

March 24, 2024 by Steve Brandon



The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-27

1. The Glory of the City (verses 9-21)
2. The Glory of God (verses 22-23)
3. The Glory of the Kings (verses 24-27)

I want for you to think this morning about a favorite vacation spot that you once visited, or perhaps some vacation spot that you are planning to go to in the near future. I want you to think about some spot that you heard about, so you began researching it on the internet. Then, you began thinking about the amenities, the swimming pool or the buffet or the special events that they hold. Or maybe there is some real estate purchase that you are thinking about purchasing. When you have found it, you begin to know everything about it before you might purchase it.

As you are thinking about it, let me tell you about a place that we visited a few years ago. We went to Girard Ridge Lookout, located in Northern California. ^[1] We were able to spend the night there in the lookout tower. When I say, "We," I mean, Yvonne and me, and Stephanie and David and their cousins, Justin and Lauren.

Yvonne had found this place, it was reservable through the National Parks System. ^[2] That means, reservations open up exactly 6 months before the reservation date. Reservations open up at 9am. After several days of trying to register right at 9am (or even a second before), we were able to get in. After reserving the place, we were excited, so we (mostly Yvonne) looked online to see exactly what it was like. What's around it? How do we get there? What's included? We were anticipating our two-night stay.

Perhaps you have had a place like this. Perhaps there was some Airbnb that you have found, or some ski chalet, or some cruise? Perhaps you have spent some time looking at it and dreaming about your time there.

Well, this morning, I want to spend some time looking at a place that all of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ will be someday. I'm talking about the New Jerusalem. In Revelation 21, we see this city described. So, if you haven't opened your Bible and turned there, I invite you to do so now.

Last week, we looked at verses 1-8, in which John described what he saw about the new heaven and the new earth. One of the things that he saw was Revelation 21:2 the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." John only mentioned it in verse 2, But now, beginning in verse 9, John gives us the detail about this "New Jerusalem," which is the title of my message this morning. Consider the text:

Revelation 21:9-27

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The passage begins with an angel transporting John to a high mountain to get another vantage point to see this city coming down from God. This isn't the first time that John has been transported to another place to be shown visions he was to record.

The first time was in chapter 4. "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard

speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the Spirit" (Revelation 4:1-2a). After this, John found himself in heaven, observing the worship of God and the Lamb.

The second time was in chapter 17. "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk" (Revelation 17:1-2). After this, John was taken away into the wilderness to see this great prostitute.

And now in chapter 21 for a third time we see John transported to another place. We read,

Revelation 21:9-10

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

Many have identified these times when John is taken away to see a vision as key indicators of the structure of the book of Revelation. The first section covering the first three chapters, where John is shown the glory of Jesus and given his message to the churches. The second section covering chapters 4-16, where John is shown the future judgments that would come upon the earth. The third section covering chapters 17-20, where the fall of Babylon is prominent. And then, the fourth section coming in chapters 21 and 22, with this vision of the New Jerusalem.

It is crucial for us to observe what they angel said about the New Jerusalem. He says in verse 9,

Revelation 21:9

"Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

In chapter 19, we were introduced to this bride, when heard about the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). But we didn't get a glimpse of this bride until now.

Pulling from Paul's imagery in Ephesians 5, we know that this bride is the church. It's all of those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. In Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul describes how

Ephesians 5:25-27

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

Now, in Revelation 21, we see that moment, when Jesus presents the church to himself as his wife, "holy and without blemish." When John sees the bride, he sees a city. This is a bit surprising, because we are the bride, people are the bride not a city. Yet, John is shown the bride, he is shown a city. He is shown the city in which the bride will dwell. He describes this city as "the holy city Jerusalem, which Jesus has sanctified. With apocalyptic style, John sees the church. He sees it as a city. He sees it as a holy city.

In our day, we don't particularly think of a city as a "holy" place. A city can be a dangerous place. A city is where crime take place. A city is where drugs and prostitutes are. A city is where homelessness and poverty are often present. A city experiences graffiti and vandalism and pollution. A city is where terrorist attacks occur. Further, cities are often the place where culture advances, that is, advances toward sin.

Now, don't get me wrong, there are some lovely things in the city. The arts in the city can be glorious. The cultural festivals can showcase the best of humanity. The performance venues can put forth talent and creativity. The density of the city helps to cultivate community. The diversity of the city can be a beautiful thing. The wealth of the city can gather to accomplish some great things. So, a city isn't all bad. But there are many things about the city that are bad.

But this city, the New Jerusalem, is a holy city because it is made up of those whom Christ has redeemed. The first thing that John tells us about the New Jerusalem is

1. The Glory of the City (verses 9-21)

And it is glorious! Look at verse 11. This city comes down out of heaven,

Revelation 21:11

... having the glory of God,

The first thing that John notices about this city is its glory. It has the glory of God. It's not a dumpy city. It's a glorious city. John continues in verse 11.

Revelation 21:11

its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

So picture this city. It's a clear city. It's not dusty and dirty. It looks like a giant crystal, that is transparent. radiating colors, much like a diamond would. Then, in verse 12, John tells us that

Revelation 21:12

It had a great, high wall,

In ancient times, high walls were symbols of safety. This new Jerusalem is a safe place. John continues by describing the city as having

Revelation 21:12

twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels,

I would suspect that these twelve angels play the role of security guards, keeping the evil influences out of the city. Perhaps this has a reference back to the garden of Eden, when the Lord placed the cherubim between Adam and Eve and the garden, lest the evil ones return to the garden from which they were cast out for their disobedience (Genesis 3:24). John continues in verse 12,

Revelation 21:12-13

and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

So picture the twelve gates. and over each one there is a name. Over one gate, there is the name of Reuben. Over another gate, there is the name of Simeon. Over another gate, there is the name of Levi. Over another gate, there is the name of Judah. Then Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher, Issachar and Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. Every time you go in and out of the city, you are reminded of the Jewish roots of the people of God. But there are other people to remember. the apostles of Jesus.

Revelation 21:14

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The wall of the city was upheld by twelve foundations. Usually, foundations are placed well below the ground, tied into the bedrock. But apparently, these foundations were partially above ground to show the names of the twelve apostles. On one foundation was the name Peter. On another foundation was the name Andrew. On another foundation was the name James. On another foundation was the name John. Then, there was Thomas and Matthew and Philip and Bartholomew and James and Thaddeus (his brother) and Simon the Zealot and (probably) Matthias, who replaced Jesus. Perhaps the last apostle listed was Paul.

This perfectly represents the people of God in the plan of God's redemption. He began with the nation of Israel, the descendants of Jacob. From there, brought forth the Messiah, the Lamb of God who was slain for our sins. And when Jesus rose from the dead, he sent out his disciples to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20). That's pictured perfectly in the names on the gates and on the foundations.

In verse 15, we transition from the beauty of the city to the enormous size of the city. It all speaks to the glory of the city.

Revelation 21:15

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.

This isn't the first time that John sees a measuring rod. Back in Revelation 11:1, John was told to measure the temple of God. But now the city of God is measured by this angel.

First thing that we are told is that the city is a square.

Revelation 21:16

The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia.

It's length and width are the same. They are 12,000 stadia. We aren't exactly sure how long a stadia was, but it was something like 600 feet. So if you do the math (12,000 stadia x 600 feet/stadia x 1/5280 mile/feet), you come up with something like 1400 miles. That's a huge city! covering some 2 million square miles. The 48 contiguous states are 3.1 million square miles. This city is 2/3 the size of the United States!

Then, at the end of verse 16, John tells us the height of the city.

Revelation 21:16

Its length and width and height are equal.

To give you some perspective, the top of the city would be higher than most Low Earth Orbit Satellites. For instance, the Starlink satellites orbit at about 350 miles above the earth. The International Space Station (ISS) orbits at about 250 miles above the earth. Now, lest you worry that these satellites will crash into the new Jerusalem, realize that this is on the new heaven and new earth. The Starlink satellites and ISS will be destroyed.

Further thinking about the height of the city, consider Mount Everest. Most people need oxygen at the top of Mount Everest, which is only like 5.5 miles above the earth, I'm not quite sure how the oxygen works in this city.

Also, when you consider the structural integrity of the city, I'm not quite sure how the building of this would work. The tallest sky scrapers that has ever been made is the Burj Khalifa, which stands at 2717 feet above the ground. That's almost half a mile! Yet, compared with 1400 miles of city, this is hardly any distance. Considering that the strength of the steel at the base of the building needs to support everything above, we are pushing the physical limits.

It all presses the idea that such a city would require some new physics in the new creation. Or, it shows that John is speaking apocalyptically of this glorious city that will be in the new creation! Then, in verse 17, we see the measurements of the city wall.

Revelation 21:17

He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

John mentions the angel's measurement because it is an angel who is measuring the city. Lest we think that the measurements taken by the angel were somehow distorted from reality, the angel measured exactly as John would have measured. The measurement of the wall came to 144 cubits. Each cubit is about 18 inches. This makes the measurement of the wall to be a few hundred feet (216 to be exact). In comparison with the size of this city, the wall is practically nothing. Yet, it is beautiful.

Revelation 21:18

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

Again, we see the apocalyptic imagery here. Gold isn't clear like glass. But if you are trying to describe a glorious place that you can hardly imagine, "clear gold" certainly does the trick. Then, more beauty comes in verses 19-20.

Revelation 21:19-20

The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

I don't believe that the point here is to figure out every sort of stone and color that will be in the foundations of this city, other than to say that the foundations of this city are dazzling in beauty! Not only is the size of this city enormous, but its beauty will be spectacular. That's the point of verse 21.

Revelation 21:21

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

I have no idea how large these gates are, nor how large these pearls would need to be, nor how large the oyster would be to create such a pearl! But for a gate to service a city that is 1400 miles on each side would need to be large. I would imagine it would be more than an eight lane highway.

Nor have I any idea of how streets of gold work in a three-dimensional city. But I'm not sure that the answers to these questions are the point. Perhaps the point is to blow our minds at the New Jerusalem that will be our dwelling place for eternity. It will far-exceed our wildest imaginations. The glory of this city will be far more than any level of expectation that we could build for ourselves.

From the size of the city to the wealth of the city to the beauty of the city, it will be glorious! And it only gets better. Because John transitions from talking about the glory of the city to talk about the glory of God (verses 22-23).

2. The Glory of God (verses 22-23)

Revelation 21:22-23

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

In verse 22, John takes us into the city. So far, all we have seen is the outside of the city. But now we get a glimpse inside. Rather than telling us what is in the city, John tells us what is not in the city. There is no temple in the city. This is shocking to us, because John has repeatedly mentioned the presence of the temple in the Revelation (see 7:15; 11:1-2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17).

Jesus even promises to those in Philadelphia a part of the temple when the new Jerusalem comes. He said, "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name" (Revelation 3:12). Yet here, when the new Jerusalem comes, there is no temple. The reason is given in verse 22.

Revelation 21:22

its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

In the new Jerusalem, there will be no temple because there will be no need for a temple. God will be among us. Isn't the purpose of a temple is to get to God! But when God is among us, we don't need a temple any more. We saw this theme last week when talking about the new creation. "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 22:3) This is the reality of when Jesus comes. When he returns, he will be with us.

Just like the LORD was with Adam and Eve in the garden, walking with them in the cool of the day, so also will the LORD be with his people in the new Jerusalem, walking with us and taking with us. The difference being, we will not be in a state of innocence, and Adam and Eve were. Rather we will be in the new Jerusalem as fully redeemed sinners, sanctified through the blood of Jesus, raised and given our new bodies.

In other words, we will be in the new Jerusalem, knowing full well that we are there by God's grace, as he has forgiven us through Christ. This is unlike Adam and Eve, who didn't know and experience grace in the garden. This is because, in the garden they hadn't yet fallen.

I believe that this will bring in a maturity among those in the new Jerusalem. We aren't naïve to sin, because we have sinned. But we will be pure, because we will be sanctified and given sinless, spiritual bodies that will never sin again. We will always look back to the wondrous

works of the Lamb who has brought it about.

It is no accident that John calls Jesus “the Lamb” in verse 22. The Lamb brings up the imagery of a slaughtered sacrifice. Do you remember the scene in heaven when the scroll was to be opened? No one was found worthy to open the scroll and break its seals, until the Lamb came. And when the Lamb came, he was standing, having been slain (Revelation 5:6).

Do you remember the new song that is sung by the saints in heaven? “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10). This comes to full reality in the new Jerusalem, when his people are in his kingdom, all of whom are priests, because we all have direct access to God!

Verse 23 continues our tour inside the city walls.

Revelation 21:23

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Again, John doesn't tell us what is in the city. He tells us what is not in the city. There will be no sunshine. There will be no moonlight. This sort of makes sense, with a city that is 1400 miles cubed, that's a long way for the light of the sun or the moon to reach the inner part of the city. You go a few miles deep in any body of water and you are in the pitch dark. With thousands of miles of city for the light to travel, surely it would be dark in the deepest part of the city. Yet, it is still light in the city, because the Lord is its light.

This is the fulfillment of the promise of Isaiah 60:19.

Isaiah 60:19

The sun shall be no more
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give you light;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

We will encounter the glory of God every moment of every day, as his light shines upon us. It makes sense that the sun and moon are gone. For they were given in the creation to mark time. "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years'" (Genesis 1:14). But this new Jerusalem will be our habitat for eternity. And eternity doesn't need time marked out. It doesn't need days and months and seasons and years. It will be forever!

Finally, in verse 24, we come to my third point.

3. The Glory of the Kings (verses 24-27)

Revelation 21:24

By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

I'm struck here by John's language. He's talking about "nations" in the new Jerusalem. In some way, there will still be ethnic identity and diversity in the new Creation. The nations will still exist. They all will be in the new Jerusalem. Now, of course, that's not to say that everyone from every nation will be in the new Jerusalem. In chapter 20 we saw the finality of the judgment, with many being thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

The "nations" of verse 24 must be talking about those who have been redeemed from the nations. The reality is that the sacrifice of Jesus will be applied to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). When the multitude appears in heaven, such a great multitude that no one could count, they are from "all tribes and peoples and languages" (Revelation 7:9). These multitudes were "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

We learn here in Revelation 21 in the new Jerusalem that the tribes and peoples don't lose their ethnic identity. Rather, we all will walk by the light of the glory of God. Then we read,

Revelation 21:24

and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into [the city],

Typically, we don't think about kings as bring righteous people. Typically, we think of high ranking government officials as corrupt. As they say, "Power corrupts. And absolute power corrupts absolutely." Perhaps verse 24 signals some hope for the grace of God to penetrate, even the hearts of kings. Or it merely represents, that the most powerful of the earth, and the most glorious things they have to offer, will be in the city as well.

In other words, "the glory of the kings," is the best that humanity has to offer. And the best of humanity will be in the new Jerusalem! This idea is repeated in verse 26.

Revelation 21:26

They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

This simply adds to the magnificence of the city. This place is incredible! It's dimensions are amazing! It's huge. It's beauty is breathtaking! Gold and precious jewels that sparkle in the light. God's presence is there! And the best of humanity is there as well!

Verse 25 speaks about the safety and security of the city.

Revelation 21:25

and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.

In the ancient world, gates were monitored closely. They were shut for security purposes every night, lest they be attacked in the darkness. When under attack, they would be shut "by day." But in the new Jerusalem, the gates will always be open. In other words, we will dwell secure. There will be no fear in the new Jerusalem because, there will be no thieves. Crime rates will be zero. There will be no assault or vandalism or arson or homicide or kidnapping or trespassing! The new Jerusalem will be a safe place! We will rest secure in the arms of God.

The fact that there will be no night is an indication of there being no sin. Sin often takes place in the dark of night. Paul said "For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night" (1 Thessalonians 5:7). Darkness is a metaphor for sin. "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

But here in the new Jerusalem, there will be no darkness. There will be no sin. There will be no wickedness. This is the point of verse 27:

Revelation 21:27

But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Now again, at this point, the judgment is already past. It took place in Revelation 20. Those who are detestable or false have already been condemned and thrown into the lake of fire. So what John is doing here is bringing out the metaphor of how nothing unclean will ever enter the city. It makes the angels' security jobs at the gates pretty relaxed, because there really won't be anything outside of the city that can come in because the evil and wickedness has already been thrown into the lake of fire.

So, what is the hope? "Only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" will be able to enter the city. This is the giant phone book of the new Jerusalem. If you want to look somebody up, you just look them up in the Lamb's book of life.

In the book of Revelation, this book of life has come up several times (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). This book is actually the book that indicates that you are saved. The presence of your name in the book is God's declaration that God has redeemed you. Remember Revelation 20:12? "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done." Then Revelation 20:15, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

On that day of judgment, you will stand before God. Your name will be found. The books will be opened. The books are the record of every deed that you have ever done in your life. You will be condemned by that book. But then, if your name is in the book of life, you will be free of the judgment. Because your name in the book of life is an indication that you have been redeemed by the Lamb. If your name is in the Lamb's book of life, you will not be thrown into the lake of fire.

How important is this book to you? It should be everything to you! It holds your eternal destiny.

According to Revelation 13:8, the names were written into this book from before the foundation of the world. That is, the published date on this book is before Genesis 1. Those whose names are written in the book of life are the ones who have faith. They believe in Jesus. They trust Jesus. They "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Revelation 14:4).

So you say, "Is my name written in the Lamb's book of life?" Do you have faith? Are you following the Lamb wherever he goes? Then you can have confidence that your name is written in the book of life.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 24, 2024 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] <http://nhlr.org/lookouts/us/ca/girard-ridge-fire-lookout/>.

[2] <https://www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/234403>.