

## Sermon 14, God Tabernacles With Israel IV, Revelation 21:1-22:5

Sing “The Sands of Time” and “In the Land of Fadeless Day”

“While the main *pastoral* goal of the book’s argument is to exhort God’s people to remain faithful so that they will inherit final salvation, this is not the most important *theological* idea in the book. The major theological theme of the book is that God should receive worship and glory as a result of accomplishing consummate salvation and final judgment.” — Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 507

**Proposition:** In the New Jerusalem, God will consummately dwell with His people — so strive to overcome temptations to sin!

### Beale’s Outline (Shortened)

- I. The New Creation: A Place of Communion with God, 21:1-8
- II. The New Jerusalem: God’s People Dwelling with Him, 21:9-22:5
  - A. It Is the Protected and Completed People of God, Jew and Gentile, 21:9-14
  - B. Its Boundaries Are Determined and Known by God, 21:15-17
  - C. It Reflects God’s Glorious Presence, 21:18-21
  - D. Its Chosen Inhabitants Glorify God in His Presence, 21:22-27
  - E. Its People Are Priests and Kings in God’s Life-Giving Presence, 22:1-5

### My outline

- I. A Vision: A New Creation and a New Jerusalem, 21:1-2
  - A. Two Ways of Looking, 21:1-2
  - B. One Single Reality, 21:1-2
- II. The Vision Explained, 21:3-8
  - A. God Will Consummately Dwell with His People, 21:3
  - B. God Will Remove Sin and All Its Consequences, 21:4
  - C. God’s Promises Are Absolutely Trustworthy, 21:5
  - D. God’s Salvation Is Freely Offered, 21:6
  - E. God’s Salvation Requires Perseverance, 21:7
  - F. God’s Salvation Excludes the Wicked, 21:8
- III. Another Vision: The Bride of Christ, 21:9-22:5
  - A. Her Perfect Unity, 21:9-14
  - B. Her Perfect Completion, 21:15-17
  - C. Her Perfect Beauty, 21:18-21
  - D. Her Glorifying Purity, 21:22-27
  - E. Her Glorious Calling, 22:1-5

## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is with deep hesitancy that I proceed to say anything on the text we've just read. *This passage is glorious!* I certainly can neither add to what John said, nor explain in exhaustive detail what he meant. The true reality of Heaven's glory has never entered the human imagination. But what I can do is draw some connections. I can tell you about the OT allusions that echo through these verses. I can remind you of what we've seen as we've looked at the Bible's Big Picture for the past three months. And I can promise you that the glorious consummation of dwelling with God, in His house forever, will be far better than everything this world has to offer. I will not try to exhaustively exposit the text we've just read. That would take us weeks. But I will skate over its surface and show you how John's final visions show us that we will dwell with God. Indeed, because God will consummately dwell with us, John says, we must strive to overcome sin! That, my friends, is the note on which the Bible closes. That is yet another summary of its Big Picture. Remember how we saw that the Bible could be summarized as "Kill the dragon, get the girl"? Or the alternative summary, "The Bible is the story of God bringing His people to dwell in His presence"? Both of those summaries find their fulfillment in our text this morning. Here we see God in and through Christ bringing His people — His bride — to dwell with Him forever.

### **I. A Vision: A New Creation and a New Jerusalem, 21:1-2**

Our passage comes after the scene of final judgment and destruction in Rev. 20. If you've read the whole book, you've seen a lot of suffering on the part of the people of God. You've seen the aggressive persecution of Babylon, and the trampling of the Beast on the people of God. But now all that has been dealt with. Now all wickedness has been judged and sentenced to eternity in the lake of fire. And at that moment, John looked, and he saw a new heavens and new earth. That is, he saw an entirely new creation, from top to bottom. Even the old sea had passed away. But then, he says he saw the New Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God.

#### **A. Two Ways of Looking, 21:1-2**

Why does the new creation get so little attention here? Why does John move from new heavens and earth directly to seeing the New Jerusalem? The answer is that these are simply two different ways of looking at the same reality. If I show you a picture of my car from the top, and then another picture from the side, you're looking at the same thing both times. But the two pictures look radically different. The same is true here. John is simply giving us two different ways of looking.

#### **B. One Single Reality, 21:1-2**

Yet those two ways of looking both refer back to a single reality — the reality that God dwells with His people, and that in order to consummate that dwelling He will purge and renew the entire cosmos such that it will be all holy, all fit for Him to dwell in, and all fit for His perfected people to share with Him. The New Creation and the New Jerusalem are one and the same thing. Here on the first Earth, Jerusalem, or the church, is just a small part of the total. But in the new

heavens and the new earth, the entire planet, the entire cosmos, will be the dwelling place of God.

This means, incidentally, that we should expect that what we call Heaven will indeed be located right here on Earth. Those of you who love C.S. Lewis doubtless remember his picture of Heaven, in which every country here on Earth has its heavenly counterpart in Aslan's country. There's a heavenly England, and a heavenly Wyoming, as well as a heavenly Hawaii and Portugal. It's an intriguing thought, and it fits with the idea of the renewed earth which is dedicated entirely to God and which serves as His dwelling place.

## **II. The Vision Explained, 21:3-8**

So John saw these things, and then he heard a voice from heaven which explained to him what he saw.

### **A. God Will Consummately Dwell with His People, 21:3**

What was it that he saw when he saw this new heaven and earth? He saw God dwelling with men. The tabernacle is invoked, because it is where God dwelt in the OT. The literal meaning of the tabernacle is mentioned — that God lives with His people, but now he doesn't live next door. He lives with them in the same intimacy with which a husband and wife live together in this world. We see the covenant promise repeated: We will be God's people, and He will be our God. We will mutually belong to each other, and with promise comes the promise of communion with God (we will be with Him), likeness to Him, communication of all good things from Him, and the eternal continuance of all these benefits. That is how Jesus reasoned when discussing the covenant promise with the Sadducees in Matthew 22.

We've talked about this. Do you want to dwell with God? Do you come to church to meet with Him? Do you seek to meet with Him personally in Bible reading and prayer? Do you try to take your family into His presence through family worship? Does this promise of spending eternity with God sound to you like the best thing that could possibly happen to you and yours?

### **B. God Will Remove Sin and All Its Consequences, 21:4**

But the next thing that the new creation means is that sin and all its consequences will be gone.

When you believe in Christ, you are freed from sin's power. You begin to have a choice about whether to sin. God grants you the ability to say no to sin. But you are not freed from sin's presence. It still indwells each and every one of us. And it produces pain and misery beyond belief in the lives of each of us and of everyone we know. Yet the promise is that in the new creation, sin will be completely gone. That means that death, sorrow, crying and pain will all go away too. Those things will not be present at all in the new heavens and new earth.

Do you want to live without pain? With sorrow? Without death cutting down and taking everyone you love? Then seek Jesus Christ, who came to deliver us from death!

Notice, too, how personal this is. God is the one who will do it. It won't just happen; it will be very clear that God is the one undoing all the bad consequences of sin.

### **C. God's Promises Are Absolutely Trustworthy, 21:5**

And if these things sound too good to be true, then listen to this assurance. God sits on His throne. He rules perfectly and forever — and it is He who will make all things new. It's not all new things. No. It's all things new. Everything that presently exists will be renewed, remade, factory refurbished and upgraded to be better than ever before. And in case you doubt it, God said, "Enter that on the record. Write it down. I didn't just say it; I put it in writing so that you can be sure that I really mean it."

### **D. God's Salvation Is Freely Offered, 21:6**

God offers a part in this new creation to anyone who is thirsty. Do you want to drink the water of life? Do you want to know Jesus Christ and to live with Him forever in this new creation, free from sin and sorrow and pain for all eternity? Then come, and welcome. What does it mean to drink of the water of life? It means to believe that Jesus really did all the things that are recorded about Him in this Bible. It means trusting Him personally to save you from your sin. It means trying to obey Him and worshipping Him regularly with His people in His house. That's what drinking the water of life looks like. And it is available to you — to all of you. Come take this water of life! Come partake of Jesus Christ in His saving righteousness.

To thirst for the water of life is to want Jesus. It means to want Him in all His perfection as the God-man, the one with perfect standards and perfect mercy and grace for those who failed to meet them. Wanting Jesus is not itself salvation — but Jesus promises salvation to everyone who wants Him. Are you thirsty for Him as the water of life? Do you desire him the way that runners desire water after a long slog across country on a blistering day?

Jesus says that His saving work is done. What does that mean? We call this a prophetic past, where an event still future is spoken of as past to highlight its absolute certainty. God will definitely and absolutely give the water of life to whoever thirsts for it. And you can bank on that because He is the beginning and the ending. When time began, He was there, and He will be there when it ends. That's how we know that His promise is trustworthy. Seek Him. Believe Him. Trust Him!

### **E. God's Salvation Requires Perseverance, 21:7**

Trusting Christ is the way to overcome. The book of Revelation makes many promises to overcomers, and this is the final one. What is an overcomer? It is someone who has persevered through life and all its trials and tests without abandoning Christ or turning away from the Christian faith.

The message of Revelation is that it will be hard to be an overcomer. I once heard that everyone wants to be an overcomer, but no one wants to have anything to overcome. It's true! But to be an overcomer, you have to overcome something. You have to overcome your own wicked heart. You have to overcome the world's temptations, and Satan's wiles. You will find plenty of reasons to sin, and you can even find reasons to abandon Christ if you are so inclined. But if you resist those temptations, and if you refuse to give in to them, then you will be an overcomer. You will have this promise, and many others. You will be the heir of the world. Just

as God promised to Abraham that Abraham would be heir of the world, so you too will be heir of the world when you overcome. Christ will leave all things to you in His will, and you will get them when you die. Do you want to inherit everything? Do you want to overcome, to persevere, to stick close to Christ?

#### **F. God's Salvation Excludes the Wicked, 21:8**

Yet perfectly balanced with the free offer of the gospel and the encouragement to persevere is the warning directed to the wicked. Notice that the cowardly are excluded from the city. That means that if you are a Christian, you cannot let yourself be motivated by fear. You have to be motivated by love for God and neighbor. If you live based on your fears, you will not be invited to a share in the New Jerusalem. Courage is necessary if you want to be a Christian. The same is true of unbelief. If you want to be a Christian, you will have to trust Jesus Christ for the long haul. Sexual immorality, too, the great sin of our era and of many of us in the church, excludes from heaven. If you want Jesus, you can't have your porn, your homosexuality, your lustful thoughts, or your office romance that your wife doesn't know about. Those who use witchcraft or call themselves sorcerers and witches are not allowed in Heaven, and neither are those who worship false gods like pleasure, money, convenience, or power. Oh, and liars too are excluded. That includes those who lie to themselves along with those who lie to others.

Let me also mention that this truth — that the new earth will be the dwelling place of God's people and only of God's people — explains John's insistence that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. This whole world will belong to God as His dwelling place, and thus to His bride as her dwelling place — and the unbelievers will be excluded, no longer part of humanity proper.

Salvation is for whoever wants Christ. Damnation is for whoever wants sin more than he wants Christ.

What do you want?

### **III. Another Vision: The Bride of Christ, 21:9-22:5**

The second part of our text expands on John's vision, filling in five key details about the bride of Christ, who is also portrayed as a city and as a new creation. Why these three different ways of talking about her? Because she is a group of people, the church. In that respect, she is like a city, which is a vast crowd of people all living together. She has been renewed by God and totally cleansed from sin, and so in that respect she is a new creation. And she is destined to dwell in perfect intimacy with Jesus and His Father and His Spirit forever and ever — and so in that sense, she is a bride.

If you believe in Jesus today, then the rest of this text is your picture. Not as you are — but as you will be. This is what the universal church is destined to be, through being washed by Christ Himself with the water of the word.

#### **A. Her Perfect Unity, 21:9-14**

Just Ezekiel was taken to a high mountain to see the new temple in his long vision, so John was taken to a high mountain to see this vision. And there he saw the great city, the New Jerusalem,

coming down out of heaven from God. This city is the perfect union of OT Israel with the NT church. It is constructed around the base number 12, which is the number of the people of God. That's why Jesus chose 12 apostles and sent Jacob 12 sons. The names of the apostles and the names of the tribes of Israel are equally prominent in this city. Indeed, she is the perfect unity of Jew and Gentile, all brought together in Jesus Christ. The gates show that God's people are perfectly protected, and the radiance and glory of the city indicates that God is there.

Remember how God brought His people out of Egypt to dwell with Him? The Exodus is fulfilled right here. So is the Incarnation, and the event of Pentecost.

### **B. Her Perfect Completion, 21:15-17**

Yet this city is also perfectly complete. The measurements indicate that God knows and has planned this place down to the last inch. He is in charge of this city; He protects this city; and He knows this city. Again, the city is built in multiples of 12. It is twelve thousand stadia on each side — that is about 1379 miles, but the point is not that a giant cubical city will come down to earth with its top in outer space, but rather that the new heavens and the new earth will be entirely equivalent to the old cube-shaped holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple. This city has every single resident it is intended to have. It is perfectly complete. Do you long for the day when the church is finished?

### **C. Her Perfect Beauty, 21:18-21**

Because when she is, her perfect beauty will then be obvious. The city is described as gold, as jasper stone, as crystal, and as founded on these twelve different kinds of stones, because the city is so perfectly beautiful that a single metaphor and allusion can't sum it all up! The twelve foundation stones are the same stones that were found on the high priest's square breastplate. There they represented the completeness of the twelve tribes of Israel. The high priest ministered on behalf of all twelve tribes. In the new Jerusalem, these same twelve stones represent the fullness of God's people and the beauty of God's people. Just as the original temple was built from "costly" or "precious" stones (1 Kings 7:10), so the eternal place of God's presence will also be built of precious stones, symbolizing how valuable and beautiful is God our rock!

### **D. Her Glorifying Purity, 21:22-27**

The New Jerusalem will be unlike the old Jerusalem in one key respect. It will have no temple. Rather than a particular holy place in the center of town, the entire city will be holy. Indeed, the entire new creation will be holy. The light of God will shine in this city. The text doesn't say whether the sun and moon will still exist; it just points out that they are unnecessary. Isaiah had already prophesied that God would be the light of the New Jerusalem, and God her glory. Now John replaces that second clause with "its lamp is the Lamb." Jesus Christ the Lamb is also God, and He is the glory of the New Jerusalem.

What does it mean for kings to bring their honor and glory into this city? Not that there will still be other kings and kingdoms in the eternal state. Rather, it means that the greatest citizens of the world, those who were kings during their original lifetime and those who are kings in Heaven (for there is no reason to think that distinctions of rank and status will disappear) will

give all the glory they can to God. Those of the highest social standing will spend their time and effort glorifying God — which means that those of lesser place will do the same. Everything that was the glory of particular nations will in the New Jerusalem be dedicated to glorifying God.

Yet the very glory of the place also means that it is absolutely pure. Once again, John reminds that liars and all defilement are excluded here, just as they were from the original temple and tabernacle. God will not live in a filthy house. He cannot endure the presence of sin. Only those written in the Lamb's book of life can come in. Only those whom God has purposed to save will be in Heaven. We know that everyone who desires Christ, everyone who finds salvation, was written in that book. If you desire salvation, then don't think you're not there. Everyone who seeks finds, Jesus said. But if you truly seek God, then you need to flee from lying and from every other abomination and sin.

#### **E. Her Glorious Calling, 22:1-5**

Finally, we see the last facet of the New Jerusalem. She is called to serve God. Her identity is as both bride and servant, king and priest. The Holy Spirit is there; the river of the water of life is there, and the tree of life is there. Why? Because Heaven is the place of life because it is the place where God dwells. In Him is life, and from Him comes life. Do you want to live? Then seek Heaven, and the one who dwells in it.

The curse will be eliminated. God cursed the earth, as we saw in Genesis 3. Yet through the finished work of Jesus Christ, that curse will be eliminated at the last day. God cannot live permanently in an accursed spot, because He is blessedness. God's blessing rests upon this new creation. What will do there? We don't know, except that we will serve God. His name will be on our foreheads, as it was on the forehead of the high priest, for we will all be priests to God. We will walk in God's light. Every Sunday I put God's blessing upon you, and that blessing is that God would lift up the light of His face upon you. Well, in Heaven that blessing will be fully realized. There you will experience the fullness of the light of God's face. And you, in Christ your head, will reign forever and ever.

Your calling as a church member is to serve God, to be the bride of Christ, to offer sacrifices of praise as a priest and to reign as a king forever. Do you want that? It is the destiny of all who know and love Christ.

So this is the Bible's big picture: We were created in God's presence, but cast out of it because of sin. God called Abraham out of Babylon and revealed to him that salvation is by grace through faith. Then God rescued Abraham's enslaved descendants and promised to bring them to live with Him. He fulfilled that promise in the tabernacle and then in the temple, but God's people preferred their sin and went away into exile, back into Babylon. Yet God returned to dwell with them in the person of His Son, and then in the person of His Spirit. Right now His Spirit dwells in us, and someday God will totally defeat our ancient enemy Babylon and consummately come to dwell with us in a New Heaven and New Earth.

So as you read the Bible, ask, "Where in that story does the book I'm reading fall?" Look for that story. Look for your place in the story. And when temptation comes, tell it, "I love Christ.

I want to be an overcomer. I'm not going to listen to you, because Jesus is better. The New Jerusalem is better."

Surely Jesus is coming soon! Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.