

“The New Jerusalem”

Revelation 21:10, 22 – 22:5

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We turn our attention today to one of the most profoundly *hopeful* passages in the entire Bible: John’s vision of “the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” We’re practically at the end of the book of Revelation, right at the end of the entire Bible. John has a vision of what will be, at the very end of the age, when Satan is defeated, when the dead are raised and judged, when heaven and earth cease to exist, when this complete era of existence comes to an end – God will start anew: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth,” says John. This time, it will be different. No more sin, no more evil, no more suffering, no more pain, no more death. A new beginning. A new ... *hope*.

Ever get discouraged in this world of ours? There is *so much* that is not right, *so much* that is not the way God wanted it to be. So much war, so much hate ... so many diseases, so much suffering ... so much poverty, so many people hungry ... so much injustice, so much greed, so much corruption ... so much deception, so many lies ... so many accidents, so many disasters ... so much stealing ... so much killing ... so many affairs, so much misconduct, so many victims ... so much depression, so much suicide ... every single week, it feels like we are hammered with more *bad news* ... will it ever *end*?

Yes. Yes, it will. This world as it exists right now, with all these stains, all these scars, all this suffering, all this sin – *this is not God’s vision for how the world should be*. God has a *better* future in mind. A *much* better future. God offers a promise; God offers hope: *It’s not going to be this way forever. I’m going to fix it. Mend it. Repair it. Cleanse it. Purify it. Make it ... wholly NEW.*

John has a vision of “the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” The vision gives us a little taste of what that will be like, strong indications of things that will be.

“See, the home of God is among mortals,” says the voice from the throne. “He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4) This is God’s second great act of creation. The first creation, back in Genesis 1, was *good, very good*. But all too quickly it became stained by sin. In this new creation, *that will not happen*. It’s not just going to be “good, very good.” This time, it’s going to be *perfect*.

Imagine a world with no more death. No more mourning for people you love. No more cremations, no more burials, no more funerals, no more hospice care. (I think we just put a lot of good

people out of work!) There's just *not going to be any more death*. If you remember, way back in Genesis 2, God had planted two special trees in the Garden: there was the tree of life, and there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were allowed to eat from the tree of life. That tree would have allowed them to live forever. But they chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge instead. One of the consequences of eating from the forbidden tree was that they no longer had access to the tree of life. Their days of living forever were gone. Humanity became *mortal*. *Death* entered the world. That had not been God's intent. John's vision reveals that in this *new* creation, the creation that is to come, *death is not even going to be an option*. "Death will be no more." Period. It's just *gone*.

And not just death. Everything that goes with it. "Mourning and crying and pain" will be gone too. No more sickness. No more disease. No more infections, no more viruses, no more tumors, no more medical conditions of *any kind*. No more hospitals, no more clinics, no more doctors, no more nurses, no more need for medical insurance. The entire health care industry just simply *won't be necessary*. (I think we just put a whole lot more good people out of work!) And, no more psychologists, no more psychiatrists, no more therapists. No more disorders, no more dementia, no more DSM-V. (More good people out of work!) *Health*. A perpetual state of *wellness*. Can you even imagine?!?

But wait, there's more. *No more sin*. Not everybody is going to get to live in this new city, this heavenly Jerusalem. "The cowardly, the unfaithful, the abhorrent, the murderers, the sexually indulgent, the drug dealers, the idolaters, all the liars" (Revelation 21:8) – people who do not repent of these things are not welcome in the city. God is going to *make sure* that no one who persists in these behaviors will be allowed in. The city is for the people who sincerely *want* to be God's faithful people.

That means – *no more sin*, of any kind. No more crime, no more corruption, no people who do harm or havoc to other people. So, therefore, no more jails, no more prisons, no more police, no more courts, no more lawyers, no more criminal justice system. (More good people out of work!)

What other professions *won't be necessary*? A lot of us will have to find a different line of work!

It's a glorious city, majestic, radiant, *splendorous*. In John's vision, it is made entirely of pure gold, clear as glass. There's a wall around it, made of jasper. The wall has twelve foundations, each adorned with a precious jewel. There are twelve gates, three on each side, and each gate is a pearl.

It's a huge city, utterly *massive*, about 1500 miles wide by 1500 miles long by 1500 miles high, maybe a cube, or a pyramid, or a fortress with tall spires – bigger than India, nearly as big as Australia; its top would stretch some *six times higher* than the orbit of the International Space Station; most of the city is outside our breathable atmosphere. It's *huge!* You can see why God would need to create a *new earth* – the current one couldn't hold it! Imagine all the *room*, all the *space* in this massive city!

Yet despite the enormous size of this city, it has no temple, no designated place for bringing offerings to God. Why not? "Its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb." God and Jesus *are* the temple. "God will dwell with them" – that's not just a metaphor. God will be *in the city*, *with* the people – *with us*. We will get to behold God and Jesus in their full, majestic splendor. Their radiance will be so bright we won't need the sun or moon or any other lights to see by. Everyone will be perpetually

illuminated by the light of God and Jesus, soaking up their rays, *eternally*. It's never going to get dark in there, never going to be night. I suppose that means there won't be any more beautiful sunrises or sunsets for us to enjoy, no more constellations to watch, no more shooting stars dancing across the night sky – but I'm inclined to think that will be okay. As beautiful and glorious as all of those things are, what we will behold will be even *more* beautiful and glorious than that. All those times when we have pulled out our camera to snap a picture of some beautiful image of creation – all those splendors are going to *pale* in comparison to the beauty and grandeur that await us to behold. Imagine being surrounded by the majestic beauty of Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, the Rockies, Santorini, the Serengeti, the Gallapagos Islands, the Great Barrier Reef – or, rather, being surrounded by something *better* than the majestic beauty of all those places, *all the time*. *Awe* doesn't even *begin* to describe it!

Does it sound boring? Some people think heaven will be boring. But *this*? Endless *beauty* to enjoy and appreciate? Glorious *wonders* to marvel at, day after day? That doesn't sound boring *at all*!

There will never be anything unclean in the city. No trash, no dumps, no landfills. No sewage, no wastewater, no need for any water treatment plants – more good people out of work. Our internal plumbing must work differently. And, John reiterates, *no sin of any kind*. *None* at all.

Plus, right down the middle of the city, a river. A grand, glorious river, more beautiful than any body of water you have ever seen, bright as crystal: the Water of Life. In the middle of the river, its roots stretching down on both banks, a majestic tree, the very same tree that God had planted in that Garden long ago: the Tree of Life. Just *one* special tree, not two, like there were in the Garden. No chance for anybody to eat from the wrong tree, either accidentally or on purpose. One tree, with twelve kinds of fruit, and adorned with glimmering leaves – leaves “for the healing of the nations.” Lord knows, there are a lot of nations that could use some healing, some *serious* healing. Ours, for one.

And, a throne. The throne of God and of the Lamb, the source from which the river flows. The Water of Life emanates from the throne. All the inhabitants of the city will get to *see God's face*. “No one has ever seen God,” John told us in his gospel (John 1:18). That will change. In the new city, we will *all* get to *see God's face*, to behold its grand magnificence, its great beauty and compassion.

“His name will be on their foreheads.” The Seal of God, inscribed on the foreheads of the Servants of God. Earlier in the vision, angels of God had marked the servants of God with a seal on their foreheads. Twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel – yes, there is hope for the people God chose first – and “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.” (Revelation 7:9) A simply *uncountable* multitude of God's faithful servants.

It is a glorious message of hope for God's faithful servants. It's not for everybody. Those who do not want to repent of their sin are *simply not welcome*. Those who are unwilling to bow down before the Lord God Almighty are *just not invited*. The city is for those who sincerely desire to *serve God*, the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This message of hope is *for them*. And what a message it is!

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