

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Capital City of Heaven, Part 2

Scripture: Revelation 21:22-22:5

Code: 66-84

We come to Revelation chapters 21 and 22 and a look at the capital city of heaven. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He included a marvelous promise to believers. He said to them in Matthew 5:12, "Your reward in heaven is great." Jesus also included in the Sermon on the Mount a command to "Lay up treasures in heaven."

Later on in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew it is recorded that Jesus told the rich young ruler these words, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven and come follow Me." In Luke 23 it is recorded that Jesus said, "Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven."

Interesting, isn't it, that Jesus talked about the treasures of heaven, the reward of heaven, the riches of heaven. The Apostle Paul followed up on that and reminded believers that he was thankful for the hope laid up for him in heaven. He talked about a crown which is righteousness. He talked about a crown which is rejoicing, a crown that belongs to all those who love the Lord's appearing.

And Peter echoed the sentiment of Paul when he said that we have an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us, 1 Peter 1:4. Heaven is our place. It's where our inheritance is. It's where our reward is. It's where our hope is. It's where our treasure is laid up. Heaven is our eternal home and the place of eternal glory. So, we're looking at heaven, particularly in Revelation 21 and 22, we're looking at the capital city of the eternal state, none other than what is called the new Jerusalem, the holy city, our forever home. It's the place where we're going to spend eternity.

Now Revelation 21 opened with the announcement that the present universe will be uncreated. John says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away and there is no longer any sea." I told you the significance of the statement "there is no longer any sea" is the fact that in the new creation there will not be a water-based existence. This existence in which we now live in the present universe is dependent upon water. Most of what we are is water, as you well know from a scientific analysis perspective. And we are in a water-based existence. The very fact that there is no longer any sea in the future, new heaven and new earth, indicates that it will be of a completely different order than anything that we can understand in the life in which we now live.

And so, we see then in the opening of this twenty-first chapter the introduction of the new heaven and the new earth. And immediately after that the jeweled city of that eternal state is introduced. Verse 2, "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." She comes down, as it were, out of heaven in splendorous garb, taking her place in the new heaven and the new earth, perhaps even settling on some place on the new earth, settling into some location on the new earth.

That city then that descends into the eternal state becomes the focal point of attention for the rest of this section, running all the way down to chapter 22 and verse 5. Now keep in mind that we're talking about a new heaven and a new earth. There will be a new earth. And there will be a new heavens or heaven in which that earth exists. It will be an infinite heaven, it will be a vast...as I said infinite heaven...at the same time it will be crowned in the very center on the new earth or perhaps hanging over the new earth with this glorious city called the new Jerusalem.

So when we talk about the new Jerusalem or the holy city, we're not just talking about all that heaven is, we're talking about the capital city within the infinity of the new heaven and the new earth. The city then, as I said, became the focal point of attention and we started in verse 9 last time to take a look at this city. And verses 9 through 11, actually a couple of weeks ago, gave us a general appearance. And you remember that general appearance is like a bride, verse 10, "He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper," which we said would be like a diamond, perhaps a diamond is exactly what is in mind here.

And so the general appearance of this city is like a transparent lucid diamond in the center of which is the glory of God blazing out through all the refractions of that diamond and scattering light throughout the entire new heaven and new earth. It is God revealed as light because when God reveals Himself, you remember, He reveals Himself as light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." John said that, "In Him is light and there is no darkness at all." He is...He is unlimited and unmitigated and unhindered and non-obstructed light and when He reduces His attributes to that which is manifest or visible, it comes out as light or glory. God's presence, God's Shekinah manifest as light. And so the city itself is a diamond reflecting light coming from the very heart of it. We saw that general appearance.

Then we came to verse 12 and we saw the exterior design. That ran all the way down through verse 21, and I'll just read it to you.

It had a great and high wall with twelve gates and at the gates twelve angels and names were written on them which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall

of the city had twelve foundation stones and on them were the twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

So the city identifies the twelve tribes, pulling together people from the Old Testament era, it names the twelve Apostles, of course, representative of those of the New Testament era. Verse 15: "The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod," and we noted that that occurs a number of times in prophetic literature and shows God measuring out what belongs to Him, marking off the boundaries of that which is His possession. And so, the gold measuring rod was used to measure the city and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square. We talked about it being symmetrical, three gates on every side. It is a perfect square. It has twelve foundation stones as well, corresponding, I'm sure, to the three gates, three foundation stones on each of the four sides.

Its length is as great as its width. He measured the city with a rod 1500 miles its length and width and height are equal.

And we talked about the fact that it is a cube, 1500 miles in every direction.

And then he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, a hundred and forty-four cubits.

And I suggested to you that that is not the height of the wall. If the city is 1500 miles high it wouldn't do much good to have a 216 foot high wall. That is, no doubt, the measurement of the width of it, not the height of it. And somebody at this point is going to say, "Yeah, well this isn't actually literal." And so, just for those folks who might say that, he says, "This is according to human measurements which are also angelic measurements." And I told you how I love that kind of statement which just backs off anybody who wants to tamper with the text.

And the material of the wall was jasper. So 216 feet or 72 yards in width, and again it is this diamond crystal. And the city inside of these walls that run from the bottom to the top, the city inside is made of pure gold like clear glass. And again, the light can blaze through the clear gold glass and come blazing through the thick crystal diamond walls, blazing through the foundation stones also. And you remember, there were twelve of them and he names them, they were every kind of precious stone, jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth and amethyst. And we gave you some idea of what those might mean.

Then the street of the city was like...pardon me, verse 21 says, "The twelve gates were twelve pearls." Verse 21 indicating the construction material of the gates being twelve pearls. That is to say each gate was one pearl. If they're 1500 miles high, then that is a fairly large pearl...a 1500-mile-high pearl making a gate. Remember now, the city is tiered and I talked about the fact that we'll be in our glorified form moving horizontally as easily as moving vertically...moving vertically as easily as moving horizontally, and so the gate will run all the way to the top so we can go in and out and

traverse the city in any way that we would wish. Each of the gates was a single pearl. The street of the city was pure gold like transparent glass.

And I suggested to you a few ways to comprehend the dimensions of the city and to understand that there's going to be plenty of room for all of the redeemed to have space there. Henry Morris calculates, "Each believer could have a cubicle block a little over a third of a mile in each direction," and that would be if there were calculated a certain number of believers based upon how many people have lived in the world and just making sort of a good educated guess. So there will be plenty of room. And besides, we'll all be coming in and out of the city and there will be plenty of infinity for us to traverse, so we're not going to get too crowded there.

All right, now we come to the third feature, or the third series of features and that is the internal character of this city. We've looked at the general appearance which is like a diamond with light blazing out of it. We looked at the exterior design, the configuration of the city and its walls and all of that. And now we're going to go inside the city and see what is inside, what are the internal characteristics. John takes us inside for a glimpse of our future home. Verse 22, and the first thing that he says is, "I saw no temple in it." I saw no temple in it. Up to this point we would have to acknowledge that there has been a temple in heaven. Chapter 8 verse 3 talks about an angel standing at the altar, holding a golden censer with incense given to him that he might add it to the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. Now those are all the kind of features that you would find in a temple. There would be an altar there and there would be incense there and certainly we are inclined to believe that there was a temple in heaven, that there is indicated in the Scripture that God dwells in heaven in some form of temple. There is in chapter 4 and verse 2 the indication of a throne in heaven. There wasn't a throne in the temple and so we don't necessarily associate that with the temple, but we do associate the altar here and the golden censer with things that were characteristic of a temple.

Over in chapter 11 of Revelation and down in verse 19 it says it very clearly. "And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple." So at the time that John sees the vision in chapter 11, he is literally taken by vision into heaven and a temple opens up and he can see into the temple. What we have to conclude then is that in the eternal state that temple is gone. There's no more temple there.

And why is that? Well there's no need for an abode of God because God will literally occupy by blazing glory the whole of the new heaven and the new earth. There's no need for a temple. There's no need for a cathedral. There's no need for a church. There's no need for a chapel. There's no need for a house of prayer. There's no need for a place of worship. There's no need for a day of worship. There's no need to for anyone to go anywhere to worship God. There won't be any place where they'll be having services. There won't be any facility at all. There won't be any temple.

Why? Verse 22, "For the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

You know what that says? That says literally that this city dwells within the temple which is the very presence of God and Christ. In other words, the presence of God literally fills the whole new heaven and new earth. Right now, as you know, God certainly is omnipresent, but you also know that Satan is the prince of the power of the air and that demons have access not only to the earth but to heavens as well, that the universe itself has been polluted. There is a unique place which is identified as the temple of God but in the new heaven and the new earth when the glory of God fills the earth and the glory of God fills the new universe with all of His infinity, there will be no need for a temple because God Himself will be the temple in which everything exists.

You see that back in chapter 21 verse 3 in different terms, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men. He shall dwell among them. They shall be His people, God Himself shall be among them." We literally will live in His presence. We will live in the temple of God and Christ. They are the temple by presence and we are in their presence forever.

So there wouldn't be any need to go to a church. There wouldn't be any need to go to a cathedral or go to a place of worship. Worship will be life. That's all we'll do. We'll worship, worship, worship and that's all we'll do. All of life, never a moment when we're not...listen to this...never a moment when we're not worshiping, never a moment when we're not in perfect holy communion with the perfect holy Almighty God and the Lamb, never a moment when we are not engaged in rapturous joyous worship and service to Him. Never a moment when those things are not reality. We will be the true worshipers that the Father has always sought. Our worship will be pure and true and perfect. We will be worshiping in perfect Spirit and in perfect truth in His eternal presence.

And I think it's interesting that that's the first thing that John noted because it was important to him, it was priority to him. After all, he was the one that wrote about God seeking true worshipers. He was the one who was so concerned about God being worshiped and he was the one who had been taken through all of these tremendous visions in the book of Revelation and been instructed about how important worship was and what happened to people who didn't. And he had seen glimpses of heaven where worship was the constant occupation.

And so, naturally the first thing he would look for when he was taken to the inside of the capital city of heaven would be to see if there was a place of worship there and the answer is...there isn't any. It's not necessary. Because there won't be anything but worship there wouldn't be any need to go somewhere and worship.

And then in verse 23 he goes back to that glory that's blazing out of the middle of the city which he talked about in his initial perspective in verses 9 to 11. And he says this, "And the city has no need of

the sun or of the moon to shine upon it for the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb." Now that will tell you a little bit about the new earth because whatever the new earth is it won't be an earth like we know now because the earth as we know it now depends upon the sun and the moon, it depends upon time for the sun to shine and time for darkness to run its normal cycles. So whatever goes on in that new earth will be dependent on a completely different structure, a completely different creation than anything we know today. There will be no sun, there will be no moon. They're not necessary for light because the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb. And again it's God and the Lamb.

And you see that pretty much through all the visions of the book of Revelation. You see the Father's throne but the Lamb is sitting on the throne. And you see them share the responsibility. The tabernacle of God is with men but so is the tabernacle of Jesus Christ. He dwells with them as well. You see the great White Throne and Him who sat upon it is no other than the Creator and yet God has committed all judgment on to His own Son. So you see them together. The Creator and the Lamb then are the light of that eternal city. And remember now the new Jerusalem is a prism of utterly dazzling light.

Then in verse 24 he says, "And the nations shall walk by its light and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." Now this might take a little bit of explanation. I'll do my best to make it as simple and plain as I can.

Some people assume that this is a millennial description, that this is describing something in the Millennium because it mentions the nations and the kings. But if you make this the thousand-year Millennium, you have a real problem because this is the new heaven and the new earth which come after the Millennium.

And you really can't do justice to the chronology of the book of Revelation by going back. And I can't imagine anything in the Millennium that could fit this description because you still have physical human beings living in the Millennium, don't you? Those who went through the judgment because they are the sheep and entered into the Kingdom and received the earthly Kingdom and they could never live in a place like this that is built on a different creative order than anything we know today. This has to be the eternal state.

You say, "Well then explain to me how the nations got there and the kings got there?" Well, that's not really that difficult. Nations is the word *ethnae*, and all it means is "the peoples." It can be translated "nations," most often do you know how it's translated in the New Testament? Most often it is translated by the word...what?...Gentiles. It's the same word. It can be translated "peoples," that's really all it means. In the broadest sense all the peoples from every tongue and tribe and nation and the world will all be walking in its light. In fact, what he is really saying here is this is not going to be limited to one group. This is going to be...this is going to be the eternal capital where everybody is

welcome. There will be no more divisions as we know them. All of the nations shall walk by its light.

What it really is saying is that there will be no more divisions. It will be the capital city for everybody. It's not the idea that heaven is going to be organized by political sections, but that all ethnic groups will be moving in and about that city, no...no race, no culture, no one left out.

And then it says, "And the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." Some see this as indicated...and I think it may well indicate that...no social structure, no upper and lower class, all the kings of the earth who come to that place, that would be those mighty men, noble men, those leaders, those great men, give their glory to that city. That is their glory is gone. Everybody is at the same level. All human glory dissolves into the glory of God. All races dissolve into the people of God. And the character of that city is universal in the fact that everybody there belongs and there is no social strata. The kings give up their glory.

There's another interesting possibility about this verse and I suggest it to you. There will be believers living at the end of the millennial Kingdom, think with me on this, there will be believers living at the end of the millennial Kingdom, right? In other words, when the Kingdom starts there will be people on earth who will have children, they'll populate the earth. Many of those people who populate the earth will be unbelievers and even though Christ is ruling in Jerusalem, they won't believe in Him. Satan will be released at the end of the thousand years. He'll sweep through the earth with his demons. He'll create a rebellion. He'll gather a huge army. And he'll fight against the Lord Jesus Christ. But there still will be millions of believers all over the world, all over the world.

Now when the...follow this one...when the present creation in its millennial form is uncreated, the question is: what's going to happen to all those living believers? And some commentators feel that this verse, "And the nations shall walk by its light and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it," is a reference to the translation of those living believers on earth, people and rulers, who are taken into the eternal state. Perhaps that is what John had in mind, we certainly can't be dogmatic about it. But it could refer to those believer who simply are alive at the end of the millennial Kingdom and are translated into the new heavens and the new earth without going through death and certainly they wouldn't be judged by God and executed in the rebellion when God judges Satan and all who fight with him.

It may well be that as the new heavens and the new earth come immediately into existence and the old is uncreated, they are translated instantaneously into the descending new Jerusalem and it is those nations and kings to which he refers. But in the end everybody is going to be there, all peoples are going to be there and all rulers are going to have their glory dissolved into the glory of God which is all the glory that will be in the eternal state.

Now I know some of you are counting big on the fact that there's going to be variations in the social strata because somewhere down the line you heard some guy preach a sermon on whether you're building a big mansion or a little one. I want to hurry to say that when John went to visit heaven he didn't see any mansions. He didn't see any.

You say, "What about...what about John 14, 'In My Father's house there are many mansions.'" That's one of the saddest translations I've ever heard. What it says in the Greek is, "In My Father's house there are many rooms, or in My Father's house there are many dwelling places." How could you have a house with many mansions in it? It doesn't even make sense in English. It's a house with many rooms. There will be room for all of us. I don't think that we're going to be up there saying, "Boy, I wish I had his house."

Verse 25 takes us a step further. "And in the day time," and then to make sure you don't misunderstand that, "for there shall be no night there," so it will always be...what?...daytime. "In the daytime and there will be no night there, its gate shall never be closed." Now that's an important thing to say. You don't understand that because you don't live in an ancient time. Although some of you have learned the importance of gates and you've got a...you've got a place behind some kind of security system and you know what that means to have those gates closed, you feel secure and that's the way it was in an old ancient city. They were walled cities and they had gates and the gates were closed at night to keep invaders, marauders and criminals and dangerous people from coming into their city in the night. But the point here is there's never any night and so you never need to close the gate. It's a place of rest and safety and security and refreshment.

The city gates were shut at night because they were there for protection. Not in the new Jerusalem, no night...by the way, nobody will ever sleep anyway because we will have entered into eternal...what?...rest and be continually refreshed all the time. Heaven is eternal rest and that's what it will be. And so...in fact, Revelation 14:13 says, "We'll rest from our labors while the ungodly in hell have no rest," 14:11. So the gates never close because there's never any night, and frankly there's never any danger. We enter into rest.

Richard Baxter, the great Puritan writer, comments on rest, eternal rest, with some interesting words that I found. "Rest," he says, "not as the stone that rests on the earth, nor as these clods of flesh shall rest in the grave, so our beasts much rest as well as we. Nor is it the satisfying of our fleshly lusts nor such rest as the carnal world desires. No, no, we have another kind of rest than these. Rest we shall from all our labors which were but the way and means to rest, but yet that is the smallest part. O blessed rest, where we shall never rest day or night, crying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbaths,' when we shall rest from sin but not from worship. Rest from suffering and sorrow but not from comfort. O blessed day when I shall rest with God, when I shall rest in knowing, loving, rejoicing and praising, when my perfect soul and body together shall in these perfect things perfectly enjoy the most perfect rest. When God also who is love itself shall perfectly love me, yea, and rest in His love to

me as I shall rest in my love to Him and rejoice over me with joy and singing as I rejoice over Him." That kind of rest. And so, we will have protection, security, safety, rest without ever sleeping.

Verse 26, not just the kings will give all their glory to God but everyone will. Verse 26 says, "And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it." That is to say all people no matter who they are or what country or nation they've come from will bring all their glory, all that is good about them and it will dissolve, as it were, in the eternal worship of God and Christ. The glory and the honor of all the nations dissolves, as it were, in the glory of God.

Now this tells us, I think, something about what this whole matter of rewards means. When we receive our eternal glory, when we receive our eternal honor, I really believe that we receive it and yet it is defused into the glory of God because after all, whatever good we did, whatever we achieved for the cause of Christ, the Spirit of God did in us, right? And He gets all the glory in the end. So all of the redeemed who enter into the eternal city and receive their eternal reward will give...give that back to God and God will be all and all and the eternal worship of God and the eternal worship of Jesus Christ will be everything.

And so, it's a shining city. It has the glory of God and it has all the glory of all the people who have ever received from God honor and glory diffused into that glory of God. It is a breathtaking glory, blazing everywhere. And that above everything describes that city.

The commentator Cise(?) writing many years ago wrote a vision of this glory that stuck with me through the years. In fact, I've never found anything to surpass it. And I went back digging through my old notes to find it and I found it. This is what he says about this blazing jewel of the holy city. He says, "That shining is not from any material combustion, not from any consumption of fuel that needs to be replaced as one supply burns out, for it is the uncreated light of Him who is light, dispensed by and through the Lamb as the everlasting lamp to the home and hearts and understandings of His glorified saints. When Paul and Silas laid wounded and bound in the inner dungeon of the prison of Philippi, they still had sacred light which enabled them to beguile the night with happy songs. When Paul was on his way to Damascus, a light brighter than the sun at noon shone round about him, irradiating his whole being with new sights and understanding and making soul and body ever afterward light in the Lord.

When Moses came down from the mount of his communion with God, his face was so illuminous that his brethren could not endure to look upon it. He was in such close fellowship with light that he became informed with light and came to the camp as a very lamp of God glowing with the glory of God. And on the Mount of Transfiguration that same light streamed forth from all the body and raiment of the blessed Jesus. And with reference to the very time when this city comes into being and place, Isaiah said, "The moon shall be ashamed and the sun confounded," ashamed because of the out beaming glory which then shall appear in the new Jerusalem, leaving no more need for them to

shine in it since the glory of God lights it and the Lamb is the light thereof.

And so does John describe the general appearance, the exterior design and the internal features. And there are more. Continuing in our look on the inside, let's go to chapter 22 verse 1. We're now getting our city tour. "He showed me a river of the water of life clear as crystal coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb." And again I point out that everything is clear, everything is crystal so that the glory shines through it all. "He showed me a river of the water of life." Remember now there's no more sea so this is not a river like we know. In order to have a hydrological cycle, in order to have a river as we know a river, you'd have to have a sea because the river would go somewhere and then it would have to dissolve into something and it would have to be evaporated and picked up and brought back and put back in the head waters to make the river go again. There would have to be some cycle that moved the water. But there's no sea. There's no hydrological creation as we know it. So this is a different kind of river. And it's clear it is because this river is filled with the water of...what?...of life. That's not H₂O, folks. You say, "What is it?" I don't know, it's the water of life and it's as clear as crystal. It's the water of life as clear as crystal, that's all I know. It's ever flowing and it's ever cascading. I see it as a cascading river. Why? Because it comes down from the throne of God and of the Lamb and it's tumbling like waterfall across this crystal city, splashing across the transparent gold.

And, of course, you know how crystal clear moving water refracts light at every change of flow. This just adds to the blaze of glory.

You say, "What is the water in there?" It's the water of life. It's a symbol of pure, holy, eternal life flowing down through the city from the throne of God and of the Lamb. That's one throne. And so the fountain head or the source of this is the throne of God from which it tumbles. It reminds us, doesn't it, of the Garden of Eden. In the Garden of Eden there was a beautiful river with four branches. And those four branches watered paradise. So the heavenly paradise has its river, too. It is a beautiful crystal clear celestial river of eternal life that bathes the holy city as it flows down from the throne of God.

Water symbolizes salvation. Water symbolizes eternal life. You must be born of the water and the Spirit, it symbolizes washing and regeneration. John really understood the meaning of water in terms of its reference to salvation for it was John himself who...who wrote down the words of Jesus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he can't enter the Kingdom." It was John who wrote down the words of Jesus, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give them shall be come in him a well of water, springing up to eternal life." So we know it's not H₂O, that's in chapter 4 of John's gospel.

Over in chapter 7 it was John who recorded the words of Jesus who said, "If any man is thirsty let him come to Me and drink," verse 37, "He who believes in Me as the Scripture says from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." It was John also in chapter 13 and verse 8 who wrote down the

words of Jesus, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

John understood the symbol of water, the symbolic character as it pointed to salvation cleansing. This river has no stagnation, this river has no pollution, no obstructions, no murkiness. It is the symbol of the constant flow of everlasting life from God's throne to all the people in glory. He is the spring, He is the fountain, He is the source of eternal life and this river symbolizes that as it comes out of His throne.

No doubt it's what the psalmist had in mind in Psalm 46:4 when he said, "There is a river, the streams of which make glad the city of God." God even gave the psalmist a view.

And then verse 2, "In the middle of its street," literally its path might be a better way to say that, "In the middle of the path of this river," and there's some punctuation issues here and some translation issues in this verse that some folks have maybe disagreed on. But let me give it to you as simply as I can. "In the middle of its path," disregard that period, "and on either side of the river was the tree of life bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

In the middle of its path and on either side of the river was the tree of life. So here comes the river tumbling out of the throne and as it cascades and tumbles, whatever it is, crystal clear, shining eternal life in some appearance as water flashing the beautiful brilliance of the glory of God, as it tumbles down its path on either side of that path it says was the tree of life. Now that's just another symbol.

You say, "Well, what kind of a tree is it?" Well it's not a tree like we know because a tree like we know grows in...what?...soil and there's no soil there. So this isn't a tree like we know. This is the tree of life, it's not a tree of the created order in this earth. This is the tree of life.

There was a tree of life once, Genesis 2:9, remember that? And God said, "You can eat of the tree of life but if you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I'm going to throw you out of the Garden because once you've eaten of that you can't dare eat of the tree of life or you would be perpetually living in that condition of sinfulness." So there was a tree of life, according to Genesis 2:9 in the Garden. The tree of life was a symbol of eternal life, a symbol of blessing.

This is a different one. This is a celestial one. But it symbolizes blessing. When the Jews want to say to you that you should be blessed they say, "La Haem"(??)(chayyim). You know what that means? To life...to life. This is La haem, this is the symbol of life, the highest life, the best life, the greatest joys, the most fulfillment, to life. This tree is the symbol of the unbelievable, glorious life.

In fact, the Jews used that concept that way. Back in Proverbs 3:18 it talks about wisdom and it says, "Wisdom is a tree of life." What does that mean? A source of blessing. It doesn't mean a literal tree, it

means a source of blessing. Wisdom is a tree of life. It produces La Haem, rich full life.

In Proverbs 11 and we would agree that wisdom does do that, in Proverbs 11 and verse 30, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." Get around a righteous person and the product of their life produces blessing, doesn't it? It produces the best of life.

Chapter 13 of Proverbs and verse 12, "Desire fulfilled is a tree of life." What does that mean? When you have something that you desire that you really long for, and God fulfills it, life becomes rich and full and meaningful, that's a tree of life.

Chapter 15 of Proverbs, as you can see, this is a common concept. Chapter 15 and verse 4, I think it is, "A soothing tongue is a tree of life." So you can see that the Jews had this concept of a tree of life simply referring to blessing. A righteous person produces a tree of life. A soothing tongue produces a tree of life. A desire fulfilled produces a tree of life. Wisdom produces a tree of life. That's blessing, joy, fulfillment, contentment, happiness.

So what that tells us is that it's going to be a happy place. It's going to be a place of contentment, joy. It's going to be "La Haem," everybody is going to be going around saying, "La Haem," to life, to life, isn't this marvelous, isn't this glorious?

And the richness of this thing is illustrated because on either side of the river was the tree of life bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Now what do you mean twelve kinds of fruit? Well this life is going to have variety. And I suppose that's an important thing to say because when I was a kid I used to think about heaven as boring. Did you ever think about it like that? As a kid I used to say, "It won't be any fun to play basketball because everybody will make every shot. It won't be any fun to play golf because every shot will be a hole-in-one." And you couldn't possibly play tennis because an irresistible force and an immovable object result in nothing. What are we going to do up there?" We won't be able to improve on anything because we'll be perfect at everything. There won't be anything to make because everything will be made.

You say, "We'll sing." Yeah, we'll all sing perfectly so there won't be any reason to practice. You say, "Well, I'm going to play a harp." Well you'll play it perfectly from the first time you pick it up and you'll never make a mistake eternally, and neither will anybody else.

It just seemed sort of boring. And I think just for people like me there's a little hint here that this tree of life is going to have twelve kinds of fruit, a different kind every month. And what that means is heaven is going to be filled with...what?...variety, variety.

By the way, somebody I know, I can feel it, is saying, "Month, month, month, did I hear month? Isn't this eternity? What's month doing there?" Well time has no part of eternity but it does remind us that there are cycles. I mean, it's just another one of those anthropomorphic expressions to say something to us in terminology which we can understand. There will be a regular cycle of joyous provision, filled with variety, changing all the time.

And then a most interesting comment. "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Healing? From what? No more illness, no more pain, no more disease, what is this healing? Well we know it's not from sickness, don't we? The word "healing," therapeon. It means therapeutic, therapeon, therapeutic. It doesn't imply illness. A better way to translate it would be this, "And the leaves of the tree were...were life giving, health giving, therapeutic." They just enriched life. Like vitamins only supernatural ones. You don't take vitamins because you're sick, you take them because somebody told you it enhances the well being of life, right? Make you feel better. Or you take some dose of whatever you take, if you're deficient in iron or whatever, it's not because you're ill, it's not because you have a disease, you don't need surgery, you just need a little zest in your life. I think that's the idea. There's...there's going to be provided in heaven infinite variety and they are going to be all kinds of things available in heaven demonstrated by the symbolism of the leaves of that tree that are just going to energize life and just make it rich and full and exciting.

And I can hear some of you saying, "But it says eat, or it assumes eat, the leaves of the tree were for the healing." It doesn't assume eat, maybe we just rub them on our glorified body, I don't know. You say, "Well, are we going to eat them?" I don't know because it doesn't say. I do know that angels ate Abraham's meat and Sarah's cakes in Genesis 16. And I do know that a resurrected Christ ate with His disciples, right? I don't...I don't really know how it's going to work. But all I know is it says that they are for the therapy, they're health-giving, they're energizing.

Heaven's going to have all kinds of variety. And it's not going to be sort of droning on at the same pace. They're going to be great explosions of energy as the life of God is made available to us.

And so the leaves sort of symbolize the full enjoyment of life in the new Jerusalem. We don't really need any food, we won't need to be healed of anything. But there's going to be endless variety and a constant infusing of great exhilarating joy.

Now that brings us to the last point in John's vision. Hear his description. He got a general look, then he got the exterior design and then he got the interior features. And now we come fourthly to the privileges of the saints.

Now we're going to talk about what life's going to be like in there, verses 3 to 5 and we'll be done. What's life going to be like? Verse 3, "There shall no longer be any curse," no longer any curse. Boy,

is that wonderful? Absolutely no curse at all. There's not going to be, back in chapter 21 verse 4, any tears, any death, any mourning, any crying, any pain, all of those things fit into the category of first things and they are all eternally gone. No longer any curse.

"And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and His bondservants shall serve Him." There's no temple there but there is a throne there. We already had a description of that throne back in chapter 4. And I would only remind you to read it, I'm not going to go through the detailed description but there is a throne. Guess what? Verse 3, "He who is sitting on it was like a jasper." Again, the blazing diamond, "And a sardius in appearance, and there was a rainbow around the throne like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne are twenty-four thrones and on the thrones twenty four elders sitting," and we discussed that those were representatives of the redeemed, "clothed in white garments, golden crowns on their heads and from the throne lightning and sounds and peals of thunder." And, of course, that was all when judgment was about to fall. "There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God." So the Spirit of God will be represented there as well. "And in front of the throne was a sea of glass like crystal." And again there's that transparency. "And then there were four living creatures," they're described there, an incredible description of angelic beings. "And holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty who was and who is and who is to come, they cry out as they surround the throne." And you have all the praise going on around the throne.

So you already have that description of what the throne is like and that's the throne that is in heaven and that's the one that's there when the celestial city descends. So we get a little hint as to what life is going to be like in there, no curse. The throne of God and the Lamb is there. And a sovereign God sits on His throne and a sovereign Lamb with Him. And His bondservants, verse 3, shall serve Him. His bondservants shall serve Him.

That's what we're going to do. We're going to serve Him. We're going to do whatever He wants us to do. Bondservants, slaves, we're going to do whatever He tells us to do. That's what we'll do forever and ever and ever. And the infinite mind of God, listen...do you understand how infinite God's mind is? Do you understand the variety of God's mind? If you think for one minute it's going to be boring in heaven, is it boring down here? You haven't even begun to see one billionth of what it will be like in a perfect world when the unlimited creative mind of God sets itself loose. I mean, it's going to be incredible to serve Him in ways which are absolutely beyond our ability to comprehend.

Back in chapter 7 of Revelation and verse 15 it says that they serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. That's why there doesn't have to be a temple or a tabernacle because He's going to spread it over all of them and so the whole of the new heaven and the new earth becomes His tabernacle or His temple and we serve Him in that.

Rudyard Kipling who was a great poet and a lousy theologian wrote these words, "When earth's last picture is painted and the tubes are twisted and dried, when the oldest colors have faded and the youngest critic has died, we shall rest and faith we shall need it. Lay down for an eon or two, till the Master of all good workmen shall put us to work anew." That's great poetry. That is lousy theology. That is a Rip-Van-Winkle view of heaven. We're not going to be lying around, we're going to be serving Him night and day, that simply means all the time because there there is no night, as you remember.

And you know, there's another interesting note I mentioned to you, did you pick it up at the communion service a few weeks ago? We're not only going to serve Him, but this is the most mind-boggling thing of all. Back in Luke chapter 12, I have to add this because it's so wonderful, Luke chapter 12 verse 35, Jesus says, "Be dressed in readiness, keep your lamps lit, be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast so that they may immediately open a door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will gird himself to serve and have them recline at the table and come up and wait on them." Is that unbelievable?

You know what's going to happen? We're not only going to serve Him, but...what?...He's going to serve us.

And then John takes us further into the activities of heaven. Verse 4, "And they shall see His face." They shall see His face. Exodus 33, God said if anybody looks on My face they'll die. They'll be consumed. No man could see Me and live. That changes. Now we can look at the blazing glory of God in all its fullness and not die. Why? Because we're holy. We are covered with His holiness. To see God's face as sinners would be to be consumed with His holy animosity to sin. But in heaven we'll see Him in all His glory. John 1:18 says, "No man has seen God at any time, but the day will come when we will indeed see Him face to face." "We will see He who is...according to 1 Timothy 6:15...the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see." We will see Him then. Matthew 5:8 says, "They shall see God."

In that city we will be engulfed in His presence. We will be exposed to the full blaze of His eternal glory. Christ will be the radiant focal point of that manifestation. Christ will be the centerpiece, if there is such a thing, of that diamond blazing glory of God.

And this then really is the joy of heaven. The hymn writer said, "The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face. I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace." In other words, the believer is going to follow the glory back to the face from which it radiates. "Not at the crown He giveth," says the hymn writer, "but on His pierced hand, the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land."

And then we look again and we see in verse 4 His name shall be on their foreheads. "His name shall be on their foreheads." What's that? Personal possession. That's eternal security, friends. No doubt who we belong to and we'll belong to Him forever. Back in chapter 3 of Revelation when the Lord was writing to the churches, He wrote a letter to the church at Philadelphia and He said, "He who overcomes," verse 12, "I'll make a pillar in the temple of My God and he will not go out from it anymore. And I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God and My new name." There you have the fullness of it. It says His name shall be on their foreheads, in that verse it says you're going to have the name of My God, the name of the city of My God, and My new name. Hey, we're going to have a whole lot of names written on our foreheads.

And what it all says is he belongs to Me and he belongs to this city of which he is an eternal citizen and he belongs to the Lamb and all of that is identified in what is written on us.

And then it all ends, this description of the glory of the holy city with a repeat of the real magnificence. Look at verse 5, remember this, this is the essence of it and this is the third time this has been mentioned in one way or another. "There shall no longer be any night, they shall not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun because the Lord God shall illumine them." And then here's one more feature of what we do, "They shall reign forever and ever." Not just serving but reigning...reigning. What a tremendous truth.

What does that mean? Well, Revelation 3:21 says, "To him who overcomes I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne." Wow! We'll be reigning and He'll be serving us as He is reigning and we're serving Him. It's unbelievable that we could attain to such glory.

The gold, the jewels, the diamonds, the pearls are all incidental to the glory shining, the glory is everything. This is astounding truth, really. To be eternally embraced in the arms of the glory of God, unbelievable.

It was the Queen of Sheba who had reason to say of Solomon's glory, "Happy are thy men, happy are thy servants who stand continually before thee and hear thy wisdom. Then surely they that stand continually before God and see His glory and the glory of the Lamb are truly happy."

You know something? If this isn't true, John is the ultimate blasphemer. How blasphemous it would be to speak of being with the eternal God, of having His personal name written on your head, of having Him serve you, of reigning with Him and sitting on His throne? How blasphemous would it be to say that you are a joint heir with Jesus Christ, that you reign on the throne of God, that you are one with the Father were it not true? What a hope.

So, we've seen the appearance, the design, the interior life and the privileges. Now I know you know I skipped a verse till now. One more issue, the occupants. Who's there? Who's in this place? Back to verse 27 of chapter 21, "And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

The inhabitants of the city are identified over in chapter 21 verse 7 as those who overcome. And what is it that overcomes in 1 John 5? It is our faith, faith in Christ. They will inherit these things and I will be his God and he will be My son. It won't be, verse 8 says, the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death.

God down to chapter 22 verse 15, "Outside this city are the dogs," dogs were symbols of outcasts, "the sorcerers, the immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, everyone who loves and practices lying." Outside, verse 19, are those who take away from the words of the book of this prophecy because God will take away their part from the tree of life and from the holy city. No, there won't be any unclean there, there won't be any who practice abominations, there won't be any liars there, there won't be any murderers there, there won't be any idolaters, any unbelieving, cowardly, abominable, immoral, sorcerers. There won't be any of those there. They'll all be in the lake of fire, only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

We've heard about that already. Chapter 17 and verse 8, "Whose name has not been written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world." In other words, the judgment of God will fall on those whose names are not written in that book. Back in chapter 13 verse 8, "All those who dwell on the earth will worship Him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of the life...in the Book of Life of the Lamb who has been slain."

The only people who are going to be there are those whose names are written in the Book of Life. When were they written there? From before the foundation of the world. It's the elect. They're described in chapter 22 verse 14, "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city." It's the elect who have been cleansed, who have been washed by the washing of regeneration. It's...it's the thirsty, verse 17 of chapter 22, who come and take the water of life without cost, those who come pleading for spiritual thirst to be quenched. That's who will be there. The elect who have come to be thirsty and cried out for a drink, come to be hungry and cried out for righteousness. It's the elect who have believed and thus they've overcome the world. It is for them that 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who...what?...who love Him." It's the elect who come to faith and who love Him and who hunger and thirst for righteousness, it's those who belong to God, first of all because they're chosen but they come by faith in Christ and they've been transformed and sanctified and made holy.

Do you want to be there? Then confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead and you'll be saved.

You want to be there? As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to be called the sons of God.

Do you want to be there? Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the eternal home for the saved. Everybody else is in the lake of fire, darkness, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth. And I ask you, what fool would choose that? One who so consummately loves his sin that he is willing to pay the price of eternal hell for it.

Hold on to hell if you want, I'll take heaven. Let's pray.

Father, what a picture, what a glorious picture of our eternal home, all those who have committed their lives to Christ, all those who have believed in You, who have hungered and thirsted for righteousness, who have come to drink and to eat, all those who by faith have overcome the world, all those who believed, all those whose names You wrote in the Book of Life from before the foundation of the world. Heaven is just for Your people, those who come to You by faith, counting on nothing that they have done to gain salvation or heaven but realizing that they have to come as a thirsty sinner, a hungry sinner, a beggar, pleading for Your grace and forgiveness which You give them so freely because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sins and satisfied Your just requirement.

Father, we...we thank you for heaven. We thank You, Lord, that it will be a place of absolute holiness. We rejoice that only the pure will be there, those made pure by Your grace. We thank You that it will be a place of perfection. But that, Lord, is not to say we don't grieve over those who are shut out because of loving sin so profoundly that they would choose eternal punishment in order to hold on to it, for the brief flicker of this life. O God, I pray that You will convict any such foolish sinner and may he let go of hell and embrace heaven. May You be gracious to that sinner, holding so tightly to his sin or her sin, clinging to eternal punishment as if it were to be desired and forfeiting heaven. And may they loose the grasp and reach out to the Savior who can forgive their sin and take them to the glory of the eternal city. Life passes so fast, may we choose in the light of eternity. Work You work in every heart, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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