

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

## Final Things Lesson 4: “The New Jerusalem”

Revelation 21:9–22:5

We are in the midst of a series called “Final Things.” And we have been looking for the last few weeks at the book of Revelation. We’ve seen already the second coming, the millennium, and the eternal state. Today we will explore “The New Jerusalem” in Revelation 21–22.



In the late eighteenth century, the French monarchy in Paris reached a place of unprecedented wealth and ostentation. The best example of this is the great “Palace of Versailles” where the king and queen of France resided. The palace was filled with ornate fixtures of gold and silver, fine cuisine, and opulent wealth. This extravagance reached its peak with King Louis XVI and his Austrian Bride Marie Antoinette. They both enjoyed the best that France had to offer in their palatial dwelling and in their grandiose lifestyle.

But the life that they enjoyed came to a tragic end, because their wealth had actually been made possible by the poverty of the people around them. And also this dangerous little thing called “taxation.” Ever heard of that?

And as often happens, the people revolted against their king and his unfortunate bride, the queen. And they were both sentenced to the guillotine which ushered in the French Revolution and eventually the reign of Napoleon. It also ushered in a number of different philosophies that were antichristian at its core, but I’ll have to save that for another time.

The bottom line is that the French king was responsible for exhausting his country’s resources and the kingdom felt the pinch of his lavish and self-indulgent lifestyle. And so the people revolted. You see in a world like ours, kings are mere mortals and kingdoms are really pretty fragile things. They come and go, and no matter how great and powerful they are, they eventually can be decimated by social and economic ruin.

But what if you had a King who had unlimited resources at his disposal? What if you had a King who didn’t depend on the taxation of the people for his wealth, glory, and riches? What if you had a people who instead of working by the sweat of their brow to support the ostentation of a king, they dwelt in the presence of the King and they reveled in the glory of the King, and they were freed up to worship the King forever and ever and bask in his greatness? That’s what we have in Revelation 21 and 22. And amazingly, we don’t live and work apart from this king. We live with him! In the same city! Millions of people! In what’s called, the New Jerusalem.

But before we look at Revelation, I want you to first turn with me to the book of Hebrews, just a few books before Revelation. Now the book of Hebrews is anonymous, so we don’t know who wrote this book. But whoever wrote this book, that person gave us a wonderful glimpse of what eternity would look like for people of faith.

**For instance, look at Hebrews 11 with me. This is what's referred to often as the "Hall of Faith" where the author of Hebrews describes men and women of the OT who demonstrated saving faith.**

**And in 11:8 it says,** "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the *city* that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (Heb 11:8–11).

**In other words, Abraham was looking beyond the Promised Land to something eternal, a city built by God. And you might say to that, "what city has foundations that were designed and built by God?" Well skip down with me to verse 13, where it says,** "These all died [that's Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob] in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a *homeland*. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a *city*" (Heb 11:13–16).

**What city is he talking about? Now quickly turn over with me to Hebrews 12, where we see this idea of a "heavenly city" reiterated. And this time the author of Hebrews has NT believers like you and me in mind. In verse 22, it says,** "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering..." (Heb 12:22).

**The author of Hebrews here is drawing on extensive OT imagery of a new heavenly Zion/Jerusalem to say that Christian believers will one day participate in worship with innumerable angels and a great assemblage of saints in this city, this New Jerusalem. And to reinforce that idea, let me just show you one more passage in Hebrews.**

**Look at 13:14. This is the end of the book and in verse 14, the author writes:** "For here [speaking of this present age that is hostile to followers of Christ] we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14).

**Now this prompts the question, what city is the author of Hebrews talking about? And why does he keep mentioning it in this letter to the churches? Well I would suggest to you that the city that he's referring to is the same one that Jesus described to his disciples when he said in John 14, "Behold I go to prepare a place for you." "In my Father's house [there] are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2–3).**

**So if I understand Jesus correctly, from our vantage point in the twenty-first century, Jesus has been preparing this place for us for the last 2,000 years. And he still has at least another 1,000 years (during his millennial reign) to continue building this place. So when it's all said and done, Jesus will have at least 3,000 years to prepare an eternal home for us!**

**How many of you think this city is going to be pretty special? I mean, God created the world in six days, and our world is pretty spectacular, right? The place that Jesus is building now is going to be beyond spectacular. That place is going to be stunning and glorious beyond our wildest imagination.**

**And God gives us a wonderful little snapshot of that eternal dwelling place in Revelation 21. And it is *breathhtakingly* spectacular. It is stunning in beauty and grandeur and splendor. And the name of city that the book of Hebrews alluded to is called in Revelation, "The New Jerusalem."**

**So church, would you want to take a look at your future home? Do you want to see the place where we will live forever and ever and ever in the presence of God? I'll be honest with you, my hope for you today is that you would be gobsmacked by how awesomely beautiful our eternal dwelling will be. That's my goal for today. It's for you to be utterly astonished by what God is preparing for you, even right now.**

**Sanja and I, when we moved to San Antonio, we kept looking for homes on one of the real estate websites that lets you take a virtual tour of homes for sale. That's kind of what Revelation 21 is like. John**

gives us a virtual tour of our future home. And this home is not like anything else you have ever seen on a real estate website. It's beyond human comprehension. I'll prove it to you.

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Write this down as #1 in your notes. Here's what makes this New Jerusalem so spectacular. I'll give you four things from the text. First of all, The New Jerusalem will be...

1) **filled** with the **glory** of God (21:9-14)

John writes in **Revelation 21, verse 9**,

<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

Remember this is the end of the end. This is after the tribulation, after Jesus's second coming, after Armageddon, after Jesus's millennial reign, after Satan's final rebellion, after the Great White Throne Judgment, and after all of God's enemies are cast into the lake of fire. After all that, then God creates a new heaven and a new earth. We looked at that last week. And part of that new heaven and new earth is this bride, the wife of the Lamb.

Now who's this bride? Well interestingly the bride is described as the holy city, Jerusalem. Look at **verse 10**.

<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

Just to reinforce this idea that the bride is the New Jerusalem, look back at **verse 2**, where John said, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (**21:2**). So a particular part of the new heaven and the new earth is this new city that is the bride of Christ. Why is "the city" called "a bride?" Well because it draws its character from its occupants. And its occupants (that's us, folks) are the eternal bride of Christ. This is our eternal home, the New Jerusalem. This is where we'll live forever in eternity.

**Like I said last week, we won't be floating around on clouds living in isolation from each other. That's boring!** We'll be living in perfect community and perfect fellowship with one another and with God forever. The church father, **Augustine**, who wrote that massive book *The City of God*, said, "**Heaven is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God [forever].**"<sup>1</sup> We, the bride, will live with him, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, our groom, forever.

**You know what my favorite part of a wedding is? Can you guess? It's when the bride and groom exchange the vows. I love that part. And I love hearing the commitments that bride and groom make to each other. "Till death do us part"... or some variation of that. "I'll love you till I'm dead." That's basically what they're saying.**

**And during a wedding, I always reach of and take hold of Sanja's hand in that moment and reassure her that those vows are my vows. And the vows that I made 25 years ago are still applicable today. And I'm committed to them just as much now, as I was 25 years ago. "I'll love you till I'm dead, Sanja." "Till death do us part."**

**Here's the other reason I love vows. Because they are a reminder of Christ's promise to us, his church. He'll love us forever and there is no death. There's no "till death do us part" with Jesus. Marriage on earth is temporary. The eternal marriage between Christ and his church is forever. And there is no dying. And there is no death. There's just love and fellowship together forever. And that's what's being pictured right here in **Revelation 21**, the eternal love between Christ and his redeemed bride.**

Now here's what's key about this city, the New Jerusalem, in **verse 11**. The city manifests ...

<sup>11</sup> ... the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

The city, in other words, radiates the glory of God. Our future home radiates God's glory. The city is luminous and resplendent like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Here's a picture of jasper:

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 22.30.



**Jasper**

Jasper in our day typically has a reddish hue and it's opaque. But the description here is a picture of jasper that is "clear as crystal." In other words, it's not opaque, it's translucent and maybe still has that reddish hue like a jasper stone.

The reason that I say it is translucent is because the glory of God is radiating throughout the city. So the light of God's glory must be able to shine through the city, and that light is refracted everywhere giving it a certain glow.

Look at **verse 12**.

<sup>12</sup>It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— <sup>13</sup>on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

So, there are twelve gates in this city. And we find out later that these gates were made of pearl. And the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Ephraim and Manasseh. Three on each gate.

Now why are the sons of Israel (or Jacob) inscribed on these gates? Well it's not going to be NT Christians *only* in the New Jerusalem. OT saints will be there too. And I love here how eternity will reflect forever the continuity between the NT and the OT saints. Their *inheritance* is our *inheritance*! We'll live together in the New Jerusalem.

Also John says, "there are angels guarding these twelve gates" (21:12). And the angels guarding the gates are really just there for dramatic effect. There's nothing to guard against! All God's enemies are gone. They are there just as figureheads possibly to greet us as we come and go out of the gates. **This is kind of like bellhops in a fancy hotel. This is kind of like the Royal Guard outside of Buckingham Palace that everyone takes pictures with and tries to get him to smile. He has a gun, but he's not really going to shoot anyone. He's just there as a decorative piece.**

**J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of the *Lord of the Rings*, said once that fairy tales continue to be popular because they give you stories in which characters: 1) escape time, 2) escape death, 3) hold communion with non-human beings, 4) find perfect love, and 5) triumph over evil.<sup>2</sup> What's going to happen in the New Jerusalem. We will 1) escape time, 2) escape death, 3) hold communion with non-human beings, 4) find perfect love, and 5) triumph over evil. It's a fairy tale come true—our relationship with Jesus.<sup>3</sup>**

And look at **verse 14**.

<sup>14</sup>And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

So the twelve tribes of Israel are written on the gates. And the twelve names of the twelve apostles are written on the foundations: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Nathaniel, Philip, etc. Why are their names there?

Well these are the men who first established the church. These are the men that first preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. So the two great epochs of human history (BC and AD; OT and NT) are reflected in this eternal city. OT saints fellowshiping with NT saints for eternity—that's what's pictured here. And the glory of the Lord illuminates this city.

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<sup>2</sup> See the video and article by Tim Keller and Gavin Ortlund entitled, "Why Sermons Often Bore," The Gospel Coalition, 05-05-15: [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-sermons-often-bore](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-sermons-often-bore)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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**It gets better. Write this down #2. The New Jerusalem will be...**

2) **vast** and **beautiful** beyond description (21:15–21)

Now watch this. Watch how epic the dimensions of this city are described by John.

<sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width [So the city is perfectly square]. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.

So not only is it a perfect square, it's actually a perfect cube. Some have suggested a pyramid that is high in the middle and sloped down to the sides. Maybe shaped like a hill instead of a pyramid. In that case the city *on* a hill actually becomes a city *as* a hill. Or maybe a city as mountain. That possibility is fascinating to me.

Other suggest a perfect cube, like what is described in the holy place in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple. In fact the Holy of Holies within the tabernacle is expressly described as a cube—20 cubits in length, 20 cubits in width, and 20 cubits in height (1 Kgs 6:20). Why is that significant? Well the Holy of Holies was that place, a cube, where God's presence was manifested before the people of Israel. And it was so holy, that only the high priest could go in there, once a year on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16; Heb 9:7).

Well the New Jerusalem, the eternal abode of the believers, is also a perfect cube. And that's where God will manifest his presence forever. And instead of one person going in there once a year, we'll all enjoy the presence of God forever unhindered by our former taintedness and unimpeded by that barrier of holiness.

Now let me just give you an idea of just how vast this city will be. The city was measured at 12,000 stadia. That's roughly 1,400 miles. And if this measurement means 1,400 miles per side of the city, which many scholars believe, that's roughly 2 million square miles.

**That city by today's standards would stretch from Maine to Florida, and Florida to Texas, and Texas to Minnesota, and Minnesota back to Maine. That's a big city, folks. That's roughly half of the United States. The land mass of the United States is 3.8 million square miles, so 2 million square miles would be more than half of our country.**

You might ask, "Is that big enough to hold all of the saints throughout the centuries?" Yes, it is! Because not only is it 1,400 miles long; it's 1,400 miles high. That's way beyond our current atmosphere. Trust me when I say this, there will be plenty of room for everybody. **Maybe someone hearing this needs to claim his or her spot in the New Jerusalem by trusting Christ. Only saved believers will be part of this New Jerusalem. And trust me, it'll be plenty big for all of us.** The city of God will be 1,400 miles wide and 1,400 miles long and 1,400 miles high. There's plenty of room for everyone.

Look at verse 17.

<sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall [it's thickness], 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

A cubit is the length of a man's arm from his elbow to the tip of his middle finger. It's roughly 18 inches. So the thickness of these walls is something like 72 yards or 216 feet. Some people have said that a building that tall with walls that thick would be structurally unsound. How many of you think God can figure that out? I don't know how the laws of physics will work in the afterlife, but I know that laws of physics don't apply to God as master builder. God created those laws and he can change them if he wants to.

Look at verse 18.

<sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

Here's a picture with all those gemstones.



Gemstones of Revelation 21:19–20

And hopefully you can get an idea of just how brilliant and how colorful the foundations of this city will be. It'll have all these different hues of yellow, blue, green and red bedazzling and bejeweling this city.

**I wonder if these jewels are actually built into the different levels of the city. Maybe there will be twelve levels built into the city. And that'll be part of our address in heaven. "Where do you live, Tony? Well I live on Topaz Level, five millionth apartment on the left." "Just jump on your hover board and head that way."**

I actually wonder how we'll get around in this huge city. Will we beam from one place to another? Will we materialize and dematerialize like Jesus did in the upper room (**John 20:19, 26**)? Will we fly? I know some of you want to fly! I don't know if that's going to be possible, but we'll get around.

And the magnificence of this city continues. Look at **verse 21**.

<sup>21</sup> *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl,*

Some commentators believe that pearls were the most valuable substance in the ancient world, even more valuable than gems and diamonds. And if I understand this correctly, these gates will be the same height as the city. So these will be 1400-mile-high gates made of a single pearl! **That's some oyster that produced a pearl like that!**

And **verse 25** says that these gates will never be shut. They'll always be open. We have the freedom to come and go as we please, and there's no need to lock the gates at night to keep out the dangers. Because there are no dangers.

*and the street of the city*

Notice, not the "streets," but the "street," which probably is the "street" that leads from the throne room of God. More on the throne room in just a minute.

*and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

Like what I said earlier with the jasper stone, gold is an opaque substance. But this gold is translucent. So I assume this gold will give off a golden hue, so this street will reflect the light of the glory of God and fill the city with a golden, effulgent glow. And we will bask in the glory of God forever. And we will bask in the beauty of God forever.

**And like I said last week, we'll never have a bad day in eternity. We'll never be depressed or under the weather. We'll never be discouraged. God will make all things new and things will get better and better and better. And this New Jerusalem will be bigger and more beautiful than anything we've ever imagined. And we'll never get bored enjoying the splendor of God's presence.**

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**Here's a third aspect of the New Jerusalem. Write this down. The New Jerusalem will be...**

3) a Holy Place, **radiating** the light of God's **presence** (21:22–27)

Look at **verse 22**.

<sup>22</sup> *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

If you remember from **verse 3** last week, a loud voice came from the throne saying, "Behold the dwelling place [literally: tabernacle] of God is with man. He will dwell [literally: tabernacle] with them, and they will be his people" (**21:3**). But there's no longer any OT tabernacle. And there's no longer any temple.

There's no longer any Holy of Holies, because everything in the New Jerusalem is the Holy of Holies. **There's no longer any Sunday morning worship service, because everything is a Sunday morning worship service.** God's manifest presence is everywhere, and everything is his temple.

Look at **verse 23**.

<sup>23</sup> *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

Remember Jesus's word, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**John 8:12**). Obviously there was something metaphorical about that statement, with reference to salvation. But there's a literal fulfillment of that in eternity. Jesus is the lamp for eternity. The Lamb illuminates the New Jerusalem.

Look at **verse 24**.

<sup>24</sup> *By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,*

That word for "nations" there is the Greek word ἔθνος. And in this verse, it's better translated "peoples" not "nations." And what's being stated here is that all the "peoples" of the earth will be represented in heaven. Just like what is stated earlier in Revelation, that every tribe and tongue will be there (**Rev 7:9**)... Chinese, Russian, African, Australian, North American, South American, Central American, Caribbean. Representatives of every tribe and tongue will be there in heaven worshipping together as one voice.

And the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In other words, the kings of the earth will no longer derive glory for themselves; they will lay down their glory before the Lord. Perhaps this is a reference to the "kings" and "rulers" who reign in the millennial kingdom (**Rev 20:4-6**).

<sup>25</sup> *and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.*

Gates would shut in ancient cities to keep the dangers out. At night the city gates would close, because bad things come out at night: thieves, murderers, troublemakers, etc. **Like your mama told you, nothing good ever happens after midnight. That was true then. It's true today.**

But there's no midnight in eternity. There's no night at all. Every single hour is bright and shiny and pure. There's no darkness. There's no evil. There's no evil sneaking in at night, so the gates stay open.

And this is our home, but it's not a prison. We can come and go as we please through the gates, travel around, see the new heavens and the new earth. And then, when we're ready, we can come back home to our home the New Jerusalem.

Look at **verse 26**.

<sup>26</sup> *They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations [i.e., the peoples].*

That's a reiteration of **verse 24**. All the glory of the peoples gravitates towards God. There's no glory that's not his glory. And whatever glory existed before is turned over to God completely... And

<sup>27</sup> *... nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

**Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life? Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ as your savior? If you have, then this is your inheritance. This is what awaits you. And God is even now preparing it for you.**

**And my guess is that it will be even more awesome than what John is describing here. John just gives us a glimpse of this New Jerusalem. He just gives us a taste, so that we know what we're fighting for here on earth. So that we will stay motivated in faith and in service to our Lord Jesus Christ.**

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Let's continue in **chapter 22**. So far, this New Jerusalem has been observed from the outside. Its pearly gates! It's cubical shape! Its massive size! Its foundations of jasper, sapphire, emerald, topaz, amethyst, etc.! And as John describes this city, he describes it from the outside in, meaning he starts on the outside and then he enters the city and describes what's inside.

**At first it's like a John is riding around in a helicopter on the outside and describes all the intricacies of the city from the outside vantage point: the walls, the gates, the foundations. But then he lands the helicopter and comes inside.**

And he sees more marvels. He sees streets of gold. He sees rooms built for millions and billions of OT and NT believers. And when John peeks inside the city walls in **Revelation 22**, he sees the most marvelous thing about this city, which is the throne room of God. And this throne room is... gorgeous.

**Write this down as a fourth point for today. The New Jerusalem is...**

4) **centered** on God's **throne** (22:1-5)

Look at **chapter 22, verse 1**.

<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city;

Remember now the throne is a dual-throne. God the Father is enthroned there and at his right hand is the Son. And the Son, Jesus, is celebrated throughout the book of **Revelation** as "the Lamb." He's the Lamb that was slain – slain is a past tense verb. And the Lamb sacrificially gave himself, so that we might spend eternity with him. And we'll worship him forever because of that.

Now as I envision this throne room, here's what I see. There's a massive city that is 1,400 miles wide and 1,400 miles long and 1,400 miles high. It's a perfect cube. And smack dab in the middle of that cube is this massive room that is large enough to hold all the believers throughout all the centuries.

And some manifestation of God the Father is seated on the throne. Jesus is also seated there. And this river flows from the throne down through the middle of the throne room, through the middle of the street of the city. And possibly this river breaks off into four sections (north, south, east, and west) and goes out to water the entirety of the new earth... not unlike, by the way, the Garden of Eden that had a source and four tributaries flowing out of it.

In fact, a lot of what we are seeing here in **Revelation** is the re-creation of the Garden of Eden. **It's the Garden of Eden 2.0**. This is paradise regained! **Grant Osborne** writes, "**Here in Revelation... Eden has not only been restored but has been elevated and expanded for the people of God in eternity.**"<sup>4</sup>

Now the water that flows from the throne is described as the "water of life." And it is "bright as crystal," meaning it's pure and clean. **In the ancient world, clean water was a big deal. Still is, by the way. Everyone in our present world is constantly searching for pure and clean and unpolluted water.** But in the New Jerusalem, there is no such thing as polluted water. In fact there is no such thing as salt water either, because as we saw last time there is no sea. There is only the pure and clean water that flows from the throne of God.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (**John 4:14**). Obviously there's the metaphor of faith there, but in eternity that metaphor will become literal. And we can drink from this stream, not because we need it to live, but because it symbolizes the pure, clean life that God has brought about in us through the suffering of the Lamb. That's this "water of life."

And I believe we'll drink from this river. **And we'll say to each other "Cheers! The water of life!" Or instead of "cheers" we'll say, "L'chai-im." "To life." "Pastor Tony, I'm an American. I can't learn a second language in heaven." Don't worry. God will help you with that.**

Look at **verse 2**.

*also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

Look at that. **Don't call it a comeback—the tree of life makes its reappearance in the Garden of Eden 2.0**. Where's that thing been all this time? And why is it here now?

Well the tree of life is the symbol of immortality. It is featured in the throne room because it demonstrates our eternity. And remember, it was taken away from us in the Garden of Eden. I'm sure you remember the story. Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God and thus introduced sin, depravity, and fallenness into our world. It didn't take long for sin to take effect. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. They both implicitly blamed God. Cain murdered Abel. Lamech murdered as well. Things got so bad in the days of Noah that the minds of men were constantly on evil and God had to wipe them out. Evil just spread like wildfire in our world.

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<sup>4</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 768.

And because of that, God yanked Adam and Eve out of the Garden, and put security around the tree of life. Why? Well God says in **Genesis 3**, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden” (**Gen 3:22–23**). But in **Revelation 22**, life comes full circle. Because of Christ’s work on the cross, access to the tree of life is reinstated for eternity. Now that sin has been permanently eradicated, we may partake of its fruit.

Now watch this, John says on either side of the river, the tree of life was there. How does that work? Either **1)** that’s an optical illusion where somehow the tree is bending the laws of nature, or **2)** The tree of life is so huge it grows on both sides of the river, or **3)** there is more than one tree of life in the New Jerusalem. In fact, some scholars have concluded that the word “tree” here is used in its collective sense, so it’s not describing one or two isolated trees but a number of trees on both sides of the river. Can you imagine that? A whole orchard of “trees of life.” A whole forest of trees just like the one in the Garden of Eden, and it’s yielding a different kind of fruit every month. **This month is banana-month. Awesome. This month is apricot-month. This month is pomegranate-month. Awesome!**

**My wife loves fresh fruit, so I know she can’t wait for this. This month is mango-month. Maybe it’ll be fruit that we’ve never seen or tasted before. And it’ll be all the beauty and the wonder and the pleasure of the Garden of Eden without the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And there’s no serpent to deceive us. And there’s no danger lurking. And there’s no potential for sin. And it’s going to be wonderful.**

Now before we continue, notice that John says “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” What does that mean? There’s no sickness in heaven, so why do we need healing? Well I think the best explanation for that is that these leaves symbolize the healing that God has brought about for the “peoples” of the world. All the peoples of the world will be represented in the new heaven and the new earth, and we’ll be at peace with each other and we’ll be at peace with God. And that peace is symbolized in these leaves.

Now here’s another possibility. The word for healing in Greek is the word *θεραπεία* (*therapeia*) which we get our English word “therapy” from. And this word could imply something “life-giving” or “energizing” instead of “healing.” So instead of viewing these leaves as healing us from sickness, we can view them as giving us an energy boost to worship God more fervently. **It’s like coffee in the eternal state, without all the side effects.** So we eat these leaves or rub them on our resurrection bodies or whatever, and it’s like vitamins, they give us a boost. I don’t know if that’s what we’ll do with them. But whatever the case, The New Jerusalem will be a place of infinite glory, purity, and immortality.

Look at **verse 3**.

<sup>3</sup> *No longer will there be anything accursed,*

Here’s another linkup with **Genesis 3** and the Garden of Eden. The curse is reversed. The consequences of Adam’s sin in the Garden are forever removed.

<sup>3</sup> *No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.*

I don’t think anyone here is going to say, **“What? Really?” “I didn’t think we were going to worship God in heaven.” No, you know we will, because you know your Bible. And because you prioritize worship as an important part of your life now. So it shouldn’t surprise you that worship will be an eternal activity for us. And heaven will not be just an outworking of our present self-indulgent and narcissistic fantasies.**

**I remember that movie “What Dreams May Come” with Robin Williams and Cuba Gooding Jr. And after Robin Williams dies and goes to heaven he asks Cuba Gooding Jr. “Where’s God?” And he says, “O, he’s up there.” And I remember saying to myself, “up where?” Isn’t heaven in the presence of God forever? Who wants to go to a heaven where God is somewhere else?**

Now John says we will live in the New Jerusalem and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it. We will be his servants, and we will worship him forever.

**I’ll just say that I love our worship team here at our church. We have great instrumentalists. We have great vocalists. We have great musicians. We have great worshippers in our congregation. Sunday**

morning is my favorite day of the week, in large measure because we gather here to worship the Lord together.

On Sunday mornings, I'm like, "Let's do this. Let's get our praise on!" And in the sweetness of those times of worship, I sense something wonderful. I sense the peace of God. I sense the presence of God. I experience something transcendent that nothing in this world can match.

But I'll just tell you. When we get to the New Jerusalem and when we experience the thickness of God's presence in his throne room and when we drink from the fire hydrant of God's glory, it'll be a million times better than anything we've ever experienced on earth, even the most fervent worship service.

Some might say, "That sounds kind of boring. I'd rather be doing my own thing." Careful now. A.W. Tozer said this, "Any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven."<sup>5</sup> **If this doesn't fire you up, church, then maybe you're fired up about the wrong things. Maybe you are fixated on the trifles of earth instead of anticipating the glories of heaven.**

**Some of you might be saying, "Pastor Tony, I want get fired up about worshipping God forever, but I'm having a hard time doing that. I try to get fired up about worship on Sunday mornings but I'm having a hard time doing that!" "My life is distracted constantly with babies and burping and dirty diapers." "My life is distracted constantly with work and mowing the lawn and taking out the trash and trying to retain a paycheck that big enough to feed my family. And with doctor visits!" Trust me, I get that. The problem with life on earth is that it's full of distractions.**

Now here's how life will be different. Are you ready? Don't skip past this verse too quickly. Look at **verse 4**.

<sup>4</sup> *They will see his face,*

That's it. No more "Looking through a glass dimly" (**1 Cor 13:12**). No more partial knowledge of the consuming glory of God. No more searching for the invisible God. We shall see his face. We shall see his face. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (**1 Cor 13:12**).

God told Moses in the wilderness, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (**Exod 33:20**). Moses said, "**Show me your glory,**" so God said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen" (**Exod 33:21–23**). When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai his face shone from the countenance of God's glory, and they had to put a veil over it (**Exod 34:29–35**). That's the closest that any human has come to seeing the face of God, yet we are constantly seeking the face of God. We are constantly longing for God's presence.

Actually that's not true. Let me take that back. Adam walked with God in the cool of the day, right. He was in daily fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden. And all that came to an end when Adam sinned. But in the new heaven and the new earth, Paradise is restored and we shall see the face of God.

Now obviously there's some anthropomorphism here that John is using. God is spirit, and he doesn't have a face. God is spirit and he doesn't have a back. Jesus will remain in human form forever, so we will see his face and we will worship him. But I believe that **verse 4** is speaking about more than just the face of Jesus. I think this is a reference to the face of God the Father, whatever that looks like.

We will see a new unveiling of God's glory and God's presence and we will be so awestruck by it—not in fearful cowering, but in glorious reverence. We'll be awestruck. And we'll see his face. And all the little trifles of this present world, all the numerous distractions of our present life will melt away. And it'll take our breath away. And we'll fall down and worship.

And John says,

*his name will be on their foreheads.*

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<sup>5</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1985), 13.

J-E-S-U-S. Everyone good with having that on your forehead? That's a sign of ownership. The 6-6-6 was a sign of ownership in the tribulation (**Rev 13:16–18**). We don't have that written on our foreheads. We have J-E-S-U-S. Or maybe *yod-heh-waw-heh*, the four Hebrew letters for Yahweh, the Tetragrammaton. Or maybe we'll have that name for Jesus from **Revelation 20** that no one knows but him.

Whatever the case, the point is this. We belong to God forever. We are his servants. We worship him. We serve him. And we live infinitely in relationship with him and with each other by the way. There's no individuality described in the New Jerusalem. We are a corporate entity worshiping God in a corporate setting and living in community forever.

And in **verse 5**, John writes:

<sup>5</sup> *And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and **they** will reign forever and ever.*

God will be the King and we will reign with him. You might say, "**reign over what?**" Reign over the universe. We are servants, we are slaves. But we are servant-kings. We are co-regents with God just like Adam was a co-regent with God in the Garden of Eden. God said be fruitful and multiply and rule over the earth. We're not going to populate in heaven, so it's not a perfect parallel with the Garden of Eden, but we will rule over the earth. We'll reign with God as servant-kings.

And there will be no need of the light of a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light. In **Genesis 1**, God said, "let there be light." In **Revelation 22** God says, "**let me be light.**" And he illuminates eternity for us forever and ever.

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I'll close with this. I want to give you one final exhortation as it relates to the New Jerusalem. And it has to do with why this picture of the eternal state was even revealed to us. Why did God give us such a vivid and descriptive picture of eternity? I know that there's a lot about eternity that God left out, but nevertheless there's a lot that he explicitly told us through John's writing here. Why did he do that? Why not just surprise us?

Well I think the reason is because God wanted you to have a little extra incentive, a little added umph, to help you press on through the struggles of this world and finish life well. As if we didn't have enough motivation to do this already, in light of what Christ has done on the cross, God gives us this wonderful and glorious picture of what eternity will look like in the presence of God... streets of gold, pearly gates, a city of incomprehensible beauty and grandeur thick with the presence and the glory of God, full of every good thing and absent of any negative thing. Why did God give us this picture?

Well here's the refrain I want to leave you with this tonight. Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for those who love him.

When you are sick, hurt, or injured emotionally... when life is hard and you want to give up... Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for those who love him.

When Satan tempts you to despair... when anxieties in this world stack up... when your worship of Christ is compromised by the increasing demands upon your time and your energy... Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for those who love him.

When your family, co-workers, or even your government opposes your faith in Christ... when your spiritual vitality is lacking and when your resolve to follow Christ is being tested and when following Christ becomes more and more difficult in this increasingly hostile world... Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for those who love him.

When your friends and family members mock your faithfulness to Christ... when you feel like a fish swimming upstream constantly fighting countercultural battles in our city, our state, our country... when people call you intolerant, narrow-minded, or a fool for your faith in Christ... Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for those who love him.

When the sinfulness of this world grieves you deeply (e.g., murder, perversion, animosity)... when temptations in this world bring you to a breaking point ... Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for those who love him.

**And finally. This is where it's most important. When your physical, mental, and emotional strength start to wane in this life... when your time to die is near and the youthfulness of life is a distant memory... when cancer catches up with you... when your heart starts to fail you... when life on this earth is a matter of months or days or minutes not years... in the final moments of life... Remember the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for you. For those who love him, for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. For those who have been purchased by Christ's blood. Bow with me in a word of prayer.**

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