

Sunday Evening Online
Our Eternal Home is the New Earth (Part 2)
Selected Scriptures
August 30, 2020
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Good evening, and welcome to Sunday Evening Online – so glad that you're able to join me again, as we look at God's word together. Let's begin our time together with prayer; you join me as we pray.

Father, it is with great joy that we unite our hearts again together in worship, and Lord, there are so many ways that You have given us to worship You, but chief among them is to sit at Your feet and hear Your word taught. Lord, we thank You for the privilege that we have Your word – and thank You that You've not left us in the dark about the future, because You've given us great hope as we anticipate what lies before us in eternity future. I pray that You would encourage us again as we consider Your truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we've been looking, as of last Sunday night, with the reality of what we have awaiting us in the future. We've been considering the fact that we are not going to live out our lives forever in heaven, as wonderful as heaven is; but rather, we are going to actually live on a new earth – God is going to wipe away the existing universe as we know it, destroy it, as we discovered last time, and He's going to make a new universe and a new earth on which we will live forever. We're looking at what the scripture has to say about that new earth, and all that it entails, its beauty – and tonight, we're going to continue to look at the reality of it, but also, practically, what will we do; what will life for us be like in eternity on the new earth? So, let's join together as we look again at God's word and learn about what awaits us in the future.

Now, beginning in Revelation 21:9, and running down through Revelation 22:5, John gives us a detailed description of the eternal city of the new world; the crown jewel of the new universe; let's look at it together. Now, after meeting John's tour guide in verses 9-10, one of the angels we met earlier in the Book of Revelation, then beginning in verse 11 and running down through verse 21, John describes, and the angel describes to him, the architectural details and features of this city. First of all, there's sort of this initial, overall impression – verse 11, "Her brilliance was

Commented [SR1]: Tom does not specifically say that these passages are from Revelation, only giving the chapters and verses, but it is understood - I have added the name of the book here for clarity.

like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper." Again, you see John is having trouble explaining this to us; he says it's like a precious stone, it's like a clear, radiant stone – think diamond; the entire city is like a giant diamond turning and sparkling in the sunlight, casting its dazzling refracted colors across the universe. That's what it looks like – think a massive diamond turning in the sun.

Then he tells us that it has real walls and gates – verses 12-14, notice verse 12, "It had a great and high wall." Now, that's a surprise – what are walls in the ancient world for? They're for defense against your enemies – but there are no enemies to threaten this city; they've all been destroyed, so why are there walls here? The walls symbolize this city's permanent, impenetrable security. In addition, there are twelve gates, or literally gate-towers; it's a big complex rather than a single little door – and specifically, you'll notice verse 12 says "twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels." And, by the way, notice that on these gates, "the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel" were written, and then down in verse 14, on the foundation stones of the wall of the city, "the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" were written – what's the point? The point is, in eternity, there will be one unified people of God – when I grew up, there was a sort of odd kind of dispensationalism taught that said the Jews would live on the earth and the Christians would live in this satellite city with God. No – just like in the church, those who are redeemed, those who have come to embrace the Messiah, we will be one people of God, united together forever.

Notice that there are these gate-towers, the twelve of them – there are three in each compass direction; that implies that we will come and go from this city to the rest of the earth, and probably to the rest of the infinite universe. For those of us who enjoy travel – notice I didn't say the process, but who enjoy travel – there will be no shortage of that in the eternal state, and I am confident there will be no economy class. Notice there is an angel posted at each gate, it says in verse 12; that also is further proof of the safety of this city; it has walls, it has gates, it has an angel – remember, now, angels are these powerful and intelligent beings; one angel killed 185,000 men in one night in the Old Testament – there's an angel at each gate. This is an impenetrable, absolutely perfectly safe city; no reason to ever fear.

Now, you'll notice in verse 14 that we're told that "the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones" – I think, implied in that, a foundation stone implies that it goes down into the earth; so, I think this city will rest on the earth as opposed to what some teach, sort of a satellite city hovering above the earth – it seems that it's connected; it sits on the surface of this new earth. That's surprising when you consider its size, and you see this in verses 15-17. "The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width, and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles, its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards" – that's probably not the height of the wall, but likely the thickness of the wall, seventy-two yards, three quarters of a football field – the wall is thick, again, symbolizing the absolute safety and security of this city; it's massive. When the angel measures the city, John discovers that it is a perfectly symmetrical cube, and depending on how long a stadion or the stadia are that are mentioned here, that biblical measurement, it's somewhere between 1,400 and 1,500 miles cubed. In other words, think that the footprint of this city is roughly the size of the U.S. from the Mississippi River to the Pacific, from the southern border with Mexico to the northern border with Canada. Some, because of that, say this can't be a real city; I mean, if you attached a cube that size to our planet, it would give the earth a distinct wobble. It's like, really? I mean, you think a Being who can speak the universe into existence can't figure that out? I'm really not worried. Now, why is the new Jerusalem a cube – why would it be a cube? There is one very famous cube in the Old Testament – what is it? It's the Holy of Holies; it was 30 feet by 30 feet by 30 feet, it was a perfect cube – and here, you have a city that is a perfect cube; why? Because it will be the Holy of Holies for eternity – it will be in the new earth what the Holy of Holies was for the people of God in the Old Testament; it will be the special dwelling place of God among His people. Now, think of how the size of a city this massive, how much it would be – a city 1,400 miles square; that's the footprint – and then imagine if you multiplied that times the number of levels that a city 1,400 miles high can accommodate, with millions of intersecting golden streets and boulevards and avenues – it's massive.

Notice its materials in verses 18-21 – "The material of the wall was jasper;" think a clear diamond-like stone, "and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone." Verse 21, "And the twelve gates were

twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." So, overall, the city is like a diamond, but it's also made of a kind of gold that is so pure it's translucent – and the walls, and much of the city, is made up of a variety of precious stones. We know some of these stones, and others of them we can't be quite as sure about, but what's intended here is to tell us that there will be a huge variety of transparent color; there will be greens and blues and purples and reds, with many other tones and hues and shades. And when you add all of those stones to the glass-like gold, and to the diamond-like, translucent quality of the entire city, this city will be like a magnificent, multi-colored jewel splashing its radiance around the universe with the colors of the rainbow. Sometimes, when I'm driving in my car, my hands on the steering wheel, and I have a couple of diamonds in the ring on my hand, my wife gave to me, and the sun will catch those diamonds and refract the colors of the rainbow around my car – it's beautiful. Well, with that city, there isn't some external source of light; the light is the glory of God within the city, and the glory of God will radiate out through that diamond-like, gold-like, multi-colored city, refracting its beauty around the universe – what a city.

Those are the architectural features – but John moves on from that in verse 22 of chapter 21 and going down through chapter 22 verse 5 to explain the spiritual realities of this city. He explains here some things that won't be in heaven – first of all, in verse 22, there's no temple. "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." We won't need a temple because God will be there. He will be its temple; we will worship in the very presence of God Himself. In verses 23-24, we learn that in that new universe, particularly in conjunction with the new earth, there will be no cosmic light source. "The city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it." Listen, it won't need a sun like we need now, it won't need a moon – why? Because the glory of God will provide its light. I love the way Isaiah describes it, talking about this very reality in Isaiah 24:23; he says, "The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed" – why? "For the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders." Isaiah's saying, listen – when God's glory is the light, you don't need the sun; in fact, the sun will be ashamed to

Commented [SR2]: Tom says the word "cities" here instead of the word "kings" as recorded in the NASB.

show up because it will look, in comparison to the glory of God, like the fading, glowing spark of an extinguished candle.

In verses 25-26, John tells us there's going to be no danger there. "In the daytime (for there will be no night there)" – isn't that a wonderful thing? Everything looks worse at night; you notice that? And that's when a lot of the evil in our world is done. "In the daytime (for there will be no night there), its gates will never be closed, and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it." Its gates will never close, never be closed, because there will never be a threat to its peace or its prosperity or its security.

Verse 27 tells us there will be no evil there – "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." There's how you get into this city – your name has to be written in the Lamb's book of life; you say, how does that happen? It happens when you are willing to humble yourself before your Creator, confess your sin, express a willingness to turn from your sin, and seek the forgiveness that is found in His Son, the Lamb of God, as John refers to Him. What He purchased through His death on the cross – that's the only way you get into this city. But everyone else – everything evil, everyone evil, will never be there.

In chapter 22 verses 1-2, we find there are no needs in this city because God's throne is there – notice verse 1, "the throne of God and of the Lamb" is there. And remember, Hebrews tells us that the throne of God is a "throne of grace" where we get everything we need. Not only that, there's a crystal-clear river – notice "he showed me," verse 1, "the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street." There's a crystal-clear river that flows from beneath the throne of God our King down the middle of the city's main street and becomes a cascading chorus of waterfalls and streams that flow through the rest of that 1,400-mile cube. This was huge – in the ancient world, and particularly in a barren country like Israel, rivers were everything; you always built your cities near rivers. This city has a river that flows through its center, just like in the original Garden of Eden; this will be paradise regained.

Commented [SR3]: From Hebrews 4:16.

Notice verse 2, "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." It's unclear how many trees John intends for us to see here; there could be two, or frankly, it could be a tree-lined boulevard – but each of these trees is the mysterious tree of life, going back to the Garden, symbolic not only of eternal life, but also of eternal blessing. Notice it bears "twelve kinds of fruit," one each month – this is the new earth version of Harry & David's; it's the fruit-of-the-month tree, incredible variety. And here's the amazing thing – we won't eat its fruit for nourishment; Jesus didn't have to eat, but He could eat – we will eat for sheer enjoyment and for social interaction. The leaves of the tree will be "for the healing of the nations" – what does that mean? By the way, there will be nations in the new world; there will be kings, there will be hierarchies of leadership – but the tree of life will have healed the nations; in other words, there will be righteous rulers, there will be justice, there will be love, there will be everything that reflects the character of God, and nothing else. Every part of these trees enhances our lives, making them rich and satisfying.

Verse 3 of chapter 22 says there will be no curse – I love that. "There will no longer be any curse" – everything that came after the fall of Adam will be erased, it'll be gone. And verses 4-5 say to us there will be no separation – notice "they," that's us, the saints, "will see His face," the face of the Lamb, "and His name will be on their foreheads." They will permanently belong to Him. "And there will no longer be any night, and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them" – and here it is – "they will reign forever and ever." There's no end to this relationship, no end.

There's one other thing that won't be in heaven, and that is, there will be no sinners in heaven; that is, no unrepentant, unredeemed sinners. Let me show you three passages here; look at chapter 21, verse 8. Remember now, this is God talking; this comes from the throne of God, the One who sits on the throne and says this, verse 8, "For the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers;" and, by the way, Christ adds, if you're angry in your heart or you express that anger in words, you're guilty of murder; "and immoral persons," that is, those who actually commit sexual sin, and Christ said if there's an unrepentant pattern of sexual lust; "and sorcerers;" the Greek word is *pharmakeia*, it's the word from which we get our word pharmacy,

it's the word that implies using hallucinatory drugs to get in connection with the gods, or with those who had already died; "and idolaters," worship something other than God; "and all liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." They won't be there – verse 27, "nothing unclean, no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it." Listen – if you hold on to your sin, if you're unwilling to repent and believe in Christ, you will never see the new earth, you will never see this magnificent city – you will, according to God Himself, have your part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

In chapter 22, verse 14, it says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes" – it's a picture of the forgiveness that comes through Christ that's offered down in verse 17 of the same chapter. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city." But, verse 15, "Outside;" that is, outside this city, outside the new earth, outside the new universe are those who live in unrepentant sin, "the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." In 1978, I was in a service like this one, and the pastor just read those verses, and for the first time in my life, I came to grips with the fact that my life was described in those verses and that, though I professed Christ, I would not be in the new heavens and the new earth – and the Lord used these passages that night to bring me to Himself. That's my prayer for you, if you're here today and you're not in Christ. Listen – please understand what this passage is saying; you will never darken the gates of the new Jerusalem, of the new earth that God has created, you will never be there – but, instead, you will forever be separated from God, enduring the wrath of the Lamb. I plead with you to come to Christ today – repent, turn to Him.

Now, a couple of common questions about the new earth, very quickly – what will we be like there? Well, in our characters, we will be just like Christ; all the divine qualities that humans can share will be ours – but understand this; we will still be completely human. Unlike Mormon teaching, we will not be gods; we will be perfected human beings in our characters. What will our new bodies be like? Well, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us our new bodies will be imperishable; that is, they will never grow old, they will never wear out, you will never look in the mirror and grimace. They will be glorious; that is, they will be beautiful and attractive – I'm looking forward to that. They will be powerful; they will have remarkable strength, Paul says.

They will be spiritual bodies – he doesn't mean by that they're like ghosts; he means they're like our Lord's resurrected body, His glorified body, recognizable but different, able to eat but without hunger, able to pass through matter but still be touched. There will be continuity between the old and the new – Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, the relationship between our old bodies and our new bodies will be like the relationship between a seed and the plant that springs from it; that's what we'll be like.

What will we do? Well, we'll worship. We'll worship – look at verse 4, chapter 22; we will see the face of the Lamb, we'll see the human form, the human body of the second member of the Trinity, Who is still human. And, in addition, just as in the Old Testament, God the Father will likely choose to reveal Himself – although He is spirit, He'll choose to reveal Himself in some physical manifestation, likely the *shekinah*, the blazing glorious light. But, regardless, we will enjoy what theologians call the beatific vision; we will gaze on God. And I can promise you this; forever, as you look at God, as you look at Christ, it will be a moving, compelling, enrapturing, life-changing vision. And we will worship Him – notice verse 9 of chapter 22, the angel says to John, don't worship me, "Worship God" – and that's the occupation of heaven, that'll be our occupation in the new earth.

We will serve Him, secondly – notice verse 3 of chapter 22, "His bond-servants," literally, His *douloi*, the plural of *doulos*, slaves – His slaves will serve Him. John MacArthur says, "We will spend all eternity carrying out the infinite variety of tasks that the limitless mind of God can conceive." And not only will we serve Him, but incredibly, according to Luke 12:37, He will serve us.

Thirdly, we'll reign with Him – look at verse 5. "They," speaking of the saints, "will reign forever and ever" – now, that invites the question, reign over what or whom? Well, obviously, over the new creation – just as Adam was installed as the vice-regent over the earth and its creatures, there was work to do before the fall in the Garden of Eden, there will be work for us to do in eternity over the new earth. But, also, we will reign over other believers – remember? There are kings, there are nations, there is a hierarchy – that's true in the character of God, it's true among the angels, it's true in every human institution God's ever created. There will be

structure and order. Oh, and by the way, who gets the opportunities there? Jesus taught that our opportunities in the new world are directly linked to our faithfulness in this world.

And, finally, we'll live perfectly human lives before Him. We'll live perfectly human lives before God – we don't have many descriptions of what life in the new earth will be like, but there are some clues, and the clues tell us that it's going to be remarkably like the life we have now, without sin. For example, there will be eating and drinking – that's true in the millennium; Luke 22:18, Jesus says, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes;" during that thousand years, we're going to eat and drink with Christ. But it's true also in eternity – Revelation 22:1 talks about the "river of the water of life" that's offered to those in that city; in chapter 22, verse 2, there's the "tree of life" with its "twelve kinds of fruit." Wayne Grudem writes, "There is no strong reason to say that these expressions are merely symbolic without any literal reference – are symbolic banquets and symbolic wine and symbolic rivers and trees somehow superior to real banquets and real wine and real rivers and trees in God's eternal plan?"

There is also going to be music – Revelation 4 and 5, there's music in the presence of God, and there will be in this new earth, forever. There will be learning – God is infinite, and we have finite minds, so we will never learn all that can be known about God; we will spend eternity trying. There will be other normal human activities – Princeton theologian A.A. Hodge writes this, "The eternal home of the divine man," Christ, "and of all the redeemed members of the human race," that's us, "must necessarily be thoroughly human in its structure, conditions and activities, its joys and its occupations must all be rational, moral, emotional, voluntary and active. There must be the exercise of all faculties, the gratification of all tastes, the development of all talent capacities, the realization of all ideals, the reason, the intellectual curiosity, the imagination, the aesthetic instincts, the holy affections, the social affinities, the inexhaustible resources of strength and power native to the human soul, must all find exercise and satisfaction." In other words, you will never be bored in eternity – and whatever you do, you will find perfect, complete joy and satisfaction in it, and you'll always do it perfectly to the glory of God. What a world.

You know, one of my favorite places on this planet is Yosemite – if you've ever been there, you've probably come into the park through the southern entrance. There's this winding road for about thirty miles, and then you come upon a tunnel, and for about a quarter of a mile, you drive through this rock tunnel cut through the heart of a mountain – and then, suddenly, you emerge from that tunnel, and before you lies the expansive view of the Yosemite Valley floor, and frankly, it just takes your breath away. Think of this world, with all of its joys and beauties – it's like that tunnel; it's like we live in the tunnel, but someday, our Lord will make a new heaven and a new earth, and it'll be like stepping from that tunnel into the full expression of the creativity and the beauty and the glory of God. Folks, that's a world worth waiting for, and it's just around the next turn. As you think about, talk about, sing songs about heaven, that's okay – but don't just think about the intermediate state; think about the new earth on which we will live forever. John MacArthur writes, "The eternal capital city, the new Jerusalem, will be a place of indescribable, unimaginable beauty – from the center of it, the brilliant glory of God will shine forth through the gold and the precious stones to illuminate the new heaven and the new earth." I love this – "But the most glorious reality of all will be that sinful rebels will be made righteous, enjoy intimate fellowship with God and the Lamb, serve Them, and reign with Them forever in sheer joy and incessant praise." Beloved, hold fast to the truth that our eternal home is a new earth. Let's pray together.

Well, it's a wonderful reality, isn't it, the great truth that we have all of that to look forward to? You know, I love my life here, and I trust that you do as well; there are so many great things on this planet, and yet it is a planet marked by sin and rebellion and the fall and the curse. Imagine, if we enjoy this world so much, what must the new one be like? We can live in great hope of all that it holds for us. Well, let's join our hearts together as we finish our time.

Father, thank You for the great truths that we have examined together; thank You that this is our future, this is our eternal home. As we think about what You will make new, Lord, I pray that You would encourage us, that You would give us, through these truths, a reason to live faithful lives here, as we anticipate what our Lord is preparing for us even now, and what we will enjoy together forever. Lord, may those truths anchor our souls in these dark and difficult times – as we walk through this valley of darkness that is this life, in spite of its joys, filled with so much

sorrow and so much grief, Lord, remind us that there's a day coming when all of that will be done, and we will live in the sunshine of Your face forever. Lord, encourage us, even this week, with the practical implications of that. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, have a great week.