



The New Jerusalem

Series: The Wonder of Worship

Revelation 21:9-22:5

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Beloved, today really is the last sermon in our series on ***The Wonder of Worship*** and we have covered a lot of ground over the last four months or so. Just consider this with me for a moment. We started by considering, afresh and anew, the person and the character of the God whom we are called to worship – His holiness, His sovereignty, His just wrath and surprising mercy, His steadfast and unrelenting love for His people, His goodness and His grace. We bowed in awe before the clear, focused, and detailed picture of the glory of God, the greatness and wonder of God in the very face of Jesus Christ our Lord. In the story of Christ’s encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, we beheld the determined pursuit, by God, of sinners and rebels in order to make them worshippers of God, in spirit and in truth – the very reason for which Jesus Christ was sent into this world to save sinners like us from the wrath of God and the power of sin. In the story of the woman with the alabaster flask, we saw the strongest motivation of worship – forgiveness. It is the realization of our great sinfulness and the greater love and grace of God in Christ that fuels our love for Him to a white-hot flame.

From the story of the blind man in John 9, we came face to face with the truth that living a life of worship for the sake of Christ’s glory, for the sake of our own souls, and for the sake of a lost world that desperately needs a Savior requires courage, conviction and clarity about Christ. In the sermon on Resurrection Sunday from 1 Corinthians 15, we learned that worship must be gospel-centered, Christocentric -- and why? Because what is of supreme importance, the supreme message, taking precedence over everything else in life, is the gospel of Christ – the gospel that saves us and eventually will result in our being glorified with Christ and gathered into the glory of Heaven. Then in Hebrews chapter 10, we were confronted with both the privileges and expectations of worship -- to draw near to God through Christ, to hold fast to Jesus Christ as Lord, and that we would meet together in order to stir up one another to greater and greater degrees of love and good works. Then from Colossians 3, we looked at what the fellowship of Christ-worshippers, our fellowship as

the church, is to look like. We saw how the corporate worship of Christ and the life of the local church, this local church, must hold primacy in our lives – not priority but primacy.

Then, a few weeks ago, we entered the homestretch as we looked in the book of Revelation. We looked at the eternal worship of God in heaven in Revelation 4 and 5, that the worship of God and of His Christ is at the very center of the Creation, and how the worship that is in heaven, worship in the unseen realms, is to inform our own right here and now. We looked forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb, the day that our marriage, our eternal union and communion with Christ will be consummated and we will rejoice forever in the presence of God and in the company of the angels, worshipping our God and worshipping Christ for our incomparable salvation. Then last week, in Revelation 21, this glorious vision of John took us beyond the Day of Christ's glorious appearing and His judgment of His enemies to gaze upon what lies ahead for the people of God – the new heavens and the new earth, all things made new.

And today, we are going to finish this sermon series by beholding, with upturned faces, the beauty and the wonder of the New Jerusalem in all of its splendor. Today, we answer with finality the questions of: "Where is all of this heading? For what is God in Christ saving His people? Why is God pursuing and redeeming, rescuing and transforming sinners and rebels into worshippers of God? How does this all end for the people of God?" Let's go with John and see...

The New Jerusalem (9-27) Look with me, starting in verse 9: ***"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.'"*** (Revelation 21:9, ESV) Now why the mention of the angel? Well, there is a deliberate purpose here. It takes us back to the opening words of chapter 17. There we read: ***"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.'"*** (Revelation 17:1-2, ESV) Here's what's going on. As John is given a vision of the New Jerusalem, we are meant to see that it stands in complete contrast to the end of those who have rejected God and His Christ. Babylon, the city of men, the center of rebellion and immorality, the center of godlessness, the picture of this very earth in which we live, ends in utter judgment, in utter destruction, and ultimately in the lake of fire and the

wrath of God – the second death. And in contrast, the future of the church, of the bride of Christ, the people of God is exceedingly glorious and wonderful.

In the vision of chapter 17, John was taken out to a wilderness, to a wasteland, to the desert, to see the end of the wicked and rebellious, but for the vision of the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, he is taken up to a high mountain. **“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, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” (Revelation 21:10–11, ESV)** John is taken up to a high mountain to see the New Jerusalem, the holy city coming down out of heaven, and the first thing that captures his attention is its shining radiance, the glory of God.

Now, before we go any further, let’s just deal with something here. Is the bride of Christ a people or is the bride of Christ a city? And the answer is – both. The bride is the church, the wife of the Lamb made up of all people from every age who have been redeemed from their sin and rebellion against God through the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ, made up of those who have been saved by faith and sanctified by the Word, thought out all of the ages and from every people group, race, nationality, social class, socioeconomic level, and gender. But the bride of Christ is more than that, and I hinted at it last week. The bride is the holy city, the community of the redeemed for all of eternity, a community and fellowship that is bound together by the blood of Christ and unites around the worship of **“the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.”** So the bride is made up of individuals welded together by grace into a community of eternal worshippers and servants to glorious God, symbolized by, but also dwelling in a New Jerusalem, the holy city of God.

And here is the thing that we need to understand, the descriptions and measurements of this holy city may or may not be literal and exact, something that you can plot out on a map – for instance. But that is not the point. The purpose of the vision of the New Jerusalem is to reveal to John and to us the deeper meaning of the heavenly and spiritual truths that the earthly images symbolize. He is expressing the inexpressible in terms that we can understand.

So like I said, the first thing that John observes is the shining radiance of the city as a result of the glory of God. He mentions how it shines like a jasper – you remember that stone. We saw it when John was trying to describe the picture of the Almighty upon his throne in Revelation 4. Jasper was a translucent stone, kind of like a diamond when the sun hits it – all kinds of colors shining with brilliance indicative of God’s holiness, purity, and majesty. Here is the point – the radiant glow of this city is derivative. It comes from God. What makes this city beautiful is not the architecture, per se, but the presence and splendor of God. It’s the eternal fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1-3, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”** (Isaiah 60:1–3, ESV) The idea is that the eternal city of the people of God will permanently shine with the stunning display of the glory of God, more beautiful and more exquisitely marvelous than words can adequately describe because God is there.

Part of its beauty is found in what John describes next: **“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— on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”** (Revelation 21:12–14, ESV) There is a great, high wall around the city, a wall that sets the inhabitants of this city apart from everyone else. It speaks of security, yes – walls were designed for security in the ANE. Walls kept the good guys in and the bad guys out. And here we see a wall with an honor guard of sorts – angels posted at every gate, all twelve of them. But with all evil and sin fully and finally defeated and cast into the lake of fire, the wall speaks more of the intimacy and the set-apartness of the people in the city.

Let me show you what I mean. We read of the names of 12 tribes inscribed on the gates and the names of the 12 apostles written on the 12 foundations. What is this all about? It signifies the OT and the NT people of God united in perfect unity and harmony. Exactly which names are written on the gates and on the foundations are not important, although some will debate that intensely. The point is the unity of the people of God. It’s the very picture of what Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2 when he talked about the cross removing the former hostility between Jews and Gentiles by reconciling us, regardless of nationality to God. He went on to say: **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the**

apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19–22, ESV)

Here is that eternal dwelling place, founded on 12 foundations – immovable is the idea -- and unchanging.

The vision continues: **“And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 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, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”**

(Revelation 21:15–21, ESV) The picture we get here is of a great big cube. Is that the architecture of the city? I don’t know but the point of the cube and the specific measurements of the city and the wall is meant to indicate that all of the people of God, all of the elect of every age, everybody who is supposed to be in the New Jerusalem, will be there. And all because of the grace of God in Christ. New Jerusalem will be complete.

The city is described as gold, clear and pure gold. The foundations with all sorts of jewels, all kinds of precious stones. Even the streets are gold, like transparent glass. What is this all pointing to – just the purity of the congregation of the righteous in the city, reflecting and shining with God’s glory. No impurities to mar its shining, nothing to dim its brightness. There will be no sin, nothing that can hamper the brightness of God’s shining through His people. Again, it is all reflective, right? Jewels and gold don’t shine on their own, they only reflect and in the case of jewels, refract, light – in this case the Light of God and of the Lamb. The scene is one of breathtaking beauty, a spectrum of dazzling colors flashing from the New Jerusalem throughout the re-created universe.

Consider the gates of pearl for just a second. That’s got to be significant, right? And it is. Think about the pearl. It is the only gem formed by living flesh. It’s created when an oyster is irritated by sand or by a wound. Around the wound or the irritation, the oyster builds and

creates a pearl. The pearl is a result of suffering. You can see the wisdom of God to make the gates to the eternal city of pearl, can't you? The saints, as they come and go through these gates will be forever reminded that access into the city of God has only come through suffering, the great suffering of the Son of God on our behalf, the suffering of Calvary. Those pearls, hung eternally at the access routes to glory, will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree and whose answer to those sinners who injured Him is to invite them to share His eternal city, through forgiveness, by His shed blood and suffering, through personal repentance and faith.

And it gets even better. **“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:22, ESV)** There is no need for a temple, why? Because the whole city is a temple, the dwelling place of the Lord. In fact, the cubic measurements of the city are in the same proportion as the measurements of the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple. The New Jerusalem is the true Holy of Holies. Unlike in the OT when the high priest could enter the presence of God only once a year and quickly – in and out, before us in the New Jerusalem, where the dwelling place of God Almighty and the Lamb, lies a place where we will live in God's Holy Presence forever.

This is the great fulfillment to which all of Scripture has pointed. In the OT, the tabernacle and the temple served as a shadow of that which was to come, pointing to Jesus as the path into God's presence, into the eternal holy dwelling place of God. In this present age, the church becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit through the indwelling of the Spirit. But even this is only a partial experience of things to come.

In the New Jerusalem, there will be no need of some special temple, some special sanctuary, because believers, the saved of all ages, will be in the absolute, undiminished and intimate presence of the Almighty Sovereign God and the Lamb. Even the names used – the Lamb for Christ underscores the fact that we are there because of His work as the Lamb of God. “God the Almighty” is used to underscore that our being there is a result of His all powerful and sovereign plan of grace which has perfectly provided for our salvation.

To make the wonder of this even more plain we read: **“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.” (Revelation 21:23, ESV)** The lesser lights, the sun and the moon, which testify to the glory of God, will be overwhelmed by the outshining of God's brilliance with His people. God's glory will be plain

to all and will need nothing to testify to it – Everywhere you look you see the glory of God. Everywhere you turn you see the Lamb in the midst of the throne. There is the Father’s glory and grace on display. There is no need of sun and moon there because Jesus, the light of the world, illuminates it all and drives all darkness away.

“By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” (Revelation 21:24–26, ESV) By the light of the Lamb, by the lamp of His eternal wisdom and power, His lamp to light the way, Christ will illumine the ways of His people – from the highest to the lowest, from kings to the common – all the elect will come to the New Jerusalem and be received into its courts – the gates will never be shut to the people of God. And they will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. Glory and honor speak of the wealth and the worth of the nations that will come to the New Jerusalem. In other words, Christ will have the reward of His sufferings – His prized possession, the glory of His sufferings – His people and their worship forever. It is the echo of Isaiah 60:

“Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.” (Isaiah 60:4–5, ESV) **“Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste.” (Isaiah 60:11–12, ESV)** We see that reflected in these next words:

“But 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.” (Revelation 21:27, ESV) Finally, the emphasis of verse 27 as it pertains to nothing unclean is simply a reiteration of the promise of 21:8. It will be a place inhabited only by those who have been justified and transformed by the grace of God, sinless and in glorified bodies, those who from eternity have been written in the Lamb’s book of life and who have conquered, overcome, persevered to the end, and has remained steadfast in persecution and oppression, the one who has not been deceived by false religion, by false saviors, the one who has not been seduced by the perspectives, values and attitudes of Babylon. The unclean, the detestable – those who have made themselves vile, and the false professor – they will all find themselves in the lake of fire.

Again, this New Jerusalem is for the holy, for the truehearted.

We see this picture, this view that John has of the New Jerusalem from high atop the mountain, then John takes us in his vision into the very streets of New Jerusalem and the scene is amazing.

The Streets of New Jerusalem (2:1-2) We go inside the New Jerusalem and John tells us: ***“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 through the middle of the street of the city; 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.”*** (Revelation 22:1-2, ESV) John gets to walk the streets of New Jerusalem and the vision he gets is awesome. There is a river, the river of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and he sees the tree of life – with roots, it seems, on either side of the river, or the tree itself is so large that it spans both sides of the river. It’s hard to know exactly what this looks like, but the imagery is unmistakable. John is describing a new Garden of Eden. Here is Paradise regained. What man lost in the Fall in Genesis is now regained by the Lamb. It makes me think of the words of Psalm 46: ***“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved.”*** (Psalm 46:4-5a, ESV) There is life and life abundant, beyond our wildest dreams – 12 kinds of fruit, a tree forever bearing fruit – here in the presence of God. The leaves of the tree are for healing. There is no sickness in heaven so what does this mean? The word for tree is the same word that is used by Peter when he writes: ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”*** (1 Peter 2:24, ESV) The reference to this healing tree is a reference to the cross, a reminder of the cross, by which the curse of sin has been destroyed.

What of this throne from which the river proceeds? The name of it is significant. The throne of God is the throne of the Lamb. It is a throne of righteousness, of power, of glory and no less a throne of grace and mercy. Spurgeon says of it: “The altar and the throne have become identical. From that throne no fiery bolt can ever again be hurled against the believer, for it is the throne of the Lamb as well as the throne of God.” This scene is glorious, a picture of the eternal Eden. And then we come to...

The Climax of Redemption's Plan (3-5) John writes: ***“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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”*** (Revelation 22:3-4, ESV)

Here it is. We come to full fruition in the redemptive plan of God. The curse will be forever gone, and the servants of the Lord will worship Him forever. That is where all of this is going. All that we do in heaven, all that that includes, praising God and singing to God, the work that He gives us to do as His people in heaven – there will be no secular/sacred split – everything will be an act of worship before the Lord.

And we will finally get to do what should be our very hearts desire, even now, as the people of God, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, made holy by His sacrifice, regenerated by His Spirit – fully glorified, all vestiges of sin forever put away by His glorious redemptive power, all sin forever banished – we will see Jesus face to face. What we see now by faith: ***“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*** (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV) What we see now only dimly and what we know only in part: ***“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 Corinthians 13:12, ESV) We will see fully and completely. We shall be like Him and we will see Jesus as He is.

I love what Spurgeon says about this. He says: ***“(We) shall literally and physically, with (our) risen bodies, actually look into the face of Jesus; and (our) mental faculties shall be enlarged, so that (we) shall be enabled to look into the very heart, and soul, and character of Christ, so as to understand Him, His work, His love, His all in all, as (we) never understood him before.”*** It's true. This will be the greatest glory of heaven: to know God, to know Jesus, more intimately and wonderfully than we ever could on earth. Again, in the words of Spurgeon: ***"It is the chief blessing of heaven, the cream of heaven, the heaven of heaven, that the saints shall there see Jesus."***

“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.” (Revelation 22:5, ESV)

No more night, no more need for a light or for the sun. Everything is emblazoned with the glory of God and we, who were made low by our sin, we will have been raised to the highest of heights – marked forever by Christ as His people who reign with Him forever and ever.

This is what I long for, this is all that can satisfy my soul – to see my Savior, my Lord, my King, the One who died and rose from the dead, the One who has blessed me, and kept me, and ministered to my soul so faithfully, to see my Lord and Master face-to-face. To have His name – the mark of His ownership, the mark of His approval, the mark of His good pleasure, the mark of His affection, written forever on my forehead. To reign with Him and worship Him and serve Him forever. I am forever His. He is forever mine. What is better than this, beloved?

This Is Why We Worship Now

This is why we worship now. This is why we find our lives in Christ alone right now. This is why He is worthy of supremacy in our affections and primacy in our lives, right now. Because we live our lives with the greatest expectation of all – that one day we will see God, we will see Christ face-to-face. How then must we live? We must live our lives to worship, to encounter His glory, to be awestruck by His majesty. We must gather here together to be moved by God and His mighty acts of salvation. We must come to exult in who He is and what He's done. We must come to hear His voice echoing in and through His Word. We must come to confess our sin so that we can taste the glory of His salvation. We must come, hungry for God, ready to feast together on the good news that, in the person of Jesus Christ, God has come to us so that we could ascend to Him. Feasting on God's gospel together through prayer and preaching, through the ordinances and singing, energizes us with the faith, hope, and love, with the courage, hope and conviction we need to be gospel people in a world of sin, to live obedient and faithful lives, to proclaim good news in a bad news world, to labor and sacrifice and lay down our lives for our brethren and for a world that needs the grace we have received in Christ. True worship produces people who think profoundly about God, feel intensely about God, and who live urgently in this darkened world for the sake of God in Christ.

The most practical, most foundational thing we do as the people of God is to worship Christ our Lord, because holy and adoring praise is what reorients our lives to what matters in this world and in the world to come. It exposes the worthless and temporary pursuits of this world. It focuses and hones our hearts to seek satisfaction in Jesus alone in the company of the redeemed. It compels us to recognize that earthly things passing and unworthy of our

heart's greatest devotion. It pierces the night of this world and lays bare the unfruitful works of darkness and of sin. It moves our hearts to make the name of Christ known to a people mired in sin, self-worship, and spiritual deception while there is yet time for them to find repentance at the feet of Christ. Worship is the glad rebuke of a world that has lost its savor for God.

We must look forward to corporate worship more than any other time of the week because when we are worshipping together with other sinners saved by grace, our anticipation of the glorious and never ending Day of Eternity with Christ grows to a crescendo. What we do now is the foretaste glory divine. may the words of Psalm 89 be forever written on our souls: ***“All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.”*** (Psalm 86:9–13, ESV)

This is why we worship. This is the wonder of worship.

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