminded that access to God’s home is only because of Calvary! And think of the size of those pearls used to make those gates! What gigantic suffering do those gates of pearl symbolize!⁷

Furthermore, in our text of Scripture there are seven references to Jesus as “the Lamb,” and 27 references in the entire book of Revelation. The first is from Rev. 5:6, “Behold... in the midst... stood a Lamb as though it had been slain....” Clearly this points to the suffering and death of Jesus for our sins as a sacrificial lamb.

My friend, if you want to enter heaven and the New Jerusalem, you need to consider also what the last of v.27 says, that “only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” shall enter that city. That means only those who have repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus as the only acceptable sacrifice for sin shall have their names written in that book. ★If I could bring the Lamb’s Book of Life from heaven and open it, would your name be there?⁸

Beginning in chapter 22 we also see that salvation comes from God:

B. As Seen in the Water of Life – V.1 says, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Notice it is called “a river of water of life.” Water is absolutely necessary for life. You can live no more than five days without it. Furthermore, notice that it explicitly says that the water of life flows from God and His Son Jesus, the Lamb of God. There is no other source of eternal life.

Even so, the only way to have eternal life is faith in Jesus! (Jn. 14:6). And I have good news for you. Look back at what God says in chapter 21, the last of v.6, “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.” Likewise, if you look at Chapter 22, the

⁷ Furthermore, it so beautifully symbolizes what Jesus did to make man fit for heaven. Just as pearl begins from a small, irritating piece of sand in an oyster and is wrapped in layer after layer of pearl to make it beautiful, so the believer is an unfit vessel until he’s been wrapped in the righteous cloak of Jesus, which makes him beautiful in God’s sight!

⁸ Also consider that in 3:12 Jesus said, “He who overcomes... I will write on him ... the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God.” Only overcomers, true believers, are registered citizens of that city. Cf. Php. 3:20, “For our citizenship is in heaven....”

last of v.17, the Spirit of God says, "...let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." Eternal life is a gift that is freely bestowed by God's grace (Rom. 6:23b).

Furthermore, from the description of the size of the New Jerusalem, we can say that there is surely room for all who want to be saved. Look back at the last of 21:16, "...And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal." That describes a city that is built as a cube, just like the Holy and Holies in the temple.⁹ So this city will be *huge*! 12,000 furlongs or stadia is at least 1,400 miles. That would be close to the distance from Maine to Florida. If so, and if the city is built like a cube in shape with multiple levels, there would be enough room for 100 billion people based on the population density of our major cities. That's certainly large enough to hold the redeemed of all the ages, including both from Israel and the Church, as indicated in vv.12 & 14. No wonder Jesus said in John 14:2, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places..." (HCSB). There is room for you in that city!

Finally, this city shows that salvation comes from God:

C. As Seen in the Tree of Life – V.2 says, "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, [was] the tree of life..." V.7 says that "the tree of life... is in the midst of the Paradise of God." The fact that it is in the midst, near the throne of God, gives its prominence. It shows that eternal life is provided by God. Adam and Eve lost access to the tree of life but Christ restores our access!

There was another tree from which life flowed. 1 Pet. 2:24 says that Christ "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..."¹⁰ So if you want to be saved and enter this New Jerusalem someday, you need to trust in Jesus.

Finally, the way this text of Scriptures describes the New Jerusalem conveys the fact that:

III. THE NEW JERUSALEM WILL BE A PARADISE

I will share four reasons from this text why the New Jerusalem will be a paradise:

A. Because God Rules There – In chapter 22, vv.1 & 3 we read of the "throne of God," which was no doubt centrally located in the New Jerusalem.¹¹ This city will be a paradise because God will have unchallenged rule in that city.

Do you want to have a taste of heaven on earth? The best way to experience that is to make Jesus Lord of your life and obey Him. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as [it is] in heaven."

Secondly, that city will be a paradise:

B. Because All Evil and Harm Will Be Banished – In 21:2 John calls this city "the holy city," for it will indeed be holy, separate from all evil. V.12 says that the city "had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates" to guard entrance through each gate.

⁹ This was the place of God's presence. No one but the high priest could enter there, but in this city, we will have full access to the presence of God. Rev. 21:3 says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and He will dwell with them..."

¹⁰ Likewise, Gal. 3:13 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed [is] everyone who hangs on a tree")."

¹¹ Again, 2:7 says that "the tree of life... is in the midst of the Paradise of God," and since it is near the throne, the throne must be centrally located.

This conveys the security and protection of the inhabitants of the city from harm and evil. In fact, v.27 says, “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie....” Back up to v.8 and we see what other kinds of sinner will not be there: the “cowardly, unbelieving, ... murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, [and] idolaters.”¹² The devil will not be there. The mob and other gangs will not be there. Drug dealers, pimps, and prostitutes will not be there, except for those transformed by the blood of Christ and the new birth.¹³ Not only will such unbelievers not enter the New Jerusalem, but 20:15 says they will be cast into the lake of fire. So this city will provide the ultimate security from all sin and harm.

The other day I heard the police chief of Colonial Heights say that 90% of the arrests in our city are of citizens who live outside our city!

Furthermore, that city will be a paradise:

C. Because Our Eternal Well-Being Is Assured - 22:2 says that “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 of the nations.”¹⁴ The Greek word translated “healing” (*therapeia*) is the basis for our English word “therapeutic” and “therapy.” So it could mean that the leaves sustain “the health of the nations.” There will be an unending health and vitality in the life to come. When that day comes, Rev. 21:4 will be fulfilled, “... there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” In this city, there will be no hospitals or doctor’s offices!

In the New Jerusalem God’s redemption from the effects of sin will be complete. Are you looking forward to the day when your back will not hurt any more? There will be no more hacking coughs.

Finally, the New Jerusalem will be a paradise:

D. Because of the Holy Pleasure We Will Experience - 22:2 says, “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....” Eating fruit is one of the natural pleasures of life and this fits in with the symbolism of paradise, like the Garden of Eden. There will be a variety of fruit and a constant supply. I have no problem taking that literally,¹⁵ but surely it conveys a symbolic truth that is expressed in Ps. 16:11, “...In Your presence [is] fullness of joy; At Your right hand [are] pleasures forevermore.”

Furthermore, looking back to v.1, it will be a pleasure to enjoy that “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal....” The River of Life not only conveys salvation but also conveys the fact that the New Jerusalem will be a true Paradise of great joy and pleasure. Psa. 36:8 says, “...You

¹² This truth is repeated in 22:14-15.

¹³ 1 Cor. 6:9-11 says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

¹⁴ This description follows closely what we find in Ezek. 47:12, “Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

¹⁵ This would mean that we would be able to eat in our glorified bodies just as Jesus was able to eat in His glorified body (Luke 24:43).

give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.” The Psalmist also wrote of a “river whose streams make glad the city of God” (46:4). We tend to enjoy vacations at bodies of water, such as the ocean, or the river, or a lake. Imagine how appealing this is to people who live in arid, dessert lands!

Conclusion: I have tried to describe to you how marvelously beautiful that heavenly city will be. But friend, you just have to see it for yourself! Will you be in that city some day? Or if you were to stand at that gate to the city and meet the angel there, would he let you into that wonderful city? Well, as we have seen, your name has to be written down in the Lamb’s book of life. Make sure you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Christian, if you have a loved one or friend whose name is not written in the Lamb’s book of life and who is not destined for this wonderful city, will you pray for them and share the gospel with them, or at least invite them to church?

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962-1966); George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972); David Jeremiah, *Revealing the Mysteries of Heaven: Study Guide* (San Diego, CA: Turning Point, 2017); Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973); John MacArthur, Jr., *Heaven* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1988); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983), 22:1-5 only; Dr. James Merritt (notes from his sermon on 21:1-22:2); Robert H. Mounce, *The New International Commentary, The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977); Page Patterson, *The New American Commentary: Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2012); John Philips, *Exploring Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1974); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on 22:1-5); John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1966). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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