

The New Jerusalem

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn then once again to Revelation chapter 21 and look together for a little while at the description that's given to us between those verses that we read from verse 9 and on to chapter 22 and verse 5, and perhaps we could just look together if we're looking for something to hang this on.

We're looking at the three features of these chapters that we've been thinking about. We've seen, first of all, that the dwelling of God is with man. That's the first thing we looked at.

And then the second thing we saw was that the former things have passed away, and particularly this verse, this wonderful promise in verse 4, that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

That's what we saw last time. And the third feature in these verses is that all things have become new. And of course, all these three are interlinked and interwoven. You can't have one without the other, but it does help to identify them so that we can understand better the descriptions that are being given here. What we're saying really is this in the first place, that heaven is the everlasting union. When God says that the dwelling of God is with man, what He means is that heaven is the everlasting union between God and His new creation, and no separation between God and that creation. You remember that was the curse which came into the world when Adam and Eve chose to go their own way, that a separation came between heaven and earth. God became separated from people and from creation, and death and sickness and misery, and all the pain and the disappointment and the tragedies in this world came into the world as a result. But heaven is not only the reunification, but the perfect everlasting union between God and His new creation. Heaven is, in other words, is everything that we were meant to be and designed to be, in which we are given the freedom to be what we were always meant to be. And then, secondly, heaven is the destruction of the defective world in which you and I live, and all its miseries. The former things are passed away. And then, thirdly, heaven is a new beginning. All things are become new. Behold, I am making all things new. It's not just a return to the Garden of Eden. It's better than that. The Garden of Eden was only a garden. I shouldn't say only because it was God's perfect creation, but that's what it was. But here, God has now transformed that into a city, a city and a garden. We'll see in a few moments, I hope if we've got time, that the city does not preclude the garden. The garden is within the city. The garden and the city are one and the same thing. But the main difference, if you like to think precisely here, that whereas in God's first world, it was possible to sin and to destroy that world. Now, in chapter 21 and 22, when God says,

Behold, I make all things new, it is now impossible for anything defective or sinful to ever enter into that world. The Garden of Eden, it was possible for Adam and Eve to sin. They did sin, so therefore it was possible. But the God's promise for this creation is that nothing will ever spoil that creation again. And that's what God means when He says, Behold, I make all things new. But what is He told about this new creation? Well, we've already seen that it's not a brand new. It's not God having obliterated every single atom and molecule of this. God will strip away the current universe and will rebuild in perfection His own new heavens and His own new earth. We've already seen that it's a city. We've already seen that the city is coming down from God and something of what that meant. But I want us to look further now at the description that's given to us from verse 9 through to chapter 22 and verse 5, where the apostle is taken up into a high mountain and he's given the selective features of the city that

[5 : 31] God wants him to know about. Now, of course, if you and I were going to build our own heaven, this is one of the reasons I believe the Bible is true. Because it's not up to me to decide what heaven is. If it was up to me and you to decide what heaven is, it would probably be completely different from the description that is given here. We would build it around ourselves because we're sinful human beings.

Our first question would be to ask, What do I want? What would give me the pleasure? What would I like heaven to be like? That's the way that all our questions begin, isn't it? Because we're self-centered, we're selfish people, and we're looking for an easy and a happy life. But this description is centered and focused on God. That's why it is a place of happiness, because when we try and please ourselves, that pleasure doesn't last. It's selfish. It's on the wrong foundation. And that's why if you live your life tonight on the basis of what you want and what you think is best, when you try and take control of your own life and you think that you know what's best, it will come to failure. And you will not have the peace that you hoped for. You will not have the lasting joy that you hope because it's built on the wrong foundation. Jesus said that. It's like the man who builds his house on the sand. But when we listen to God and when we trust God, and here in this chapter, God is saying to us, Trust me, you will love this place like you've never loved any place before ever. And you will never want ever to be anywhere else. You will lack nothing. You will want for nothing. Your joy will be absolutely perfect.

And here in these chapters, he describes heaven, but it's in the language that he chooses to use. And that's important. It's not in the language that we would choose to use, because we would use a completely different set of parameters. But it's in the language, it doesn't even answer many of the questions that we would ask. We would ask a whole load of other questions, wouldn't we? About the details and the architecture and the structure, and what about this, and what about that, and will there be food in heaven, and will there be animals in heaven, and all the things that mean so much to us here in this world. Now, I don't know the answer to these questions. I don't know whether there'll be food in heaven. I don't know whether there'll be other life forms, and there could be. That doesn't mean, by the way, that your dog will be in heaven. That's a different thing altogether. But I don't know. God hasn't revealed to us exactly what he has planned for his perfect universe when he makes all things new.

But these are the questions that we would ask. But we have to trust God when he comes to us tonight, and he says, trust me, this place will be absolutely perfect. And that's what comes across as the very first feature of the new heavens and the new earth, that it is a perfect place. Now, I put it to you tonight that you and I simply cannot understand what that might mean, because we are not perfect. We do not live in a perfect world. Nothing that we do in this world, not even the greatest thing, the greatest activity that we do in this world is what we're doing tonight. We're coming collectively to meet with God and to sing his praises and to listen in faith to his word. And even then, you and I both know that what we're doing tonight is imperfect. It's full of our own selfishness and our own restlessness and our own dissatisfaction. We get dissatisfied even with what

God has done for us sometimes. We get tired of even the greatest things. Well, there will be none of that in heaven, because it will be a perfect place. And it will be perfect because you and I will have been made perfect. We will think differently. We will be released from the restrictions that tie us down in this world. But we will be released not to do what we want, but to do what God wants. And what we want will be what God wants. That's what we were created for in the first place. And that's why we're so miserable. Because what we want has become separated from what God wants. We've become disoriented, and we've become self-centered, self-worshipping, self-absorbed, and we'll never ever find what we're looking for if we try and find it in ourselves. We won't even find what we're looking for if we look for it in each other. We will only find what we're looking for when we come back to our Creator, and when we rediscover Him and come to know Him through Jesus Christ. And only then will we be, will our way be set, our compass will be set, our sat-nav will be set in the right direction, will no longer be lost, endlessly trying to find our way in this world, trying to figure out why we're here.

[10 : 53] But then we'll be in on the right direction, and that direction heads, it leads to the city that we've just been thinking about, a perfect city. And I want you tonight to think about what a perfect city would be like, a perfect place, an environment that will be absolutely flawless.

try and think about it, try. One in which we will not be inhibited or fearful, one in which we will not be tired and restless, one in which we will not be irritated and irritating, in which we will never ever tire and become fed up, and which even in this world the good things they come to an end, that won't be the case in heaven. Everything will be new, every moment will be a new moment, we will never lose that sense of wonder. A million years from the first moment will be just as wonderful as it was the first moment that we set our eyes on the glory of God. You see, we talk about the glory of God, we don't understand what that means, we've never seen it. And that's what takes faith. Faith is the evidence of things that are not seen. I believe in the glory of God. I've never seen the glory of God. But I believe that tonight that when I see the glory of God, that everything within me will be instantly and immediately satisfied. And I will, my breath will be taken away, and there will be all of a sudden, there will be a coming together of me and everything that I was meant to be.

That's what God has created us to be. And He will finally one do it. He will finally do it one day, but only by faith in Jesus Christ. Let me keep reiterating this. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, in the life. There is no other way. We said this, we sang this in Psalm 24, who shall ascend the hill of God? Who shall stand in His holy place? He says, He whose hands are clean and whose heart is pure.

Your hands are not clean. My hands are not clean. Your heart is not pure. My heart is not pure. How can it be possible for me to stand in the presence of God by Jesus Christ, who has cleansed me from all sin by His death on the cross? Tonight, in Christ, we have a promise. We can answer that question, who shall ascend the hill of God? You can put your hand up if you're a believer. You can say me.

When somebody asks you, but your hands are not clean, and your heart is not pure, I can say, but Jesus' hands are clean, and Jesus' hands are pure, and He has died the death that I should have died. He has become my sacrifice, and in Him, God has united me. He has united me to Jesus Christ, and so that tonight, I have that promise that amongst all that multitude of people, I believe that in Jesus, I'll be one of them. Not because I'm a minister, not because I've been a, not because I'm experienced, who knows what experience I have, not because I'm a good person, I'm not a good person, but because of Jesus Christ and what He has done for me. Now, I'm asking you tonight, one more time, because the time is short. You don't have all the time in the world. I'm asking you again tonight, what about you?

[14 : 37] What about, are you going? Will we all be there? Will we be there? Will I be saying to you, oh, it's just fantastic to see the Stornoway congregation. Nobody left out. Why should there be anybody left out? The only person who's going to leave you out is you, because you've had every opportunity. God has opened the door of heaven, and He said to you, strive, make every effort to enter in at the narrow gate, because broad is the way that leads to destruction, and narrow is the way that leads to life eternal. The way is open. Notice how there's so many gates in this city, and they're open. They're open today. The gate of heaven is open tonight for you to enter in.

And of course, you could say it's just a piece of nonsense. I believe, and I don't believe anything. Well, I'll leave that between you and the Lord. All I would ask is that you make very sure of what you believe. And I hope you're asking the right questions.

Well, now, so it's a perfect place, and it's a perfect fellowship of God's people. It's a perfect worship. It's a perfect life, the life that God gives, whatever that life will contain.

We don't know what people will be doing there throughout eternity. We read in chapter 7 that they are standing in front of the throne. That does not mean that they are standing endlessly.

It's symbolic. Once again, I'm told that the word for standing in chapter 7 means that they are serving, that they are doing service. And I believe that heaven will be a continuous doing and discovering and learning and finding fulfillment in ways that we have never found fulfillment before.

[16 : 41] It's not going to be some kind of static existence. We're not going to be like statues. God will bring fulfillment that we have never, ever had in this world, but we have to leave it until then to find out what that will be. There's so much that we cannot understand because we cannot, words simply cannot describe a life form and an existence that doesn't relate to this life.

And then I want us to notice also that not only is it perfect, but I want us to notice the description that's given to us here in this chapter. And I want us to notice in verses 12 to 14 of chapter 19, the fact that its walls and its foundations are founded on, first of all, the 12 apostles and the 12 tribes of Israel. Look at what it says. The 12 sons of Israel were inscribed on the gates and the wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were 12 names, the 12 apostles of the Lamb. Again, we're dealing here with symbolism. God is going back into the Bible and he's saying this is everything that the Old Testament looked forward to and the New Testament looked forward to. And here we have a coming together. Well, of course, the Old Testament came together with the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. The 12 tribes of Israel were chosen out of all the world in order to be God's people and to lead the way for God to send his own son. And everything looked forward to the coming of Jesus as the son of God. And the 12 apostles were the friends of Jesus, the servants of Jesus, whom God sent, who he sent into the world to preach the gospel. And here the whole thing comes together and there's a fulfillment of the promise that each one looked forward to. And so it's not that the names necessarily are physically inscribed, but God is drawing our attention to the importance of the gospel and the Bible as they look forward. This is God building on the foundation that he has already laid in the world. There's no temple there. You notice that there is no temple in the city. Verse 22, that's one of the main features of this new city. And this was quite strange to any Jewish person who was looking and asking the question, how can this be the city of God when there is no temple? Because the most prominent feature of Jerusalem for the Jewish people was the temple built by Solomon and rebuilt, of course, by Zerubbabel after the tribes of Israel came back again from captivity.

And for them, it was unthinkable to have a city of God. If you took the temple away, then there was no, it could not possibly be the city of God because it was God's plan that there'd be a temple in the first place. And here, which was a surprise to the Jewish person, there was no temple. But he explains why. For its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb. In other words, there was no need for a temple because the real thing was there.

You remember way back in Solomon's time, the temple was built to house, if you like, the glory of God in the most holy place. And when the temple was finished, there's this chapter in Chronicles that talks about the glory of God filling the temple. But you could only, the glory of God was only found, as it were, in one particular place deep within the temple, and no one was ever, ever allowed to enter into that place. But now, the glory of God is all over the city. There is nothing but the glory of God with unrestricted access. It's the same idea as, you remember, we looked at how high and wide and long the city was. 1,400 this way, 1,400 miles that way, 1,400. This is a massive city.

Anybody who thinks that heaven is a small place containing a tiny remnant of people is mistaken. But these numbers, again, symbolic, but they are massive. 1,400 miles each way, in each direction.

[21 : 14] But do you notice it's 1,400, 1,400, 1,400. What does that remind you? It's cube in its shape. Now, that's very important in the Bible. You go back to the Old Testament, and the cube was the shape of the holy place. Again, I spoke about it a few minutes ago, the place where God's glory was in the temple, and beforehand it was in the tabernacle. It was cubic in shape, and the cube represented the purity and the perfection and the holiness of God. And it told them two things, and there was almost a kind of contradiction in these two things. First of all, it told them that God was pleased to dwell and live among His people Israel. But, and there was a huge, huge but, nobody was ever allowed to go into the presence of God except the high priest once a year, and only for a few moments. The people were not allowed to enter into the near presence of God. In other words, although God was their God, and He dwelt amongst them, yet they were not allowed near Him. Now, that was a contradiction, wasn't it? It had to be, because their sin separated them from God. But now there is no sin, and now the glory of God is everywhere, and His people are part of that glory. They enter into the presence of God. There's no place where the presence of God isn't. You see, we cannot possibly understand what that, because, because no man, as far as this world is concerned, can see God and live.

Even Moses wasn't allowed to see the face of God. But here, because sin is taken away once and for all, and because we've been perfected, and all the impurities, we'll have new bodies, glorified bodies, then we'll be able to enter into the presence of God. I cannot imagine what that must be like.

All I know is this, that there was one or two people in the Bible that just got a little bit close to it. Peter, for example, when Jesus took him up the mountain of transfiguration, and when all of a sudden something incredibly strange happened to Jesus, He started shining like the sun. That was something of His glory, as much of His glory as it was possible for anyone in this world to see. And when Peter saw what the glory of Jesus was, something happened to Peter that had never, ever happened to him before. He experienced something that was truly unique. He did not want ever to go anywhere else. He wanted to stay there for the rest of his life, and that's what it will be in God's new kingdom. The glory of God will be everywhere. That's why there's no temple. That's why there's no tabernacle, because the city and God will be one and the same thing, even in the beauty.

And look at the precious stones that adorn the city. The pearl, the clearest crystal, jasper. It's radiance like a most rare jewel, a high, great wall, and its gates were pearls. And the foundations of the wall were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelians, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase. And I believe that that's God's way of just describing splendor as we have never seen it ever in. I don't know what symbolism there is in all these different precious stones. I know that they were found on the breastplate of the high priest in the Old Testament, each one of them symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel next to the high priest's heart, and they were next to God's heart, symbolizing the love that God had for His people next to His heart. And that, of course, will be revealed as never before in perfection. Not that God's love isn't perfect, but we don't perceive it as we ought to in this world. And God the Lord is using these symbolic characters to simply convey to us that the splendor of this place not only will be as we have never seen it before, but it will reflect the splendor of God.

Reflect it. See, I feel so inadequate speaking like this. I can't find words. I don't know. I perhaps don't have the command of the English language, but then again, I don't know if there are words in the English language that can possibly describe adequately. I want to tell you, but I'm not entirely sure if I know myself and I'm not entirely sure of this chapter. It does not give a comprehensive description, but it gives us enough so that by faith we will lay hold upon this tremendous promise and that we will know what God's plan is. One of the things I find absolutely fascinating is verse 24 in chapter 21, verse 24 and verse 26, and I'm going to close with this. I'm going to finish with this.

[27 : 00] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Verse 26, they will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Why do I find that fascinating? Well, for several reasons. First of all, because I try to pretend to be a Jewish person reading that, and I think I feel very uncomfortable if I'm a Jewish person reading that, because I think we are God's people, and the nations of this world, the heathen nations of this world, they've got nothing to do with God. God's left them out of His covenant. But why is then, in this perfect city of God, why is God welcoming people who are not Jews into this city? That's the way they thought in the time that John was writing. But this is the promise of the gospel.

That's why Jesus said to His disciples, He said to them, go into all the world, all the world, and make disciples of all nations. Here is the fulfillment of that promise.

And here is all the world. Now, I don't mean every single person. I've just said, the Bible says clearly, not every single person will be there. Those who don't believe and trust in Jesus Christ will not be there. But people from every race and color and tribe and ethnic group, why are they there?

Because they have heard the gospel that you and I are commanded to bring to every nation in the world. Go into all the world, said Jesus, and make disciples of every nation. I want you to think about this tonight. I want you to think that the kings of the earth, and you remember that earlier on in Revelation, the kings of the earth are those who were opposed to God. Many of them are, and many of them always will be. And yet, there are some of them who are in the city. They have been kings of the earth, and they are now in God's city, and they're bringing their glory and their honor into the city with them, because how have they got there? How did they come to end up in the city of God? Because they've been born again. They've heard the gospel. How did they hear the gospel? Because someone went to them and shared Jesus with them. Someone who was fearful, someone who put their life on the line, someone who perhaps was persecuted because they were a Christian, and yet the result of all that suffering was that the kings of the earth, they came and they trusted, they read their Bible, they saw that Jesus was the truth, and their life was changed when they came to faith in him. People from all over the world, black, white, brown, yellow, wherever they are. That's an interesting question, isn't it? Will Chinese people still be Chinese people in heaven? Will Scots people still be Scots people in heaven? Will Indians still have the same color and the same facial recognition and facial features in heaven? I believe they will. I believe that that's part of what this means, that the nations of the world will bring. What right do we have to say that everybody's going to look like us? If anything, they should all look like Jesus. He was a Jew. And we will look like Jesus in our glorified body. But here we have the nations of the world. They will bring their honor into it. They will pay homage to the king. His name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall. The nations of the world will gather in all their millions and millions and they will worship Jesus one day. And it's all because, in part, you have supported the work of the gospel. You've prayed. You've taken an interest, not just in what happens here, but what happens worldwide. Every element of interest you take in mission all over the world, God will bless.

[31 : 21] And this will be the result. You'll never see the result of that on this side of eternity. But there's a promise. By its light will the nations walk and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

What a promise. It's God's promise. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Let's pray.