

The Glory of the New Jerusalem, part 3

Revelation 22:1-5

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-10-14

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Text

22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2 in the middle of her street. And on either side of the river was a tree of life producing twelve fruits, yielding each month's fruit monthly; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 There will be no accursed thing there, but the throne of God and of the Lamb are in her, and His slaves will minister to Him. 4 They will see His face and His name is on their foreheads. 5 Night will not exist there and they will need neither lamp nor sunlight, because the Lord God illuminates them. And they will reign forever and ever.

I. Introduction

This is our third snapshot of the New Jerusalem, and this shows us the main city-square. The picture in your outline definitely does not do it justice. It's one artist's rendition of looking through one of those round gates of pearl that is open. But you can sort of think of this as downtown New Jerusalem.

When I am traveling through some major cities in the USA, I try to avoid the downtown areas since they tend to be dangerous and a bit scary. One time I got off on the wrong exit and got lost and ended up in a gang infested area. And there was a group of youths blocking my way. At least one had a baseball bat. I gunned it and drove the car straight through the group and stuck my head down and other than a dent or two, made my way through. I didn't hit anybody, but neither was I going to stop. But I tended to avoid unknown downtown areas after that. Somehow downtown is not attractive to me. Even if they are perfectly safe and not scary, I tend to avoid them to avoid the traffic congestion.

I don't think you are going to want to avoid this downtown. This is where God's throne is located. You are going to be drawn to it like a magnet. And it is going to be much more beautiful than the picture shows. Down the middle of the massive street is a massive river of life with a beautiful boulevard of trees on either side. It's a garden city. No earthly city can even remotely compete with the lights and sights of this beautiful city of God. So this is part three of our tour through the glories of the New Jerusalem.

II. This is a garden city (vv. 1-2)

Previously we have primarily looked at the outside of the city. But now we

are given a peak into the heart of the city - God's throne room. And what is surprising about this downtown area is that it is a garden. The painting I have included does not show that very well, but many commentators have described it as a lush garden city, where at least parts of the city represent a kind of Garden of Eden.

A. *The river of life*

Verse 1 says, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life..." Almost everyone says that the symbols on earth are faint reflections of this heavenly river. Eden for example was on a high mountain-top plateau with a river watering the garden that was on top of the plateau, and then going out of the garden spilling over the four sides of the mountain to water the whole earth. We aren't told what the heavenly water is for - we assume that it has some function parallel to or similar to the use of water on earth. But certainly what it symbolizes is the same - it symbolizes the Holy Spirit bringing life and refreshment. Keep in mind that the New Jerusalem with its river of life was already established in the first century. Our dead relatives and friends are already experiencing the glories of the New Jerusalem.

And if this water symbolizes the Holy Spirit flowing from God's throne through the garden city and out into the world (just like the garden of Eden did), then there is a gradual transformation of the planet spiritually that was happening in history. Apart from the Holy Spirit, there can be no life. And apart from the Holy Spirit, even those who already have life will not have ongoing transformation. That is what is being symbolized. Just as the water of life flows continually, the Holy Spirit must be continually active in our lives.

Jesus applied this to individuals this way in John 7:

John 7:37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

So if each individual has rivers of living water flowing from him into the lives of others, can you imagine what a whole community of faith can have? Faith receives of the heavenly water and disburses that water to others.

That's exactly what verse 17 of our chapter will say happens in history. There is an invitation to each one of us to drink of those waters. Jesus compared even the water that the Samaritan woman had been drawing from the well to the Holy Spirit in John chapter 4, saying,

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water... Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

It is beautiful imagery of the life and refreshment and garden-producing transformation that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Let me give you one more background passage. It is Ezekiel 47. The stream that flowed out of the temple in Ezekiel 47 was based on the fact that historically the temple had an artesian well under it that provided water for the temple and for the city as it flowed eastward. Psalm 46:5 speaks of “a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High” (John 7:10,13-14). So in terms of symbology, that is some of the background.

So which water is flowing here? Is it literal water or spiritual water? In one sense we don't need to know because either way (whether symbol or the thing symbolized) it points to the need for the Holy Spirit in our lives for all of eternity. I tend to think it is always both literal and symbolical in the book of Revelation. So I think that there will be a literal river of water in heaven. And the water appears to keep getting recycled with heaven's own hydrological system. And I don't see why it can't be literal. Jesus was pointing to literal water being poured out by priests in John 7 in order to point to the Holy Spirit. He was pointing to the water the woman had drawn from the well to point to the Holy Spirit. Eden had both a literal river as well as being a symbol of the need for the Holy Spirit for Adam and Eve to be able to take dominion even before the Fall. But Ezekiel 47 is particularly strong in having both, but in smoothly transitioning from the literal to the purely spiritual.

I'll have you turn there, because Ezekiel 47 is one of the most powerful of the background passages that stands behind this image in Revelation 22. In my Esther series I showed how the temple of Ezekiel 40-47 was the literal temple that Ezra and Nehemiah built and that later got added to by Herod. And in my Acts series I showed that Pentecost was poured out in that literal temple, so that when people left the temple filled with the Holy Spirit, they took the Spirit of Pentecost with them into the world just as literal water went out of the temple and into the world. So let me start reading at verse 1.

Ezek. 47:1 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. 2 He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.

Was this part literal? I believe so. And if not, it was at least symbolized by the literal water that flowed out of temple in the first century. The Gihon Spring was a siphon spring that had sufficient force to push water up Warren's Shaft and into the temple. This assumes of course, that George Wesley Buchan,¹ Ernest Martin,² and others are correct in locating the temple over the Gihon Spring rather than a little further northwest where the Dome of the Rock or Haram al-Shariff currently stands. I pointed out in a previous sermon that there are four theories for the location of the temple, even among Jews. Obviously there is heated debate on this - most of it politically driven. But virtually all of the Biblical and historical evidence points to the fact that the huge platform area of Haram al-Shariff is the remnants of Fort Antonia and the temple was immediately southeast of it but right next to it. Let me give a brief rabbit trail and tell you why I believe this, because, once you understand where the literal temple was, then the symbols make perfect sense.

There are crystal clear historical sources proving that the Gihon spring was under the temple. Aristeas reported to King Ptolemy in the 2nd century BC his own eyewitness account of the glories of the temple. In one place in that letter he said, "And there is an inexhaustible supply of water, because an abundant natural spring gushes up from within the temple area." (Aristeas 89). You don't have any spring in the place where the Dome of the Rock is. But on the oldest theory of the temple's location you do. Anyway, Aristeas said that this vast water supply was carried under the temple through an intricate array of pipes that dumped water into cisterns and eventually flowed out of the temple and into the city and providing all the water that the city needed. What a wonderful symbol of the whole city being supplied by water from the temple - the earthly replica of the throne room of God. It's an incredible symbol. But Aristeas' description does not fit the theory that places the temple on the Dome of the Rock. That area is dependent on rain water or water brought in by hand. Aristeas pointed out that some of the water supply under the temple flowed to the area for sacrifices and was used to wash away the blood of sacrifices so quickly that he said the blood was removed in "the twinkling of an eye" out through a different sewer system.³

1 George Wesley Buchanan, "In Search of King Solomon's Temple," Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, PO Box 25000, Portland, OR 97298-0990.

2 Dr. Ernest Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*. Portland: ASK Publications, 2000.

3 This portion of the account is important. It says, "There are moreover wonderful and indescribable cisterns underground, as they pointed out to me, at a distance of five furlongs all round the site of the temple, and each of them has countless pipes so that the different streams converge together. And all these were fastened with lead at the bottom and at the sidewalls, and over them a great quantity of plaster had been spread, and every part of the work had been most carefully carried out. There are many openings for water at the base [of the altar] which are invisible to all except to those who are engaged in

So even the sacrificial area was always pristinely clean. I always wondered how they got rid of the blood; well, he describes it. And the water stream was loud enough that it could be heard running underfoot as you walked throughout the temple. And there are Scriptures that speak of the noise of many waters under God's throne (Ps. 29:3; 93:4; Rev. 19:6). Well, Aristeas describes the sound of many waters under the temple.

The Book of Enoch, written around the same time, also mentions a stream flowing under the temple (see 1 Enoch 26:2-3).

The Roman historian Tacitus said that the temple "contained an inexhaustible spring."⁴

These are all eyewitness accounts that modern establishment scholars ignore - and have to ignore if they are going to hold to the Dome of the Rock being the location for temple. That is impossible, and during the first thousand years nobody believed that. And in the Jewish literature there are numerous references to the need for flowing water, or living water, to supply all the ceremonial cleansings of the temple.⁵ Cisterns were not sufficient. Clearly Leviticus demanded running water (see Lev. 14:5,51; 15:13; etc).

But what the inspired Scripture itself says about the water under the temple is most noteworthy. These verses do not make sense if the temple was on the spot of the Dome of the Rock. Psalm 87:7 speaks of springs of water (יְצִוּן) being in Zion. Psalm 29:10 says that "the Lord sits enthroned over the flood" (ESV; see NIV, NET, NAB, Geneva, Amplified, LXX, etc). So that would imply that the mercy seat and Holy of Holies was over a flood of waters. In fact, verse 3 says that He is over the waters (plural). Joel 3:18 says, "a fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD." Psalm 46:4 says, "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High." The literal river of waters that flowed from the temple⁶ symbolized the Spirit that would flow from the temple at

the ministration, so that all the blood of the sacrifices which is collected in great quantities is washed away in the twinkling of an eye." (The Letter of Aristeas 1:89-90)

4 The History of Tacitus, Book V, 12. See <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/histories.html>

5 For example, the Temple Scroll says, "Above the house of the ... when they come to minister in the sanctuary. You shall make a trench around the laver beside its house and the trench shall go [from the house of] the laver to a cavity. It shall descend [rapid]ly to the ground where the water shall flow and disappear. It shall not be touched by any man for it is mingled with the blood of the holocaust." Mishnay Middoth 3:2 says, "And at the south-western corner there were two holes like two narrow nostrils by which the blood that was poured over the western base and the southern base used to run down and mingle in the water-channel and flow out into the brook Kidron"

6 On the physical location see 2 Chron. 23:10-11; 1 Kings 1:38,39; 2 Sam. 6:17; Ezek. 47:1ff. On how this spring symbolized living waters, see Zech. 14:8; Joel 3:16-18; Is. 30:19-26; see symbols Psalm 36:7-9; 46:3,5; 65:4,9; 93:1-5.

Pentecost.

In any case, Psalm 48:1-3 says that the temple was on the north side the old city of David. We know where the old city was, and this would place the temple exactly where it needs to be to have this spring. That then makes sense of the fact that David placed the tent of the tabernacle next to the Gihon Spring. Likewise, Solomon was anointed by the Gihon Spring right next to that tent (1 Kings 1:38-39). And Solomon planned to build the temple in the same location.

Well, back to Ezekiel 47. The literal flow of water out of one of the gates (the East gate) symbolizes Pentecost falling on the disciples gathered in an upper room of the temple premises, and as they left that east gate, they took the Spirit with them since they were filled with the Spirit. And the flow of the Spirit grew larger and larger until it is destined to fill the world with Spirit-filled Christians. Continuing to read at verse 3.

Ezek. 47:3 And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. 4 Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. 5 Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

So this is obviously now describing a miraculous river. He has fluidly moved from symbol to the thing symbolized - the healing influence of the Holy Spirit. He continues to describe this healing using symbolic language from earth.

6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. 7 When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. [Note that phrase - "very many trees on one side and the other."] 8 Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region [the eastern region was the desert region; the pagan region. So it symbolizes the Gospel going way beyond Israel], goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. 9 And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. 10 It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. 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."

So you can see the tree of life symbolism as well as the water of life

symbolism that is used in Revelation 22. How much is literal and how much is symbolic is hard to make out sometimes because Scripture often moves fluidly between the symbol and that which is symbolized; between the sign and the thing signified. If the river symbolized Pentecost, then the river of life brings life in history as the Spirit transforms the planet. But the point of this chapter is that the Spirit is needed for all eternity. We will always need Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So back to Revelation 22.

The next phrase in Revelation 22 says that the river of water of life was “bright as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of her street.” Bright as crystal indicates that this is not stagnant water, but pure spring water. And it symbolizes the purity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings refreshment and life.

And it proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The Spirit only works what the Father has decreed and what the Lamb has purchased. There is no division or tension or contradiction between the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That’s important to understand because there will always be tension and contradiction if you hold to four point Calvinism instead of the more Biblical five point Calvinism. On four point Calvinism the Father’s decretive work contradictory to that of the Son and the Spirit. But here we see that what the Holy Spirit does is to carry out the will of Father and Son. And because the Son is highlighted as the Lamb, the focusing is on Christ’s atonement being applied by the Holy Spirit. In the very area of redemption all three are united in purpose. It is not that one is trying to save the whole world and the others are trying to save only the elect. There is a perfect consistency in redemption with the Father’s eternal plan.

But the last phrase of the sentence, which is the first tiny section of verse 2, is “in the middle of her street.” Some have connected that phrase with the next sentence because it doesn’t make sense to them to have the river flowing in the street. But I think that is clearly the meaning and Pickering captures that well in his translation. This means that the river is flowing right in the middle of the street with street and trees on both sides of the river. This may indicate that our very walk must be characterized by the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Holy Spirit empowers all that is done in heaven, and He should be empowering all that we do in our daily walk down here below. But it appears that the water flows down the street and is then diverted into every part of the city, and then flows out of the city. This is much like what happened in the Garden of Eden, where the river flowed out of the center of the garden and flowed down the four sides of the mountain plateau to water

the world. Just as water is conserved and reused through evaporation and rain in our earthly hydrological system, it appears that there is some kind of a hydrological cycle that is self-contained while the New Jerusalem is in heaven. We are not told what that cycle is, but the water never stops flowing.

B. The trees of life

The next phrase in verse 2 moves on to describe another aspect of this garden-city - the trees. “And on either side of the river was a tree of life producing twelve fruits, yielding each month’s fruit monthly; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

There are three things that have puzzled people. First, how can there be one tree (singular), and yet it be on both sides of the river? And the most satisfactory answer is given by Beale,⁷ Thomas,⁸ Aune,⁹ Lenski,¹⁰ and many others who say that this is a collective tree. In other words, it is an orchard or forest of trees that derives from one tree. This interpretation is strengthened by the symbols of many trees along the river that we read in Ezekiel 47, the lack of an article here, and the literal rendering of “on either side of the river” as “from here and from there” - in other words, the tree of life is here, there, and everywhere along the river. The river is lined with the tree of life. In my mind’s eye I see far more trees than you see in that picture of your outline. I see a lush forest expanding out from the river. If this is true (and the exegesis that these commentators give is fairly convincing to me), then Beale says that this makes the eternal paradise far more than paradise restored; it is paradise exponentially improved because of grace. You are moving from one tree of life in the original garden to the tree of life having spread everywhere. The tree of life symbolizes the cross of Christ, from which life flows. And so, the literal tree and fruit acts as a beautiful symbol of the spiritual realities that flow from redemption. I love these three

7 Beale, for example, says, “The allusion to Ezek. 47:12 supports a picture of trees growing on either side of the river, so that the singular “tree” of 22:2 is likely a collective reference to “trees.” A collective interpretation is consistent with Ezekiel’s picture of trees growing on both sides of the river bank, and it is in line with the logic of the picture in Rev. 22:1–2 (how could one tree grow on either side of the river?). The absence of the article may point further to a collective meaning. The one tree of life in the first garden has become many trees of life in the escalated paradisaic state of the second garden (for OT and Jewish references to a future escalated temple in contrast to the old temple see on 21:22). But since these trees are all of the same kind as the original tree, they can be referred to from the perspective of their corporate unity as “the tree of life” (so 2:7).” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1106.

8 Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation 8–22 An Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995.

9 Aune, David E. *Revelation*. Word Biblical Commentary, Vols. 52a and 52b, edited by Ralph p. Martin. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997 and 1998.

10 Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963.

snapshots of the New Jerusalem!! They give you a little bit of a feel of the glories that we can anticipate.

There are differing views on whether the monthly fruit is twelve crops of the same fruit produced monthly or whether it is twelve different kinds of fruit produced month by month. Aune, Sweet, Ladd, and others say that it is twelve different kinds of fruit, whereas Beckwith, Caird, Mounce, and others say that it bears twelve monthly crops of the same fruit. I tend to think it is twelve crops of the same fruit just like it is numerous trees of the same tree, but am not dogmatic on that point. Whatever the literal fruit might be, commentators are generally agreed that it symbolizes the constancy of God's provision which never ends. There is always more generous provision for the saints.

But there is one more issue of debate. The fact that there are months may be another indication that there actually may be a moon. Many commentators deny that there will be a moon, and previously I leaned in that direction for a while. But commentators who insist there will be no moon say that John is here using earthly language to describe something that does not exist. That does not make sense. The language clearly indicates that there will be months and progression of time - which directly contradicts the theory that some people have had that in eternity all concepts of time will end and we will no longer be subject to time. But that is actually a heresy; it would make us divine. God alone is above time and not subject to time. All other creatures are part of creation, and to be part of creation is automatically to be limited by time and space. We can't experience the past, present, and future at the same time like God can anymore than we can be everywhere at the same time. Nor can we experience total timelessness like God does.

And people object, "Well, doesn't Revelation 10:6 say that time will be no more?" No, it doesn't. Even the KJV (from which people get this idea), and which says, "there should be time no longer" does not mean (in the English of that day) that time will no longer exist, but means that time has run out before judgment falls. It does after all take place in history, and on every interpretation there is some history after that verse. So virtually every version translates that phrase as there being no more delay for judgment on God's part or time running out before judgment. Only God is not subject to succession of moments. We will experience months (however those are ticked off) and some kind of sequence of time. It's part of our creaturehood. It is so important that we get this theological point correct. There are bad implications of denying it.

Finally, it mentions that the leaves of the tree were intended for the healing of the nations. And people use this to try prove that the events of this vision take place in history, not eternity. But we saw that every snapshot is looking from the perspective of eternity back at what Jesus has accomplished over the previous thousands of years. There is no verb here by which you can tell time. It just points to the purpose of the leaves. As Beale points out, “Just as the tears that God will wipe away refer not to pains being endured throughout eternity but to a once-for-all relief from such pains (see 21:4; 7:16–17), so it is likewise here.”¹¹ All through history God’s grace was bringing healing, but as eternity begins, there is a final healing of memories. Tears are wiped away, disease is wiped away, emotional pain is wiped away - there will be a final healing that culminates thousands of years of healing. After that first day of eternity, there will be no more disease or pain that will need healing.

But if the literal leaves are symbols of spiritual healing, it implies that there are healing properties in at least some literal leaves - and I am talking about healing in the physical realm (medicine). Certainly the tree of life in the literal Garden of Eden had healing properties. That was why it was such a blessing when God prevented Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life after they sinned and living forever. Who would want to live forever in a state of sin and misery? So God sent an angel to guard the garden that they had been kicked out. Perhaps the same angel shows John the way to the forest of the tree of life. We are not told.

But some people speculate that the use of this metaphor implies that even in history there are some literal trees that bring literal healing and that serve as medicine. And that is possible. Ezekiel 47:12 speaks of the leaves of trees as medicine - and that symbol was during history. And other passages speak of healing oils and sap from trees and plants. It makes sense that the literal could have healing properties if it symbolizes the healing of the cross. If there never have been any leaves of trees that have ever brought healing, they would make a lousy symbol of the spiritual healing that the cross brings. So I think that it is a worthwhile aspect of dominion to discover the medicinal qualities of plants. Actually, pharmaceuticals have done that for a number of years. The problem that sometimes happens is that the chemical has a different effect when it is isolated from the rest of the plant. But I think a great deal more work needs to be done in this area.

¹¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1108.

But ultimately the focus of this passage is on Jesus and not on the symbol. The cross of Christ, gave healing and life in history, and will be the basis for life throughout eternity. Outside of Christ we are nothing, but inside of Christ we have everything that we need for life and godliness. In history the saints are a people in process of healing; in eternity they will give thanks for the cross for having been healed forever.

So the bottom line is that these two verses pick up the themes of paradise and show that though paradise was lost in Genesis, it will be regained and surpassed in eternity. Even though the temple of the Old Testament had images of a garden all through it, this garden-city will far surpass the life that was in that earthly temple.

III. This is a cosmopolitan city (v. 2b)

The next point is that this is a cosmopolitan city. Verse 2 ends with the word “nations.” Even in eternity there will be nations. Believe it or not, there are a lot of people who deny this. Chapter 21 said that there will be nations serving Christ and kings of nations likewise doing so through all eternity. So what makes them different nations? It appears that some of what differentiates nations on earth will continue to differentiate nations in heaven. Will they retain their different skin colors? Possibly. I tend to think so. Will they retain their different languages? I don’t think so. Last time I gave evidence from Zephaniah that they will lose their languages and all will speak one purified language. Will they have different cultural traditions? Possibly. I tend to think so. But however you analyze the concept of nations, in some way national identity will seem to continue into eternity. That much I think is clear.

And if it continues into eternity, we should not object to it continuing in time. I think this speaks to both extremes that have been presented on Facebook recently on the issue of Kinism versus obliteration of nations. In some people’s overreaction to extreme Kinism that does not allow fellowship of nations within a local church and does not allow for intermarriage, we should not go to the opposite extreme and disparage differences among nations and cultures and hope to eventually obliterate all genetic and cultural distinctions. I think that is misguided. This will be a cosmopolitan city, which shows both the preservation of nations as well as the fellowship of nations, thus avoiding both extremes. To be cosmopolitan means to be at ease or at home all over the world and in every nation and without any prejudices against national or cultural ideals. This eternal ideal should have a magnetic pull upon our lives where we both value cultures as

well as integrate cultures into one church.

Of course there will be no flag waving sense of superiority of one nation above another. Their focus will be God-centered and grace driven. All the tensions that tend to divide cultures and nations today will dissolve in unity in heaven - unity in diversity. And we should model this unity in diversity on earth. National walls, enmity, pride, and hostility will be healed. Only that which has made it through God's judgment fires and has been cleansed by Christ's grace will make it into heaven. But whatever is purified, enhanced, and glorified from various cultures will be eternally appreciated by all.

And the take-home I have from this is that our churches should reflect a multi-cultural perspective to some degree if we have tasted richly of God's purposes of grace. And no, not all multiculturalism is Marxist. In fact, Marxism has tended to produce the exact opposite of multiculturalism. Some of the most nationalistically oriented statistists have been Marxist and have been radically monocultural. China took the monoculturalism to such an extreme under Mao that everyone was forced to wear the same drab uniforms. But what does grace do? Grace makes us go beyond what we are used to. It makes us go beyond our comfort zones into expressing appreciation for the rich diversity that grace has produced within the kingdom. Every tribe, kindred, and tongue should come together to worship the Lamb according Revelation 5:9. And you can't write off that admonition as being only an ideal that applies to eternity. In context it is clearly referring to history. How do I know that? Because it mentions different languages in this united worship. Since tongues (plural) won't last into eternity (and I proved that last time), it means that chapter 5 and chapter 14 are both calling for the church to be cosmopolitan in history (while multiple languages are still around), and not simply in eternity (when multiplicity of languages are abolished). The eternal goal should be a magnetic pull upon us now that makes us appreciate other nations and cultures.

IV. This is a curse-free city (v. 3a)

Verse 3 goes on to show that this is a curse-free city. "There will be no accursed thing there..." Again, this shows that John is looking at the New Jerusalem on the first day of eternity. No curse will be evident. All aspects of the curse will be banished from the universe as heaven is merged with earth.

But if the city shows a magnetic draw upon the elect; if this is the final goal of the Gospel, then we should be making progress towards that curse-free goal even during history. Some people feel that it is fighting against God to

fight against the curse of genetic mutation and disease through medicine. They claim that we must be passive and not try to reverse infertility through technology. But sickness is a part of the curse, and it is appropriate to prayerfully seek to reverse every aspect of the curse in history. Death is the only enemy that won't be conquered prior to the Second Coming, according to 1 Corinthians 15. Indeed, in past weeks we have seen that the more pervasively the Gospel spreads through the world, the more of the curse will be removed in history. God wants that to happen. There is an inverse relationship between the holiness of a culture and the amount of curse that can be seen. Eventually there will be no more war. Isaiah guarantees it. Isaiah says that animals will become less vicious until even the most dangerous animals and snakes will eventually be safe around humans. Disease will be removed. People will live longer. There is no reason to think that the curse will not be more and more pushed back as planet earth is more and more saved and characterized by grace and holiness. Every career that reverses some facet of the curse can be engaged in humanistically (and sometimes in violation to God's law - especially in genetic studies and artificial fertilization) or can be engaged in to God's glory. Even technology is a part of God's plan for reversing the curse. I'm glad for air conditioners, computers, and modern medicine. Scientists are discovering ways to reverse some of the genetic mutations and deteriorations that have been happening in history. But obviously in eternity this will be a 100% curse-free city.

V. This is the capital city (vv. 1b, 3b)

But both verses 1 and 3 give hints that this is the capital city of the world and the universe. Verse 1 speaks of "the throne of God and of the Lamb" being in the midst of this city. Verse 3 repeats that thought by saying, "but the throne of God and of the Lamb are in her." If this is the throne room of both Christ and God, it is the capital city.

Which implies what? That this city will be a model for other future cities and places of industry and exploration. Just as God's Garden of Eden was a model for how man was to take dominion of the rest of the world, this city made without hands is a model for redeemed mankind. It appears from 21:24 that the nations will be bringing their dominion into the city - perhaps by way of tithe or gift to their beloved King. In my mind's eye I imagine people coming back to the city after a long absence and excitedly telling Jesus about their discoveries and the new exploits of dominion that they have taken, and Jesus saying, "Well done, well done." If they are bringing dominion, glory, or honor into the city, it means they have been exercising this dominion

outside the city. And the new heavens and new earth passages of Isaiah 11, 65, and 66 confirm this. Those passages show that nations will be working on the planet with animals, building houses, planting vineyards, and in other ways taking dominion. In the parable of the Minas in Luke 19, Jesus said that some of his servants will rule over ten cities, some will rule over five cities and others will not rule over any cities. But the very mention of cities (plural) in eternity shows me that the New Jerusalem is not the only city. It is the capital over the universe.

It would not surprise me if people move out from the New Jerusalem in order to take dominion over the earth with division of labor and specialization. When they report back they will have their own mansions that they can stay in for a worship and training retreat. It wouldn't surprise me if there are other worlds to explore and to take dominion over. After all, we will have eternity (endless years) in which to take dominion on behalf of our King. This New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven on the first day of eternity, and people will finally be able to explore beyond it. Right now they can't explore beyond it, but I'm sure they have plenty to explore within it. But saints right now are restricted to the New Jerusalem. Once it settles on earth, that will no longer be the case. There will be travel, eternal expansion, development, dominion, research, and learning. That's my theory. In any case, it is clear that this is the capital city - the place of God's throne room.

VI. This is a city of fellowship (v. 4a) and belonging (v. 4b)

Next, it is a city of fellowship and belonging. The fellowship is seen in the words, "They will see His face," and the belonging can be seen in the words, "and His name is on their foreheads."

One of the longings of the human heart is to erase anything that alienates us from our loved ones. It grieves us when there is alienation. And the Old Testament expresses the removal of alienation from God as being able to see God's face and having His countenance shine upon us (Ps. 11:4-7; 27:4; Ps. 42:2). Psalm 16:11 says, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." We will not run from God's presence as Adam and Eve did. Clothed in the righteous robes of Christ we will long for God's presence and have incredible joy and pleasure in His presence.

Well, if that is one eternal goal for our lives, we should press into God's fellowship right now. We should long for and be motivated to have fullness

of joy in His presence. Jesus has perfect fellowship with Father and Spirit, and 1 Corinthians 1:9 says that we have been called into the fellowship that the Son has. That's incredible - the same fellowship that the Son now has with the Father, we can have with the Father. We are being called into that? Do you answer to that call?

But it is also a city of belonging. We all want to belong. Well, God in effect will brand His name on our foreheads so that we will joyfully never doubt that we belong to Him and He belongs to us. But this metaphor not only shows ownership and belonging; it shows likeness. We will be fully living out our image of God; our likeness of God in the way that we serve Him.

Do you wish you had an Abba Father relationship with God? Then ask for it. Be filled with the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of adoption. He is your heritage.

VII. This is a city of light (v. 5)

Next, this reiterates what we saw last time - that this will be a city of light. Verse 5 says, "Night will not exist there and they will need neither lamp nor sunlight, because the Lord God illuminates them." Since this city is 1500 miles long, wide, and high, there would need to be another lighting system than that of the sun and moon because the sun and the moon will be outside that city. But the presence of the light of God Himself is an incredible blessing.

There is nothing more frightening than to be in pitch darkness under the earth while spelunking and find your flashlight go out; or to be in pitch darkness in a mining accident - no sound and no light and away from the presence and fellowship of others. And there is something very comforting about lying in the warmth of the sun on a beach. God made us to need light and to value light. And it is a marvelous metaphor of God's favor shining upon us. The repeated prayer of the Old Testament is for God's countenance to shine upon us (Num. 6:25–26; Pss. 4:6; 31:16; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135). That is at the heart of the Aaronic blessing that I pronounce upon you each Sunday. So for God's light to always shine is for God's blessing and favor to always be upon us. Incredible!

But if that is what we will experience in eternity, our hearts should be longing for more and more of the light of His countenance right now. Whenever I pronounce the Aaronic blessing, I would encourage you to hold your hands out with your palms upward as a symbol that you believe you will receive something from the Lord.

The Puritan writer, Thomas Manton called the grace we daily experience, “young glory.” I love that - young glory. Young glory implies that glory can grow. And of course the Scripture says that God’s glory can grow in our lives as we move from faith to faith, from strength to strength, and from glory to glory. The Puritans said that grace is like a bud that will open up more and more until we experience the fullness of glory in heaven.

VIII. This is a city of dominion - each citizen will work and reign over something (vv. 3c, 5b)

Finally, this is a city of dominion. Verse 5 says of the saints, “And they will reign forever and ever.” What is there to reign over? We’ve looked at verses that indicate that some will rule over cities. Well, it’s going to take a long time to build up cities on the planet, so it implies that some will take dominion in the area of building, supplying, administration, transportation, communication, economics, etc. Matthew 25:23 says that some will simply rule over things - what I take to be dominion responsibilities. Beale points to Psalm 8 to show that we will reign over creation - and Psalm 8 lists not only the living things in creation that are the heritage of God’s people, but also the physical planet itself - which I happen to believe will be a much bigger planet at that stage. Will there be farmers? I can’t imagine that there won’t be. But Psalm 8 also speaks of the moon and the stars above being under Christ feet, and through Christ under our feet. It is a hint that there may be space exploration and tapping of energies and perhaps mining from other planets. There will be plenty to keep us busy throughout eternity. Psalm 8:6 says that God has (through Christ) given man dominion over all the work of God’s hands. That’s pretty expansive. Beale points out that since angels are a part of God’s creation (Nehemiah 9:6), Hebrews 2:5-7 implies that even angels will be under man’s rule and authority.¹² Certainly angels will help us

¹² He says, “There is still a sense in which the saints rule forever, even if the last judgment is construed as only a one-time event and not an ongoing activity into eternity. That is, they exercise sovereignty over the new creation in a way similar to how Adam was to rule “over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28; Psalm 8). The original Adamic commission did not assume that Adam’s rule entailed dominion over other righteous humans. It is probably presupposed here that the new creation will take some kind of material form and contain creatures to rule over. And even if there are no animals to rule over, it is probable that God’s people will rule over holy angels, since angels were included in the creation over which Adam was to reign (Neh. 9:6; Heb. 2:5–7) and since they will exist alongside the redeemed in the eternal state. Christ fulfills the role of the last Adam in order, partly, to rule over, in corporate solidarity with his people, the eternal new creation, which includes the holy angels (Heb. 2:5–16), who exist merely to be servants of the redeemed (Heb. 1:14; cf. Rev. 21:12). But exalted believers are different from the first Adam in that, whereas God only commissioned him to rule, now God promises that his people certainly will reign without end.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1116–1117.

in our dominion by being our servants. Hebrews 1:14 says that they are “all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.” So He is talking future there - every believer will have angels to help him or her in their dominion. So if angels will be our servants, there will be some rule that believers will have over even angels.

So there will be plenty for each and every believer to reign over. Each of us will be given an initial trust over which to rule and take dominion. And it appears that as we gain skill we will be given increasing challenges so that there will always be fulfillment and satisfaction in our work. As verse 3 says, “His slaves will minister to Him” or “will serve Him.”

You may remember the part of the movie, in Chariots of Fire, where Eric Liddell says, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.” Every time I see that part of the movie, it brings me to tears and deeply moves me. Eric found pleasure in ministry as a missionary, but he also found great pleasure in running for God. Why? Because God had made him for that.

I have the same experience in my ministry - and especially in research and writing. It is hard to carve out the time for research and writing, but when God enables me to do so I find a heightened sense of God’s pleasure and smile upon my work and it gives me great delight. I can hardly wait till Rodney becomes more full time so that I can devote more time to writing. But here is the thing that I find fascinating. The very things that bring me great fulfillment are a burden and utterly uninteresting to others. The things that make a scientist fulfilled are utterly uninteresting to an artist or a musician. Now, they can appreciate the fruits of each other’s labors, but don’t have the passion for the hard work to get there. Why? Because God made them for something different. That’s OK. I spend hours teasing apart chronologies, historical details, exegetical clues, looking through hundreds of verses, and engaging in hard work that most other people would find too tedious, boring, and painful to continue in, but it brings me great delight and satisfaction. I was made for it. And I am always grateful when this church gives me weeks off for writing. During those weeks I see myself as your missionary for writing. You will share in any rewards that the Lord gives me. And yes, I am shamelessly asking this congregation to continue its practice into the years to come.

Now, you have your own areas of life that make you feel God’s pleasure. Well, Scripture says that in heaven, God will perfectly fit us with work that matches our calling, our gifts, and our capacities. Think of the things on

earth that bring you the greatest fulfillment and heaven will be a multiplied increase of that fulfillment.

IX. Conclusion - what is the way into this city?

We have spent three Sundays looking at this amazing city. And I want to end by asking the question, “How do we get into this wonderful city?” You can’t enter it unless you have applied for citizenship in this life. If you die before having put your faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, it will be too late.

But this series will not be complete unless I conclude this section by showing the relationship of the heavenly Zion to everything in history. For example, we can only enter that city as the city itself gives birth to us. Galatians 4:26 says “the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” In some way, heaven gives birth to us while we are here on earth. It’s an incredible image. That’s why Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born from above,” which is the literal translation of the Greek that the King James unfortunately translated as being born again. No, we are born of heaven; born from above. The book of Galatians goes on to indicate that you contribute nothing to this heavenly city apart from grace. Even your faith is a gift of God. And actually, James 1:21 starts earlier and says that you were conceived by the implanted Word. You couldn’t so much as experience thirst for God, much less come to God, if God did not draw your heart to Him. This is heaven invading earth every time a new soul is regenerated. And Jesus said that the angels of heaven rejoice every time a sinner repents. Heaven is very much involved in evangelism. There is a mother-child relationship between heaven and new believers.

We have spoken in the past two sermons and in this sermon about the magnetic pull that the New Jerusalem has upon our lives right now. But the magnetic pull of the new Jerusalem comes long before our new birth. Let me outline how everything flows from the throne of God. The throne portion of this New Jerusalem is said to have been present from everlasting in Psalm 93:2 and many other passages. And it is a symbol of the fact that even salvation flows from God’s throne. God sovereignly chose us to be saved before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Jesus died for all who were given to Him in eternity past (John 6:39; 10:14-16,26-27; 17:6,9,11,24), and the Spirit sovereignly draws those whom the Father elected. He first calls us (Eph. 4:4), then regenerates us - what we call being born from above (John. 3:5,8; Gal. 4:29; Tit. 3:5) or being resurrected from spiritual death (Mark 12:26-27; John 5:25-29; 11:25; Rom 6:4-6; 8:10-11; Eph 2:1-7; Col 2:12-

13; 3:1; 1 John 3:14; 5:11–13). This new life automatically makes us conscious of our sins and of our need for God. It gives us new eyes, new spiritual insight, new longings. All of a sudden you have heaven-granted longings that you never had before. It instantly produces repentance and faith and an immediate turnaround that makes a person want to come to God. All of these things flow from God's throne room. Jesus repeatedly said in John 6 that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him. Well, from where does this drawing power of the Father come? From His throne in the New Jerusalem.

Which means there was the tug of mother-Jerusalem upon us at our conversion. So Acts 18:27 speaks of "those who had believed through grace," and Ephesians 1:19 speaks of those who had believed according to the working of His mighty power, and Ephesians 3:12 speaks of the faith that comes through Him, and Philippians 1:29 speaks of it being granted us to believe, and 2 Peter 1:1 says that the elect obtained faith. Where did we obtain this faith? From the heavenly Jerusalem; from God's throne. The moment we put our faith in Jesus, we are justified before God's throne and declared to be righteous before that same throne (Rom. 3:26,28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24).

This in turn begins God's work of making us long to be more and more like God (this is the upward call that Paul speaks about) and God gives us the ability to answer that upward call through our pursuit of holiness - called sanctification. And God makes it clear in Galatians that we are sanctified by grace. It all has to flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Leviticus 20:8 says, "I am the LORD who sanctifies you."

Finally, when we die we are glorified and at the end of history we are given new bodies. But they are all produced by the New Jerusalem. Over and over the imagery of the New Jerusalem is applied to every stage of our salvation. Already at the foundation of the world, God was saying to Zion, "You are my people." Zion didn't even exist yet, but God speaks Zion into existence from eternity past. We see that decree for Zion in Isaiah 51:15-16.

And from that moment on Zion was having a magnetic pull working all things together for the good of that people even before the individual elect people were born. Jeremiah speaks of Zion where God says, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you." We were being drawn by this magnetic pull of electing love before we were even created.

Psalm 110:2 says Zion ruled in our lives while we were still enemies. "The

LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!”

But as God’s kingdom comes into people’s lives, they are turned from enemies into servants. So Psalm 14:7 says that salvation comes out of Zion and God redeems us out of captivity to Satan. Romans 11:26 says,

Rom. 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

It is heaven alone that can turn death to life, rebellion to submission, an unregenerate state into new birth. So Galatians 4:26 says that the Jerusalem above gives birth to us and is our mother. We couldn’t become Christians if heaven was not drawing us. So Psalm 87:5-6 says,

Psa. 87:5 And of Zion it will be said, “This one and that one were born in her; And the Most High Himself shall establish her.” 6 The LORD will record, When He registers the peoples: “This one was born there.”

Every one of the elect are born: where? They are born in Zion. Zion is our mother. But not only are we born in the heavenly Zion, so to speak, the next verse says that everything good in our lives flows from the heavenly Zion for the rest of our lives. It says,

7 Both the singers and the players on instruments say, “All my springs are in you.”

This is why Colossians 3 is so insistent that we stop seeking things from below, and instead commands us to seek those things which are above, where Christ is. From heaven He gives us everything we need for this life and for godliness. It is always the kingdom of heaven invading earth; invading our lives below and transforming us. Our prayer should constantly be, “Your kingdom come in my life, Lord. I don’t want my kingdom. I want your kingdom. I don’t want my will to be done. I want to be passionate about your will being done. Please, have your way in my life.”

And as a result every blessing comes from above. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...” Psalm 133 likens this to Zion’s dew descending from heaven. Psalm 20:2 says, “May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion...” Psalm 134:3 says, “The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!” This is not pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by theology. The New Jerusalem is relevant to ever second of your life and everything you do.

If you are to have life, it must come from above. If you are to have blessing, it must come from above. If you are to have wisdom and victory, it must come from above. Don’t look to the world’s weapons and resources for anything - look to Christ and His Word and His grace. The heavenly

Jerusalem is not just a destiny we will get to when we die; it is the place where everything good descends right now. If that doesn't transform your prayer life, I don't know what will. Since it is the throne of the kingdom of heaven, it is the invading force for the transformation of everything below.

So how do you get into this city and how do we have constant access to its resources? By faith in Jesus Christ. How do you drink of the waters of this river? By faith in Jesus Christ. He told the Samaritan woman at the well,

Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:13-14)

May we all learn to live by heaven's power even now. The more you do so, the more you will look forward to the eternal state. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.