

Revelation 21:21-27

²¹The twelve gates are twelve pearls. Each of the gates is made out of one pearl. And the street of the city is pure gold, like transparent glass.

²²I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God has given it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵There is no day when its gates will be shut, for there will be no night in that place. ²⁶They will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. ²⁷Nothing that is unclean and no one who does what is detestable or who tells lies will ever enter it, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

City of God

I.

If you are like me, the imagination soars as John speaks about the perfect city.

City planners have been trying to come up with the perfect city from the time people began to congregate in cities. After the Great Flood, God wanted people to spread out, but they thought living in a city would be better and started to build a tower. God confused their language, and they were forced to disperse with the other people they could understand.

As they dispersed, they still built cities. Walls were built around them for some degree of security. Gates in the walls controlled who could come in and go out. At night, the gates were closed. There were no streetlights, so it was difficult to see who or what might be lurking in the deepest shadows. It was important to minimize the threats to the security of the residents.

The same concerns are there today. To hide some of the everyday needs, utilities are buried. Call that hotline number before you dig in your yard and soon there will be paint and flags in a blizzard of color dotting the lawn and the sidewalk, letting you know where all the buried lines are so you don't hit one by accident.

As for the dangers of the night, there are no longer city walls. Poles rise up from the ground with streetlights to keep the patches of darkness to a minimum. Ring doorbells and home security cameras help spot intruders, or even just the porch thief after your package. Detectors for fire and carbon monoxide can't stop other threats, but at least can give you a warning to get out before disaster claims live rather than just property.

The perfect city doesn't exist. It can't be built. There is always some danger. There are always problems that have to be dealt with. But that doesn't stop us from trying; and dreaming.

II.

That is perhaps a reason why John's description of the perfect city captures our imaginations and takes us away. Ah, but it's coming, right? Heaven.

But there's a problem. "Nothing that is unclean and no one who does what is detestable or who tells lies will ever enter it" (Revelation 21:27, EHV).

God's standards to enter this perfect city are high: perfection. You have not been perfect. I have not been perfect. "Unclean" was not just something the Old Testament used to describe certain foods the people were to abstain from; unclean referred to any sin—any

slight deviation from any part of God's Law—that made them unfit for worship.

One who does what is detestable. The word in Greek for detestable refers to something disgusting that arouses God's wrath. Paul referred to several Old Testament references when he said: "There is no one who does what is good; there is not even one" (Romans 3:12, EHV). In God's eyes, every human being is detestable.

"Or who tells lies." It might be tempting to think that not every lie is wrong, or that lying is insignificant. Not so. And not one of us can say that we always speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—all the time.

Each of us, therefore, is ineligible to enter this most wonderful place.

III.

John's vision of the perfect city, however, revolves around a very important figure: the Lamb. There was one more important phrase to that final verse of today's text: "Nothing that is unclean and no one who does what is detestable or who tells lies will ever enter it, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27, EHV). The Lamb's Book of Life changes our status—not because of who we are, but because of what *he* did.

Last week we spoke about (agape) love—that kind of love that is self-sacrificing love. That's why the Holy Spirit makes the Lamb a central part in this vision given to John. It is the Lamb who makes it possible for us to enter this perfect city.

The Lamb's Book of Life would not exist but for the perfect, self-sacrificing love Jesus showed by giving his life as the ransom for all people. Recently we spoke about another part of John's vision—of those continuing to come out of the Great Tribulation. They came out from this life and entered eternal life because "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14, EHV). The same John who recorded this vision of Revelation says elsewhere: "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, EHV). Believers from every time and place—from Adam and Eve to the last believer on earth—have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life because the blood of the Lamb cleanses us from all sin and gives us his righteousness, by which our names are recorded in his Book of Life.

IV.

Because of Jesus, each of us, as a believer, *is* eligible to enter this place.

"The twelve gates are twelve pearls. Each of the gates is made out of one pearl. And the street of the city is pure gold, like transparent glass" (Revelation 21:21, EHV). Pearls, *real* pearls, are expensive. John describes something impossible: each gate of the city is made from one giant pearl. There is only one street in this city, and it is paved with gold—like transparent glass. Opulence is a way to make our limited human understanding picture the most beautiful thing imaginable; even *beyond* imagination; beyond our wildest dreams.

"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22, EHV). The temple was the central feature of Jerusalem in Bible times. That was where the people gathered for worship of the One true God.

The temple was a sanctuary. It was a place to find relief from the sins that separated a person from God. It was a place to escape the cares and worries of everyday life and focus on the *spiritual* things God wanted his people to remember. He wanted them to focus on him and be devoted to him.

Inside the temple complex was a place called the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place; it's dimensions were a perfect cube. There was where God promised to dwell with his people. When John saw the dimensions of the city in his vision earlier in this chapter, he

wrote: “The city is laid out as a square...Its length, width, and height are equal” (Revelation 21:16, EHV). The walls of this city are as high as the length and width of the city, making it a perfect cube—the Holy of Holies.

That’s why the city doesn’t need a temple, and why John said the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The perfect city does not need a sanctuary in which residents can escape from problems. As he said in the last verse of our text, nothing unclean or evil can get in the city to spoil it. The perfect city does not need a special place to go and meet with God. The whole place is the place where God dwells with his people. God himself and the Lamb *are* the temple. They are not separated from the people, but are right there to see and speak with in person.

“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God has given it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.²⁵ There is no day when its gates will be shut, for there will be no night in that place” (Revelation 21:23-25, EHV). No need for streetlights. Jesus, the Lamb, lights the city. No need to close the gates at night for security. Nothing can threaten, and there is no cover of the darkness of night for anyone to cause problems.

At the beginning of this chapter of Revelation, John says: “I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2, EHV). We, believers, those written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, are part of the city of God. We are the bride of Christ.

Jesus said in today’s Gospel: “In a little while you are not going to see me anymore, and again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father...²² So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you” (John 16:16, 22, EHV).

Right now, we wait. We deal with the insecurities of imperfect cities and lives plagued by sin. But we know something better is coming. As the bride of Christ, we always keep ourselves prepared.

Our imagination soared as we went with John, by faith, to catch a view of what we will have in eternity. Keep the joys of Easter in view. Listen to the voice of the Lamb who is also our Good Shepherd. He will return for us, and our joy will be complete. Amen.