

LOOKING FOR A BETTER COUNTRY

Revelation 21:9 – 22:5

Introduction:

After defecting to the United States, Orestes Perez knew he had to rescue his family from Cuba. So one Saturday afternoon, flying low in a borrowed Cessna to avoid radar, he swooped down into Cuba, past his former neighborhood, and landed in traffic on a Coastal road. His family ran to the plane, and they were soon leaving the Cuban shore, en route to freedom.

His wife, Victoria, had waited patiently. But it was hard. Going to America seemed to her like going to heaven. "When I saw the plane, I screamed to my children, 'That's your father!'"

"I grabbed both of them and we ran," she said. As they ran, one of the kids lost a shoe. "Forget the shoe!" Victoria screamed. "Father is in the plane!"

After two years of separation, the family had been reunited. To Victoria and Orestes, their new home in America is like heaven: a place of freedom, a place where they can realize their dreams.

For Victoria, America had been a vague reality. She knew her husband was there and that it would be better there, but she had few details to make it real in her heart.

(Joseph Stowell, *Eternity, Reclaiming a Passion for What Endures*, p. 67)

Do you ever feel that heaven is kind of like that? We know so little about what life will be like in heaven, but we know it will be better.

There is a desire in all of us for something more. We read in Hebrews 11 about the patriarchs and their faith—faith that looked ahead to something they could not see.

Abraham went out, called by God, not even knowing where he was going. But we are told that his faith led him to look even further, beyond the land that God said would one day be his, to look for a city with real foundations. He was looking for an eternal city, whose designer and builder is God. (Heb. 11:10)

The writer to the Hebrews tells of men like Abel, the first martyr who died without seeing the promise... like Enoch, who walked with God for over 300 years, and was taken up without dying...like Noah,

who believed God, though he could not see what would happen. All of these, we are told, died in faith – *read Heb. 11:13-16*.

"...he has prepared for them a city." It is that city, the holy city, the New Jerusalem that is revealed to us in our text today. Turn with me to Revelation 21, where we will read the passage that is the basis for our discussion this morning. *Read Revelation 21:9 – 22:5*.

I want to look briefly into this passage in three parts:

1. Exposing the New Jerusalem – 21:9 – 14
2. Exploring the New Jerusalem – 21:15 – 21
3. Experiencing the New Jerusalem – 21:22 – 22:5

We do not have time to go into detail on all of the description that is given of this great city, but I hope that you will get enough of a picture that it will draw your eyes heavenward with anticipation of what is to come for the believer.

Exposing the New Jerusalem – 21:9 – 14

This is one of the final revelations given to John. The angel (specifically identified as one of the seven who carried the bowls of God's judgment) calls him to come and see the Bride, the wife of the Lamb—Christ. The marriage of the Lamb has already taken place. The Church is now forever united with Christ in a union of perfect love and harmony.

What John sees is, more specifically, the abode of the Bride—the holy city, the new Jerusalem. David Levy explains it this way:

It should be understood that John is not saying that the bride is the new Jerusalem, but it is being characterized as "the bride, the Lamb's wife." The bride is a figure for a material city yet to come, as well as for the inhabitants of that city. The bride figure cannot be limited to the individuals who will live in the city. It must also include the literal city with its physical characteristics.

In verse 2 of this chapter we read last week of John seeing the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Here we have an expansion on that vision. John is taken up to a high mountain where he sees the holy city Jerusalem descending to the earth out of heaven from God. And what a sight it is! Look at John's description.

First of all, it has the glory of God. What John sees is a huge city, brilliant like a rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. The dictionary describes jasper as "...an opaque, usually red, brown or yellow variety of quartz..." But what John saw, he describes as clear as crystal.

This great, magnificent city was surrounded by a great high wall with twelve gates, inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the sons of Jacob. The wall was supported on twelve foundations, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, the Lamb.

It is hard to imagine what John was looking at. As God showed him a vision of this great, majestic city, the place where the Bride of Christ, together with the angels and the OT saints would well for all eternity, it must have taken his breath away.

But this is just the beginning. Now it is time to explore—to look a bit deeper at this magnificent city that has been prepared for the righteous. Let's keep going.

Exploring the New Jerusalem – 21:15 – 21

In the next section (vv. 15-21) we see what I call "Exploring the New Jerusalem." Exploring is always fun when you are in a new place.

Illust. – when we were on vacation, we took a bit of a road trip east from Camrose as far as Loughheed. We drove into two or three other towns and villages along the way – places we had never been before. It is intriguing to drive or walk around and explore the place—to see how big it is...what sort of things are there...what it looks like.

That is kind of what I see happening in this passage. John sees the angel who called him with a measuring tape in his hand – lit. a measuring rod made of gold. As he looks around there are a number of things that catch his eye—the size of the city, the wall, the gates, the streets.

As the angel measures, he finds that this city is 12,000 stadia in length and breadth. That is approximately 1400 miles (many commentators round it off to 1500 miles). That means the New Jerusalem at its base is roughly 2 million square miles.

Illustration –People sometimes wonder if heaven will be big enough for all the believers of all the ages. Mention Calgary, looking over the city from Stoney trail – would fit 6000 times in this city. And that is not the end of it. The New Jerusalem is just as high as it is long and wide. The size of the city is immense...

Then there is the wall – 144 cubits (roughly 220 feet). The text doesn't actually indicate what this measurement refers to. The NIV adds the word "thick" but it is not clear whether John is talking about height or thickness. But the wall is made of jasper, the city of pure gold – so pure it is all clear as glass. The twelve foundations of the wall have jewels on them along with the names of the apostles.

The jewels – twelve in number – every color of the rainbow. Very similar to the twelve stones embedded in the breastplate of the High priest that is described in Exodus. We don't have time to look at them...

The gates – mentioned earlier – twelve gates, three on each side of the city, inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. But the amazing thing about these gates is that each one is made up of a single pearl. Imagine the size of those oysters!!

The streets – made of gold, pure and clear as glass.

There will be plenty to explore as John found as he looked around at the city that God showed him. But what is life going to be like in that city? The beauty will be amazing, but more importantly what will it be like to live there for all eternity?

Experiencing the New Jerusalem – 21:22 – 22:5

In this section we see something of what it will be like in the New Jerusalem. The first thing we notice is that there are a number of things missing or not needed there. Life will be very different than it is now on the present earth.

First there will be no temple. The Jewish nation has always placed great importance on the temple. One of the great tragedies was the destruction of the temple in AD 70. The Bible indicates that the temple will be rebuilt during the Great Tribulation and that there will be a temple during the Millennium. But in eternity, there will be no need of a tem-

ple, because God himself will dwell in the midst of his people. They will have direct, immediate and intimate communion with him.

Second, there will be no need for sun or moon. The glory of God will be the light in the eternal city. God's presence will illuminate every corner of the new Jerusalem.

Discuss briefly the "nations." David Levy explains:

"The word *nations* means *Gentiles* and is used, not in a political sense, but referring to saved Gentiles living in the eternal state who are not part of Israel or the church. At that time, "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into" the new Jerusalem (v. 24). Those holding positions of honor among the saved Gentiles in eternity will give their glory and honor...to God the Father and Jesus Christ."

Then we see that there will be no night. There will be no reason to ever shut the gates, since it is always day. The only people living there will be the redeemed, and the city will be open to all.

Finally, there will be no evil in that city. Read v. 27. Nothing unclean, nothing vile or detestable will ever enter the New Jerusalem. All that is evil and unclean has been forever banished to the lake of fire.

In the first 5 verses of chapter 22, we are given some of the qualities of this magnificent city. What becomes immediately apparent is that it will be paradise restored. Some of the key things that John saw there are:

- The throne of God and of the Lamb
- The river of the water of life flowing from the throne
- The tree of life reaching to both sides of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit – one each month

It would appear that there will still be some kind of time calculated, even in eternity, if there are months, but we will certainly not be confined by time as we are now. The leaves will be "...for the healing of the nations." The word healing means health-giving, therapeutic. As there will be no sickness or disease in the eternal order, this is not necessary for healing of diseases, but obviously they will enhance life in some way in eternity.

Verses 3-5 reiterate some of the things John already mentioned. There will be no night there. There will be no need of sun or moon, or lamps of any kind, for God himself will provide the light.

About the only clue we are given in all of Scripture regarding what we will do in heaven is given in these verses. We will be identified with God himself – see his face, his name on our forehead. We will worship him and serve him. We will reign with him.

I am not even going to try to speculate what all that will mean. What I do know is that it will be glorious. It will be life like we have never known it.

Conclusion

Are you looking forward to life in the new Jerusalem? I hope and pray that as we have looked just a little bit at heaven through John's eyes, that our hearts have been drawn heavenward. After all that is the real home of everyone who knows Jesus Christ as Saviour.

There is a great southern gospel song, written by Squire Parsons. It is called Beulah land and it starts out with a line which says:

"I'm kind of homesick for a country, to which I've never been before."

How can you be homesick for some place you have never seen? I believe it is because God has placed within us a desire for heaven. The preacher in Ecclesiastes said, "God has placed eternity in their hearts." There is something in us that looks forward to a better place.

Just like Abraham, we are looking for a city with foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Like the patriarchs of old, we desire a better country, a heavenly one. We know inside that, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

The problem we have to guard against is losing sight of that eternal home and becoming too comfortable in this world.