

The Heavenly Jerusalem, part 2

Revelation 21:21-27

In this second message about the celestial city, we learn more about this wonderful place. It is commonly referred to as “heaven.” And we ought to raise the questions that we raised in the first part of this message:

What will Heaven be like? Why would you want to go there? What is it about Heaven that stirs the heart and imagination of every true believer? Revelation chapter 21 gives us specific answers about this glorious, heavenly city. It is called “Jerusalem” meaning “city of peace.” And this name, which includes the word *shalom* indicates more than just a lack of hostility. *Shalom* indicates a wholeness or completeness in a full-orbed perfection. This vision in the Revelation of Jesus Christ is about the New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1). And the highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God’s people will dwell in His presence forever.

This amazing dwelling place is yet future for us. But Hebrews chapter 12 does give us a little glimmer of what it is like to be in heaven at this very moment. *“But you are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant...”* (Hebrews 12:22-24)

This is a beautiful vision: more angels than a man could number, in the presence of God the Judge of all. And there is Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. And among them are men and women who have been made perfect by the transforming favor of God. And for our purposes today, it is especially important to notice about these citizens of heaven: *“their names are written in heaven.”* But before we consider these citizens of heaven, let us first reflect on the beauty and glory of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

The Beauty of the Heavenly Jerusalem, 21

“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” (v. 21)

When you hear someone refer to heaven as “the pearly gates,” they are referring to verse 21. Sometimes heaven is also referred to by the description “the streets of gold.” Today men place high value on gold. But in heaven, gold will be so common that it’s like concrete or asphalt. About the closest you will come to that anywhere else in the Scriptures is a note found in 1 Kings. About the reign of Solomon, 1 Kings 10:27 notes, “And the king made silver *to be* in Jerusalem as stones...” What a beautiful place that will be. But remember, the highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God’s people will dwell in His presence forever. This becomes even more clear in verse 22.

The Glory of the Heavenly Jerusalem, 22-26

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.” (v.22-26)

There will be no temple in the Celestial City. This is because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. In the New Testament, believers are described as being “in Christ.” In the Holy City of the New Jerusalem there is no need of a temple because God is the temple. God the Father and Immanuel, they will be the temple in which we dwell. Including the words “and the Lamb” show us how important it is for us to have a Savior and an Intercessor. We can illustrate this using a story from the life of Moses.

When the rebellious children of Israel worshiped the golden calf they had made, God made a startling statement to Moses. **“And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff necked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation”** (Exodus 32:9-10). What should you do when God says “Let me alone?” God told Moses to stand aside so that He could pour out His wrath on those stubborn people. And on top of that, the Lord told Moses that He would make Moses’ family a great nation! How would you respond? Moses passed the test for an intercessor. He would not leave the Lord alone. But Moses made a remarkable appeal to the Lord: **“Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written”** (Exodus 32:32).

Moses expressed the fervent wish that God would forgive – even if it meant that Moses must be accursed. In other words, Moses was willing to forfeit heaven if it meant that his people could be received into heaven. (Paul expressed the same sentiment in Romans 9:3.) But Jesus Christ was actually cursed for us as our Substitute! As Paul wrote, **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree:”** (Galatians 3:13).

Much greater than Moses, Jesus was cursed for our sins as our Substitute on the cross of Calvary. He died and rose again to prove that He could conquer our curse. Understanding this explains what it means that we will be together in the Almighty and the Lamb. Jesus is our Intercessor. He refused to stand by and allow us to be destroyed. He is our Savior. We will dwell in Him for all eternity because He was willing to be cursed for us. The Revelation of Jesus Christ highlights our glorious union with Him for all eternity.

This is part of the glory – the unique excellence – of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Just think what it will be like to dwell in God. **“God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him”** (1 John 4:16).

The glory of God will illuminate this celestial city, and the Lamb will be the light of it. Think of it. Think of what it will be like to dwell in that city illuminated by God Himself. We could make an acronym using the word “light” to illustrate what this glory will be like. L.I.G.H.T. – “Living In Godliness, Holiness and Truth.” Surely this is what it will be like to dwell in the light. Redeemed humanity, the nations of the earth, will bring their glory into the city to glorify their Creator and Redeemer. And the highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God’s people will dwell in His presence forever.

Notice what is absent from the Heavenly Jerusalem. There will be no temple. There will be no artificial lights. But one final note warns us about what else will be absent. We have seen the beauty and glory of the Heavenly City. Now consider its citizens: who will be there and who will not be there?

“And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (v. 27)

The Citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem, 27

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Who will not be there?

When Solomon consecrated the first temple in Jerusalem, the Lord’s glory was overwhelming:

“And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy *place*, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.” (1 Kings 8:10-11)

Not even the priests could remain within that temple. But all believers will dwell in God in the Heavenly Jerusalem. But wickedness will be excluded: Anyone or anything that defiles will be banned from the Holy City. This is especially important to remember in a society that seems to have gone mad in its abominations. What used to be the creepy fetishes characterized as abnormal are now the chosen entertainment for children. If you and I love people who are caught up in perversion and cross-dressing, we must proclaim this truth to them: **““And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination...”** And there will be nothing that is false. Those who make or contrive lies will not be in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Who will be there?

Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be there.

A book of life was the registry of the citizenry of a city. One author wrote, “Legally, a Roman citizen was to register any legitimate child within 30 days of birth. The father received a copy of the declaration as proof of citizenship. Theologically, this concept of being registered in a heavenly book is found in both the Old and New Testaments (Exod 32:32; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; and numerous times in Revelation).¹

Is your name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life? If you can answer, “Yes!” then your highest joy in the Heavenly Jerusalem will be that God is there and you will dwell in His presence forever.

On one occasion, when seventy followers of Jesus returned from a preaching trip, they were rejoicing. They reported that even the demons were submissive to them through the name of Jesus! But Jesus reminded them, **“Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven”** (Luke 10:20). Yes, it would be a remarkable experience to find that the powers of darkness are submissive to you. But the greater joy for every believer is that he or she has the confidence to know: my name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. The highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God’s people will dwell in His presence forever.

This glorious vision is magnetic for every believer. Why not embrace Christ as Savior? You can revel in the beauty and glory of the Heavenly Jerusalem as a citizen whose name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

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¹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 592.

