

Things are not what they seem; glimpses from Revelation

The City of God

Chapters 21:9—22:21

The world's false attempt to create itself as a people (Babylon or the prostitute) has been destroyed, as have the visible power structure she 'rode' (the beast) and the dragon or Satan who lent it his power. Christ, the true authority for this world, an authority he has always exercised as the Lamb, has conquered (17:14) and the Bride intended for him has made herself ready (19:7-9).

This is the Bride we are now asked to see. It is ourselves! And this is the future God has intended for us.

- An angel of wrath makes the call. Destruction of rivals has been vital to this destiny.
- The Bride's beauty and function is best described as a God's city. Married to the Lamb, she is what God has ordained from the beginning for the flourishing of humanity.

The city is glorious (21:9-27).

- It is a lofty vision and we need to be 'in the Spirit' to see what God has done—it comes down and is not a human product. It is holy.
 - Compare the beast and false prophet who arose from the sea and the land (13:1, 11).
 - Compare Babylon who stole the affection of the world with illicit favours (14:8).
 - Beware of 'Marxists and secular humanists who envisage a new age arising out of, and in continuity with, the existing order' (Paul Barnett, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, p. 151).
- It *has* the glory of God (21:11). Glory is the outshining of what is actually so. We have seen the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Now we ourselves manifest God (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 2:3).
- God's glory is the city's light, and this light is the Lamb (21:23; also 22:5).
- This light is enough for all nations. They are not dominated by the beast or seduced by Babylon but freely bring their glory into the city (21:24).

The city is established (21:9-27)

- Its gates are God's proclamation to Israel (21:12), welcoming all nations (21:13; Luke 13:28-29). They never need closing because there are no enemies (21:25).
- Its wall, determining who is inside and outside the city, is the apostles and the truth they have announced (Eph. 2:19-22).
 - Beware of thinking that a society built on the Judeo-Christian ethic is secure.
 - Beware of thinking that a society that has borrowed the gentler virtues of Christian faith and proclaims them as their own can survive.
 - The city of God is married to Christ and he is its power. A form of religion will not suffice (2 Tim 3:5).

The whole city is a place of worship (21:15-16).

- The city is a cube, like the most holy place in Israel's temple (1 Kin. 6:20). So the city needs no temple. God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (21:22).
- Compare Domitian who sought to be called 'Lord and God' (cf. John's constant calls to worship God (15:4; 19:4, 10; 22:8) and not the beast (14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

The city is immense (21:15-17).

- It is over 2000 kilometres in each direction—which to ancient readers would have registered as the size of the entire world they knew.

The city is beautiful, adorned with precious jewels and lined with gold (21:11, 18-21).

- No need for further programmes of 'Grand designs'!

- Paul Barnett writes, 'As with the first creation the source of the beauty is not mankind but God. ... Men and women are indeed able to create beauty but when they do so it is in imitation of the beauty of God's creation. When people attempt to be creative apart from God, their efforts are frequently debased and corrupt. Our hope for a future which is bright with glory does not lie with Caesar or his modern political counterparts, or with architects, town-planners or the artistically creative [or software engineers] but with God' (*Apocalypse Now and Then*, p. 156).

The city will never be polluted (21:27; also 22:3).

- Neo-Marxists seek to eradicate our evil past and redefine good.
- No solvent shall clean our hands, or our souls, except the blood of the Lamb. We need guilt-freed people to build something true and lasting—something eternal.

Creation's completion (22:1-5).

- Eden's river brought life to the first garden. The picture there suggests that we were charged with extending Eden by following along its water-course out to the then known world. Now it reaches to the nations (v. 2).
- Now we know the source of water is God and the Lamb (cf. Jer. 2:13).
- Eden's tree of life was not good for us to have as fallen creatures, but now we eat freely. Even its leaves bring healing to all that was torn and broken among the nations.
- Fallen in Eden, Adam hid, and we hide, from God. Now we see him. The Lord's word has been fulfilled—'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt. 5:8).

The Epilogue (22:6-21).

- Themes raised in the prologue (1:1-8) are recalled.
 - 'These words' (1:3, 11) are the message of the whole book, and are the theme of this epilogue (vv. 7, 9f, 16, 18f). Beware of tampering with anything God has said (vv.18f)!
 - The book is about what must take place 'soon' (Gr. *tachos* = in a short time, quickly or without delay; 1:1; 22:6).
 - In particular, Christ is coming (1:7) and now the Lord tells us personally that he is coming soon (22:7, 12, 20).
- The book began with letters from Christ to the churches, and concludes with a personal message from Christ (vv. 7, 12f, 16, 18-20).
- The book's repeated call, 'Worship God!' is reiterated when John again mistakes the message for the messenger (22:8-9).
- There is one authority, one who is 'A' to 'Z' about everything (v. 13).
- There is one salvation—washing one's robes in Christ's blood and entering God's city (v. 14).
- There is one hope ...
 - The Spirit who announces God's truth, and the Bride who receives it, respond to Christ's promise to come by saying, 'Come!'
 - Let those who hear this message join in the chorus, 'Come!'
 - If you are thirsty, 'Come!' Here you will discover that all creation is God's gift, not our deserving.
 - Oh that the world would know its God!

May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with all! The finality and solemnity of this book has not detracted from the grace we have received. It has secured it.