

Revelation 21:9-27

“The New Jerusalem”

Revelation shows us what things really are. This is what we have been saying since the beginning of this series. God wants us to see, and in seeing to understand, the true nature of things, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the powers aligned against us, and our own true nature in and through Jesus Christ.

Earlier in Revelation God showed us the true nature of the city of man, the cultures of man, the world united together against the Lord and His church, the world united in its wickedness, its idolatry, its immorality. The image God used to show us the true nature of the city of man, or Babylon, was that of a harlot, a prostitute.

Her beauty was superficial. She was no true bride but posed as one, an adulteress who sells herself to the highest bidder, a prostitute dressed in gold and scarlet, drinking the blood of the saints from a golden goblet. She represents the city of man, the world in its striving after the passing pleasures and riches of this world, seeking to make a name for itself, man seeking to build his own high mountain so that he might obtain glory by his own efforts.

The implication was that all who align with her, all who give themselves to her, all who make their bed with her, will suffer her

judgment. She was presented not only as an enemy of the church of Jesus Christ, but as an alternative to that church, that true bride who knows and loves and follows her one true Husband and Lord.

Babylon, the city of man, the harlot, is the rival of the true bride, who would lure the world away from God into immorality and idolatry by her promise of infant gratification and pleasure, and she cannot countenance the existence of a true bride, a city that is not built by man and adorned with God's own glory, but aligns herself with the beast and false prophet, the violent and deceptive powers of this age to destroy her.

But again, we saw her end. Great and terrible will be her fall. The smoke of that city will rise forever. God will execute His perfect judgment upon Babylon even as He did in times past to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Babel, to that once great earthly city that also went by the name Babylon, and even to earthly Jerusalem, that city which turned out to be of this world, a spiritual Babylon like the rest.

But in this chapter, chapter 21, the vision has shifted. No longer do we see the world and its true nature, the city of man and its demise, the beast and the false prophet and the dragon and their judgment, nor the judgment of the world, great and small. Now we see are seeing what remains after God's earth-shaking judgment at the end of the age.

What remains is a new heavens and a new earth. What remains are those who have conquered, that is, those who refused to lay down with the harlot and be identified with her, those who resisted the compulsion of the beast and the deceptions of the false prophet, those who were willing to lay down their lives in this world for the sake of the testimony of Jesus Christ.

What remains, and this is what we are seeing this morning, is the true bride. The counterfeit is gone; only the true bride of Christ remains. Our passage this morning refers to this bride, the wife of the Lamb. The angel says that he will show us this bride. Now, when we hear that we will be shown a bride, we fully expect to see a portrait of a woman, the church of Jesus Christ portrayed as a woman, but when the angel shows us the bride of the Lamb what we see is not a woman but a city, the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

Kids, let me try to make this easy to understand. The church of Jesus Christ, God's people, are called the Bride of Christ. We are God's bride. We belong to Him. He is our true husband. We do not have many husbands, only one, and we are faithful to Him, we love Him alone. We have become one with Him.

God wants us to picture ourselves in this way so that we can fully appreciate how wonderful our relationship with God truly is. There is no love greater than that of a man and his wife, and likewise God wants us to understand that we are to have no greater love than our love for Him and He has no greater love than His love for us.

And when we think of a bride, we think of her beauty, the glorious white dress that she wears as she comes down the aisle to her husband. God wants us to see ourselves as beautiful like this, even more beautiful than the most beautiful bride on earth. We are His bride, and He clothes us with something even more beautiful than a white dress.

So God describes for us the true beauty of His bride, but He does so by calling her Jerusalem, the true and heavenly Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, we know, was in the Old Testament the place where God dwelled with His people. It was the city where God resided, where He placed His name. But that city in the Old Testament was only a little earthly picture of what was coming.

If the harlot was also described as a city, Babylon, so now the true Bride is also described as a city, Jerusalem, because God wants us to understand that in the new heavens and earth, when God comes again, we will be the place of His dwelling. He will dwell among us,

with us, in us. We are the holy city of God, and He will dwell with us forever.

This is not a city built by men, but is a city, a bride, a church, which God has made. He made us by His Word, by Jesus Christ who purchased us and washed us with His own blood. And, as I said, He clothes us in beauty far more glorious than a white dress. Listen to how we are described,

“having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” v. 11.

“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.” vv. 18-21

This bride, this city, is far more beautiful than the harlot, than Babylon. But the point of all of these jewels and precious stones is to show us how we are radiant with the glory of God. The thing about these jewels is that they reflect light, many of them are transparent, which

means that if light shines on them they sparkle with that light and reflect that light all around them in all kinds of beautiful colors.

The main point of this then is to show us that our beauty is really God's own beauty. We will shine with His glory, we will radiate His glory, His glory will shine upon us and through us. We should remember that we were created in His image, to reflect Him, and in Heaven this is what we will do in a most perfect way.

We already reflect His glory in part even now on earth as we trust in Him and keep His commandments, as we love one another and turn away from evil, as we bear the image of Christ in our sufferings and as we speak of Him to others, but in Heaven we will bear His image perfectly. We will shine with His glory without any sin clouding that glory in the way.

The stones mentioned were also stones that were found on the breastplate of the High Priest in Israel. So in this way we are also being shown that we reflect the glory of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and will be, in and through Him, priests who minister in the presence of God and reflect His splendor.

We're told in verses 22-27 that there is no temple in this city, because God Himself and the Lamb are that temple, we dwell with Him and in Him without the need of any earthly buildings. Where God dwells with

His people, there is the temple of God. Christ Jesus is the temple which God raised from the dead, for in Him the fullness of the godhead dwells, and we are in Christ.

We're also told that there will be no need for sun or moon to shine upon us, for the glory of God will be our light and the light which we reflect all around us. The lesser things, the earthly things, have given way to the greater things, the heavenly things. Earthly Jerusalem is no more, earthly temples are no more, earthly lights are no more, now there is the true Jerusalem which God made, His church, and the true light, Christ, which enlightens every man.

This city is described as having high walls and twelve gates, and its dimensions are truly out of this world. The twelve gates represent the fact that this is true Israel, the home of the twelve tribes, each coming in through its appropriate gate even as they did in the Old Testament. But these twelve gates, as verse 14 tells us, have twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the apostles of the Lamb.

This means that this Jerusalem was built by God through upon the foundation of the apostles, those whom Christ appointed to proclaim His name and salvation to all of the nations of the earth. And this means that this is the home of true Israel, that is, of all of those who from every tribe and nation and tongue have responded to that apostolic Gospel of Jesus Christ with faith.

This is why we hear in verse 24 that “the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” and in verse 26 “They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” This Jerusalem is the home of all who heard and believed the Gospel, those who are the true twelve tribes of Israel in Jesus Christ, the true Son of Abraham. This point is also reinforced by the measurements of 12,000 stadia and 144 cubits (12 times 12).

And God shows us that this city, this bride-city, has great and high walls (verse 12). This indicates to us that no enemy will ever enter into it, nothing that can hurt or destroy us, nothing that is evil or defiling. God will ensure that His bride, His dwelling place, will be eternally holy, set apart to Him and to Him alone. This is reinforced by verse 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.”

Ezekiel saw this city in chapters 40-48 of his prophecy. Zechariah spoke of it. But the whole Old Testament told us it was coming, using earthly types and shadows. And in these last days, in and through Jesus Christ, it has come. Church of Jesus Christ, you are the bride. You are Israel. You are Jerusalem. God already dwells in your midst. His glory is already shining upon you and being reflected by you through the Spirit of Holiness.

This is who you are. This is who you are now by faith, and one day this is who and what you will be when God comes to perfect what He has begun in you. Already the nations are coming, the glory of the nations of this world, as people from every tribe, nation, and tongue turn away from their idols, from Babylon, and embrace Christ, becoming members of His church, the church of which He is the cornerstone, founded upon the apostolic Gospel.

And given that this is who you are and what you will be in Christ, live now accordingly. Believe what God has shown you here. Trust not in your own eyes or your own understanding, but in what He has revealed here to you. You might not see yourself in this way, a glorious bride, the dwelling place of God, but this is how God sees you in Christ.

Believe it, live it, protect it, and strive after and set your hope upon its consummation. Guard that which has been given to you. Be holy as you are and will be holy in Christ. Call the nations to 'come, and put away from your midst all that does not belong. Be the beautiful bride, the glorious city, that you are in Christ.

Amen