

Our Dream Home

Rev 21:1 – 22:5

Turn to Revelation 21. Our text is Rev 21:1 – 22:5, and it is mostly about a city, the holy city, the new Jerusalem. I tried hard to figure out what these paragraphs of the Bible were saying to us. What question does this Scripture answer?

It is this; the last part of Revelation, after all the battles and judgements and turmoil are over, answers this question: what's it like to be with God? What's it like to finally be with God? That's what the end of Revelation wants to tell us.

Ed's experience. I have had a few memorable experiences of God in my life, and I will tell you about the one that was most potent. About thirty years ago, I was sitting a small audience, 35 or 40 adults, listening to an old Dutch Pentecostal preacher. He was telling us about the faithfulness of God, that God was always reliable, that trusting God was never a mistake.

I was agreeing, I liked this, as everyone else in the group. And all of a sudden, I felt God right down into the center of my soul, like never before. I was astonished. It was wonderful. I saw nothing, heard nothing, no voice, no words, no picture or vision, no message at all. Just that God was right there, very close, and that's all.

If everyone around me had jumped up and gotten noisy, I probably would have too. But they didn't. I remember looking around slowly to see if this was happening to anyone else. No, no one else. I was no more deserving than the rest, I had not done any godly thing. It was just my day.

I walked out in a daze, in a kind of private glow. Didn't say much. What was there to tell? "I sure felt God close to me in there." I did try that once or twice. "Oh, that's nice." So I did not talk.

But, what did it mean? What was the point? The conclusion I came to was this: God had given me a tiny taste, a little corner, of his Presence. What's it like to be with God? He gave me half a teaspoon, so I would have some idea of what it was like to be with God. And if that's what it is like, I can tell you that it is very good to be with God.

The Real Question. We ask, "What will heaven be like?" We are thinking of heaven as a *place*, and we want to know what the *place* will be like, and what will *life* be like for us in that *place*.

According to Revelation, that's not the best question. The better question is, "what is God like, and what's it like to be with God?" That is harder to answer, and very often it is not as attractive to us. When we imagine "heaven," we imagine the perfect place, and the perfect life.

God is often not a big part of this. That's not good, but that's how we tend to be, so let's just agree that we're like that. Let's admit to God that when we think of heaven, he's often not at the center of what we imagine. It is not right, let's get that out in the open, and take it from there.

God calls us in this Scripture. God says to us, "Let me shape your hope. Let me shape your imagination. Trust me on this. I know you because I made you. I know how to give you pleasure forevermore better than you know how to do this for yourself. You will be my home, and I will please you in ways you don't understand now."

We're God's dream home. And God is our dream home.

What is the Holy City? Rev 21:2 *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

This is a peculiar line, although we've had that before in Revelation. If you see something coming down out of heaven from God, you should be able to tell the difference between a holy city and an attractive woman, right? But John sees this coming down, whatever he sees, and can tell right away that this is a holy city dressed up as a beautiful bride on her wedding day.

What did John actually see? I do not know, but this is clear: the city and the woman are one and the same. The holy city and the beautiful bride are one and the same reality. We saw this before. Jesus is both the lion of Judah, and the slaughtered lamb. We don't need to pick one, he is both lion and lamb. So also, the holy city and the beautifully dressed bride are one and the same.

Revelation has mentioned this city a few times, but not been clear about what it is. But do know what the bride is. Jesus talked about the bride, and so did Paul, and the OT prophets often spoke about Israel as God's wife. The bride of Christ is the whole church, the whole people of God, the whole crowd of Christ's people. We know that, John's seven churches knew that.

This means that the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is not an actual city, just as the bride of Christ is not an actual woman. The holy city is another picture of the whole people of God. All of us together are the new Jerusalem, the holy city. Revelation has no interest in geographical Jerusalem, the ancient city in Palestine. None.

Let's skip ahead to verses 9-10, and we'll see the same thing again. John wants us to be real clear on what the holy city actually is, so he repeats.

Rev 21:9-10 *One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.*

Remember that in Revelation, John sometimes **hears** one then, and then **sees** another, but they are two descriptions of the same thing. In Rev 5, he **heard** Christ called the lion of Judah, but what John **saw** was a slaughtered lamb that lived. The same thing happens in vv9-10.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” (What John heard with his ears: come see the bride, the wife of the Lamb.)

But what did John see? *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. (He heard, “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” But he saw with his eyes “the Holy City, Jerusalem.”)*

We are not talking about an actual city. Revelation 21 describes this holy city, but it is not talking about an actual city, it’s talking about a group of people, the whole people of God.

This is not complicated, but we have trouble getting it. There are no actual streets of gold, there are no actual gates or high walls or pearls. The city is the people of God. We know that the bride is the people of God. The city another image for the bride.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now with the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

God’s dream home is his people. We spoke about this last week. Every since God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, God has been homeless, and rebuilding his dream home, which is the gathering of people who love and serve him. Rev 21:3 is God moving into his dream home.

And, Rev 21:3 is also us coming into our dream home. When God is in our midst the way he will be then, that’s our dream home. The place does not actually matter. We’re God’s dream home, and God is our dream home.

The bride and groom and wedding. Let’s talk about the wedding supper of the Lamb. *I saw the holy city, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.* This is us on that day. God dwelling with us is our marriage.

Imagine a groom and a bride at their wedding, both eager for each other, both sexually eager for each other. They have been waiting for the wedding, waiting to be married, so they could be together have complete freedom with each other.

We are all made in the image and likeness of God. That has to include human sexuality and arousal and desire. God wants us the way the groom wants his bride. Our Lord wants to be with his bride the way a groom wants to be with his bride. God has worked a lot harder to get us than we have worked to get him. We have no idea how much he wants us.

This is a picture of what it will be like to meet the Lord and be with the Lord forever. This is why the Bible does not feel sorry for celibate people. God designed marriage, but he did not design everyone for marriage. Scripture is clear on that.

Why does God not feel sorry for unmarried people, who live without sexual intimacy? Because if they follow Christ, they will be a part of the real thing, the real wedding, the real marriage, the real and ultimate intimacy. We have no idea how good it will be to be married to the Lord. Human sexuality now, at its best, is a small fuzzy picture of that fulfillment.

That's the big picture of these two chapters, now we will look at some of the details.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. (21:4) *They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God, ⁴ and 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

God himself will be with them, and be their God, and He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There are broken hearts that do not get healed in this life, there are sorrows and disappointments that do not get healed in this life, there is pain, and crying, and there is death.

This line tells us that many of us will end this life without those being resolved. We are not healed, the sorrows and fears are not over. Many are, wonderfully, I my own stories about that.

But not all. God knows this very well. Don't believe the preachers and the songs that tell you God will heal everything if we trust and pray the right way. But God will have the last word. He is not yet finished with your sorrow and pain.

God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. It sound like God goes to every single person and comforts them about everything that caused crying or pain.

Who is included? (21:6b-8) Revelation takes a few lines to tell us again who is included in the holy city, the bride of the Lamb. Three kinds of people each get something from God.

One, *to the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.* This is a picture of us first coming to God. We got thirsty for something, we came to God, and he gave us the water of life, eternal life.

Two, *those who overcome will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.* This is a call to endurance. The Jesus himself said, the one who endures to the end will be saved. Being a follower of the Lord is not easy. We are regularly under attack from all kinds of things. Overcoming means we stay faithful to the Lord. Those who overcome inherit God.

Three, the rest of people. *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their portion will be the*

fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. Life is serious business, people. It is crucial that we come to God for eternal life, and that we stay faithful to Christ in this world.

Twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:12-14). The city wall has twelve gates managed by twelve angels and the gates the twelve names of the tribes of Israel. The wall has twelve foundations with twelve names on them which are the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Remember, the holy city is the bride, the people of God. This means that the holy city is made up of both faithful Israel and faithful church. All God's faithful people, OT and NT, are one people, one city, one bride. This city fulfills OT promises to Israel as well as NT promises to the church.

This explains why Revelation likes two twelves. How many royal elders around the throne? 24, which represent both faithful Israel and faithful church, 12 tribes and 12 apostles. 144,000 marked on their foreheads by God, 12x12. The walls of the city, (12:17) are 144,000 cubits high.

Three gates each in east, north, south, west (21:13). In Numbers 2, the 12 tribes of Israel camped around the tabernacle like this, 12 tribes on each side. But did each tribe have their own gate into the Holy of Holies? Not a chance. There was one gate, and that only for the priests.

But now each tribe gets their own gate, and it never closes. Now remember, people, there are not actual gates. This is a picture to teach us that everyone will have complete free access to God at all times.

The city is a cube, like the Holy of Holies. 1 Kgs 6:20 *The inner sanctuary [of the temple Solomon made] was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar [with pure gold].*

Rev 21:16 *The holy city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.*

The entire city is the Holy of Holies, where God dwelled in all his power and glory. There is no part of the city that is not Holy of Holies. And remember, we are not talking about a city at all, we are talking about a great gathering of people. We, the bride, the church, will be the new Holy of Holies. We his people and bride will be his throne and his temple. His dream home and ours.

There's no temple in the holy city (21:22) because God himself and the Lamb are the temple.

Gold is metal of God's Presence *The city is made of pure gold, as pure as glass* (21:18). *The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass* (21:21).

Solomon overlaid the Holy of Holies with pure gold, as Moses before him had made all the tabernacle furniture out of pure gold. Christians get excited about walking on streets of gold, because it means we'll all finally be RICH!!

We will be rich, I suppose, but the meaning of the gold is not wealth, but presence of God. The city is made out of gold because it is the Most Holy Place, the inner dwelling of God.

Remember, the holy city is the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Christ's bride is the church, the whole gathering of God's faithful people. That's the bride. So the holy city is not an actual city, just as the bride is not an actual woman.

We are the city, we together are the great dwelling of God, we are the walls and gates, we are the city made of pure gold, we are the streets of gold. We are God's dream home, and God is our dream home. He will wipe every tear from our eyes, and we will see his face.

There's more in Revelation, but not in me right now; this is enough. Amen.

Ps 100

O Lord, we shout for joy to you.

We worship you, Lord, with gladness;
we come before you with joyful songs.

We know that you, Lord, are God.

It is you who made us, and we are yours;
we are your people, the sheep of your pasture.

We enter your gates with thanksgiving
and your courts with praise;

We give thanks to you and praise your name.

For you, Lord, are good, and your love endures forever;
your faithfulness continues through all generations.

Added later: In the discussion after the sermon, I realized I should have made something clearer. What I did make clear was that the new Jerusalem is not a literal physical city, but rather symbolically describes God's people living in intimate closeness with God.

What I did not say, but should have, was that we will certainly all have a physical presence on a physical new earth. We will have material resurrected bodies, patterned after our Lord's. We will be in some enjoyable material environment, apparently on the new earth not in the new heaven.

But, that literal, physical environment does not matter in John's Revelation. What matters in Revelation is that we will be in the intimate presence of God, as shown us in pictures of the bride and the holy city.