

Revelation 21:9 - 22:5

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[0 : 00] So, if you could please evacuate the building and follow the instructions of the fire marshals who will be wearing high visibility vests.

So, just calmly, if we could evacuate the building and soon the marshals will appear and if you can follow them and follow their instructions. So, I think we're back.

Thank you for coming back. So, thank you for participating. This was a drill, as you've probably worked out. And I think, though it is obviously very disruptive to have a drill like this, we're sure that we can learn some lessons to ensure safety.

In the event of an actual emergency. So, thank you for participating in an orderly manner of vacating the building. Let's return to God's Word, to the passage that we read in Revelation chapter 21.

Last Sunday morning we were thinking about the first part of the chapter and we want to move on now to the second half of the chapter where you have in this very vivid language, you have the Holy City described, shown to John, who then shares with us what he sees in his vision.

[1 : 39] And we want to spend a little time just reflecting on some of what we can learn and discover from this part of the vision. What is the big truth about the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, your future home?

Let that be very much prominent in your mind. This isn't some esoteric exploration into something fantastic and otherworldly that has nothing to do with us.

This is a description of our future home. And what is the big truth about it? What is the most wonderful truth about the new heaven and the new earth?

Well, it is simply this. God is there. Jesus is there. The new heaven and the new earth is God's place and wonder of wonders ours too.

Last Sunday morning we were reflecting on that truth about the new intimacy that we will enjoy with God. And we read in verse 3 of the chapter, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and He will dwell with them.

[2 : 45] They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And in chapter 22 that we've read this morning, We read that His people, you and me, will see His face.

As He wipes away every tear and our blurred vision comes into focus, What will we see? We'll see Him. This is the big truth, the wonderful truth.

This is the light of heaven, of the new Jerusalem, of the new heaven and new earth. It is God's dwelling place and ours. We will share the same home. And what a home it will be.

I want to try and explain in a measure, in a very small measure, The two pictures employed in the vision from verse 9 through to verse 5 of chapter 22.

Pictures used to describe God's dwelling place. The picture of a city and the picture of a garden. Perhaps a garden city. Two pictures, a city and a garden.

[3 : 49] But before we do that, and in order to better appreciate what the pictures are describing, We need to go back to the very beginning and trace the thread of the theme of God's dwelling with His people through history.

What was God's first dwelling place with His people? Well, it was the Garden of Eden. Remember the beautiful language that we find in Genesis chapter 3 where we're told that Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of day.

God was there. God made Eden His dwelling place with His people. But we know the story. We know what happened.

Adam and Eve sinned and they were expelled from the garden, from God's presence. Never again to hear the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of day.

We need to fast track to Mount Sinai. A family, the descendants of Abraham, has become a people, the people of God. And they have begun their journey to the promised land.

[4 : 59] Will God be with His people on the journey? Will He dwell with them? He will, but in a particular way. God gives Moses instructions for a tabernacle or a large tent that will have at and as its center the Ark of the Covenant, which will hold the tablets of stone of the law.

What will happen where the Ark rests at the heart of the tabernacle? Well, listen to what God says when He gave the instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 25 and verse 22.

God says of that central inner sanctuary of the tabernacle, He says this, There I will meet with you. There I will meet with you.

The Israelites, God's people, occupy the promised land. And in due course, during the reign of David, Jerusalem is established as the city where God dwells. And at the heart of that city is the tabernacle, soon to become under Solomon a temple.

At the heart of the temple, there is the inner sanctuary, or holy of holies, that houses the Ark of the Covenant, just as in the tabernacle before.

[6 : 19] It is God's place. It is where God dwells. But the presence of God in the holy of holies is both reassuring, He is with His people, but it's also threatening.

And so access to the holy of holies is restricted to the high priest once a year on the day of atonement. We now need to fast track again to the next big event in this thread, tracing the dwelling of God with His people, the coming of Jesus, the eternal Son of God.

John in his gospel tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt or tabernacled among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God dwelt with us, dwelt with His people in the person of His Son, who very significantly identified Himself as God's temple.

Remember the occasion that's recorded for us in John's gospel in the second chapter in verse 19, Jesus declared, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.

[7 : 36] Jesus identifies Himself as God's temple, the presence of God amongst His people. Jesus, having lived a perfect life for us and died an atoning death in our place, rose again and ascended to His Father's right hand.

What now of God's presence with His people? Does God still dwell with us? He does. He does so in the person of His Spirit. At Pentecost, God's Spirit came down to dwell amongst and within His people, each one of us.

What are we told is one of the implications of God's Spirit dwelling within us? We are God's temple. That's what Paul says to God's people.

You are God's temple, for God dwells within you. So God dwelt with His people in the garden. He dwelt with His people in the temple. He dwelt with His people through His Son.

He dwells with His people by His Spirit. What connects all these expressions of God dwelling with His people? Well, let's trace the connection going backwards in time.

[8 : 45] He dwells in us. We are God's temple. He dwelt with His people in Jesus. Jesus is God's temple. He dwelt with His people in the temple.

The temple is the symbol of God's presence. And He dwelt with His people in the garden. And the garden can be seen as a kind of temple.

The Garden of Eden was a kind of temple where Adam served as a priest in the service of God. This thesis, if we call it that, can be established in a number of ways.

But perhaps the most vivid illustration of this contention is what happened when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden or garden temple. Do you remember what happened when they were thrown out of the garden?

We read in Genesis, after God drove the man out, He placed cherubim and a flying sword to guard the way to the tree of life. Now, remember what covered the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

[9 : 48] In the instructions God gave, we read of them in 2 Chronicles in chapter 3. The Ark of the Covenant was guarded by 2 Cherubim. As we make that connection, it becomes clear that it is reasonable to view Eden as a kind of temple.

Indeed, the Holy of Holies where God dwelt. Hence the need to guard it with a cherubim. In like manner to the way in which the Holy of Holies was subsequently guarded in the temple.

So, the temple theme connects all the expressions of God's dwelling with His people in both the Old and the New Testament. And with this in mind, let's explore our new home.

Painted as it is in the vision, as a city and a garden. First of all then, our city home. The temple fulfilled.

What I want to propose is that our city home, as described for us in the vision, is what we might call a temple city. Now, that might appear, if you were following the reading carefully, it might appear a rather bold proposition.

[10:58] Given that John expressly tells us, we read that in verse 22, I did not see a temple in the city. I did not see a temple in the city, and yet I'm suggesting that we can call this city a temple city.

So, bear with me as we think about this or develop this and substantiate this proposition. What are we told about this city?

We're going to have to be very selective here, but I want to particularly highlight three features of our city home as they are revealed in the vision John shares with us.

The first feature, and without doubt the most prominent, is what is stated in verse 11. It shone with the glory of God. John is taken up to a high mountain.

He's able to view the holy city laid out before him. And the very first thing that he highlights, the very first thing that grabs his attention before all other is this.

[11:58] It shone with the glory of God. It shone with the glory of God. Now, this is what is most prominent in our new home.

God is there. Our city home is God's place. Doesn't this remind us of the temple in Jerusalem? Remember when the ark was brought to Solomon's newly built temple?

What are we told dominated the occasion? Well, in 2 Chronicles 5 and verse 14, we're told what dominated that occasion.

We're told this, the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God. And that pointed to a far greater filling of a far greater temple, of the city temple of which we reach, which will be our new home.

We will share our new home with God. And we will witness and bask in the brilliance of His glory.

We're then told in the vision of its walls in verse 12 that speak of our eternal security.

[13:09] We read of its gates in that same verse and in the following verse. Gates that face in every direction, north and south and east and west, that speak of access for the nations.

The nations of the world from every corner and from every point of the compass being drawn to occupy this new home with gates wide open for their entrance.

And notice another curious detail in the light of what we've just commented. The gates are guarded by angels, just like the ark in the Holy of Holies, just like Eden when Adam and Eve were cast out from that holy place.

So, the first thing I particularly highlight is this, that this city shone with the glory of God. But I also want to highlight a second feature of the city that we find in verse 16, in the second half of the verse, that speaks of the city being measured by the angel.

We read there in that verse, he, the angel, measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, or 1,400 miles as we translated the measurement for the children.

[14:26] I think it's probably at the foot of the page in your Bibles as well. And as wide and high as it is long. Now, we can get, I think, that the city shone with the glory of God.

But what are we to make of these bizarre and colossal measurements? And we need to hone in on one crucial detail. And the crucial detail is this, quite apart from the significance of the numbers, whatever their significance might be.

The crucial detail is this, that the city described is a perfect cube, as long as it is wide, as it is high. Now, why is this significant?

Well, let's take a peek into Solomon's temple, as it is described for us in 1 Kings 6. In 1 Kings 6, and if we read from verse 19.

In 1 Kings 6, and reading from verse 19. And we'll read just a couple of verses there. So, the part we're reading is the part that describes the features of the inner sanctuary, of the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple, as instructed by God.

[15:38] We read there in verse 19, He prepared the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, within the temple to set the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord there. The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 wide, and 20 high.

And we just leave the reading there. So, the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, shares this characteristic with the new Jerusalem, the holy city. It is a perfect cube, 20 cubits by 20 cubits by 20 cubits.

And this is no coincidence. This is no random detail that we are identifying. You see, the holy city in the vision, in Revelation, is not only presented to us as God's temple, but as the very inner sanctuary of the temple, the Holy of Holies.

So, the whole city, the whole of the new Jerusalem, is where God dwells. No longer restricted or limited to this one small place.

walled around, protected from entrance by sinners, but rather God dwells in the whole city.

[16:46] The whole city becomes His most holy place. But what is the big difference between the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple and the holy city as a colossal holy of holies?

Well, the big difference is simply this. Access. Access. The holy of holies in Solomon's temple was designed to keep people out.

The holy city invites people in. And we know how this new arrangement contemplated for our eternal home is possible.

It's possible because of Jesus. It's possible because of what Jesus has done for us sinners. We're alienated from God and far from God, not able to come into His presence.

What happened when Jesus died for our sins on the cross? We're told that on that occasion, on that historic occasion when Jesus died on the cross, we're told that one of the events that accompanied His death is that the curtain in the temple that blocked access to the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom.

[18:03] And as we see these parallels or links between the holy city and the temple, we can better understand what John is saying in verse 22 of the chapter. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The whole of the city, the eternal dwelling place of God and His people, is the temple. There is no temple because everything will be temple.

Or we could put it this way. There is no temple in the city, which is the precise language that John uses. There is no temple in the city, because the city is the temple.

Now, we've already noted, I think last Sunday morning, that the holy city and the new heaven and new earth are one and the same.

And so what the description of the holy city reveals is that the whole renewed cosmos, the new heaven and the new earth, is God's temple, God's dwelling place, and ours.

[19:12] But there's a third element of the city, as it is described, that I want to highlight. I am being very selected. There are so many other elements, but let me limit myself to one further element of the description.

It's found in verse 19. We're told that the foundations of the city were decorated with every kind of precious stone. Now, as with the measurements, the significance of these precious stones is not immediately apparent.

You know, we read that and we say, well, precious stones, yes, shiny, precious, wonderful. But what more can we say about the significance of these precious stones that decorate the very foundations of the city?

I think the key is to understand that the precious stones, which, as we read, if we count them, we'll discover there are twelve jewels. These twelve jewels are based on the twelve stones that decorated the high priest's breastplate.

We don't have time to look up every reference, but if you are taking notes or if you can take a mental note, in Exodus chapter 28, and from verse 17 to 20, you have the high priest's clothing or vestments described, and the breastplate is decorated by twelve precious stones, twelve jewels, with each precious stone representing one of the tribes of Israel.

[20:34] But here's the thing. The breastplate of the high priest was meant to serve as a miniature version or replica of the Holy of Holies, sharing the same square shape.

It's almost as if the people of God were given the opportunity to see in represented form that which they could not enter. The people could not enter the Holy of Holies.

Only the high priest, once a year. They couldn't enter, but as they saw the high priest and as they saw his breastplate and the twelve jewels that sparkled on his clothing, so they were given a glimpse of that which was closed to them, the very presence of God.

You see what's happening. The very foundations of the walls of the Holy City, that which delineate the full extension of the city, also serve to represent or delineate the new Holy of Holies, the place of God's dwelling.

God is there and we are with Him. It's the same big truth repeated time and time and time again. John goes on to describe that the city does not need the sun or the moon for the glory of the Lord gives it light in a clear fulfillment of the promise of God through Isaiah that we read of in chapter 60 of that book.

[22 : 08] This is God's place. God is there and so are we. This is the remarkable thing, how we can continue that sentence, God is there, and continue it with the words, and so are we.

That we would declare that God is there, well, we can kind of handle that, but that we can say God is there and so are we. That is the most remarkable thing. Note that John does not say, and this is perhaps just a detail, but I'll share it nonetheless.

John does not say that there will be no sun and moon, but that the sun and the moon will not be needed. I think that's significant, that he's careful in his choice of words.

The sun and the moon will not be needed. It may well be that in the new heavens and the new earth, the renewed cosmos, the sun will be there and the moon will be there. If I had to venture an opinion, I would suggest they probably will.

I claim no inside knowledge on that, but what I can say is that what John declares is not that they won't be there, but that they won't be needed. And they won't be needed because a far greater light will shine brightly and eternally, the light of the glory of God, the light of the one who declared, I am the light of the world.

[23 : 34] And into the city, we read as we continue reading the vision, into the city will flood the nations of the world. And what will the nations of the world bring?

What will we bring into the holy city? We're told that the nations will bring their glory and honor. There in verse 26, the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

It's an intriguing and fertile debate as to what the vision contemplates as constituting the glory and honor of the nations. I wonder if it is simply describing or anticipating the praise of the nations.

In Revelation, the language of glory and honor is invariably used of praise, of ascribing praise to God. And so when we read of the nations bringing their glory and honor, it might not be so much as is sometimes suggested, their culture and their language and their achievements, not that they are to be underestimated or diminished, but bringing their praise.

The nations bring their praise to God and to the land in the center of the city. So behold the city, a temple city, a temple city where God dwells and where we also will dwell with Him.

[24 : 52] But in the short time that remains, let me just comment on not only our city home, but our garden home. These are two pictures describing the same reality. But what can we draw from the picture of our garden home in the first few verses of chapter 22?

I think the chapter is helpfully entitled, though there's an element of interpretation and even giving it this title, it's entitled Eden Restored.

I think that is a fair description of what we have here. Our garden home, Eden Restored. The new heaven and the new earth is pictured as a temple city to visibly represent how the temple as a symbol of God's presence has now been replaced by the reality of God's presence with His people. But the new heaven and new earth is also pictured as a garden or a garden city. The end times garden is presented to us in the vision as Eden Restored and more.

Eden Restored and beyond. As was the case in Eden. We find in this garden the tree of life. It occupies a place of prominence in this garden.

[26 : 02] We read of it there in verse 2 of chapter 22. We're told that a river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb irrigating the roots of the tree of life that in turn provide healing and satisfaction and sustenance to the nations or all who dwell in the garden.

When we read of the leaves of the tree of life as bringing healing to the nations it rather begs the question why is there the need for healing in the new heaven and the new earth?

Have we not discovered that in the new heaven and the new earth there will be no illness no disease no pain no suffering no death? Why is there the need for healing? I think the picture painted here parallels the picture of God wiping away every tear that we thought about last Sunday morning that we read of in the beginning of chapter 21.

There we understood that description as being a once and for all act of tender kindness and the part of God as He wipes away the tears of all that has gone before of every pain of every frustration of every disappointment of every failure every tear wiped away that we might never cry again and can we not understand the healing of the tree of life is also serving that same function for the nations the nations healed by the leaves of the tree of life but the tree will continue to provide fruit to nourish and to satisfy those who dwell in the garden the echoes with the original Eden continue in the passage with the promise that there will no longer be any curse we know that Jesus was accursed for us and drew all of the poison of the curse pronounced in the original Eden but let me close as we think of one further detail or description of this garden home let me close by highlighting what is central to both pictures the city and the garden and is expressed in a particularly beautiful way as life for God's people in the garden is described we read there in chapter 22 one of the features of life in the garden for us is this they or we will see his face they will see his face there in verse 4 they will see his face those who live there will see his face they will see the face of God and of the Lamb they will see his face

God is there and we will see his face the very thing that God's people could never do except in a veiled manner remember the words of God to Moses when he was first to receive the law covenant God kindly warned Moses that you cannot see my face for no one may see me and live but now in the new home that is no longer the case to see God's face this was and is the hope of every saint to see his face the psalmist anticipates this day when in Psalm 11 he declares the upright will see his face this glorious prospect of seeing his face allows us to appreciate with greater excitement and expectation the promise contained in the priestly blessing or the ironic blessing as it is sometimes called listen to that blessing in the light of this new home where you will live the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace peace you see in the garden in God's restored Eden in the temple city in the new heaven and new earth

[30 : 39] God will tenderly graciously and eternally make his face shine on you and be gracious to you and turn his face toward you and give you peace and as he turns his face toward you you will see his face our new home your new home are you looking forward to your new home I hope so God gave John the vision to share with us that we might be encouraged and excited and enthused but also motivated and challenged to persevere and overcome to reach that day throughout Revelation this is the call to God's people to overcome to persevere in the face of trial and suffering and pain with the hope held before us of our new home where there will be no trial or suffering and pain but I need to close with a question for you will this be your new home it's big enough for everybody the gates are open wide it is a colossal city there's room for you in

God's new home but John is also left in the vision in no doubt as to who will dwell with God in the new heaven and the new earth at the close of chapter 21 not for the first time this reality is made very clear only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life and so the call to you if this is the home you wish to spend eternity in come to Jesus come to the Lamb put your trust in the one who died for you that you might know forgiveness new life and a welcome into the family of God that you when the time comes might take your place in God's place the new heaven and new earth let's pray heavenly father we do thank you for your word we thank you for so great salvation we thank you for all that we enjoy of your salvation in the here and now we are in the present a blessed people and yet we thank you that as we look ahead we acknowledge that there is yet much more for us to enjoy and experience we thank you for the new home that you are preparing for us but not just for us where you too will dwell with us we thank you for its many glories its many beauties we thank you for much that might dazzle us in its description but we thank you that above all what we discover is that the glory of the

Lord is there that you are there you are there with us and for us and we will see your face we thank you for that and we pray in Jesus name amen we love to have you