

The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

“The Invitation”

Revelation 21.9 - 22.21

7.18.21

21.9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. ¹² It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. ¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷ And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. ¹⁸ The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; ²⁰ the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; ²⁶ and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; ²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

⁷ *"And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."*

⁸ *I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹ But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."*

¹⁰ *And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ "Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy."*

¹² *"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. ¹³ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." ¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.*

¹⁶ *"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."*

¹⁷ *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*

¹⁸ *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

²⁰ *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

²¹ ***The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.***

I want to thank the congregation for praying for us in the course of this study in The Apocalypse. I really did feel the prayers and... the 100-foot wave that is Revelation turned out to be what God promised: an exhilarating ride and a blessing. Thank you.

You may want to know if I learned anything and I did. I think we should pay closer attention to the Seven Churches to whom this letter was originally addressed because it was primarily for their benefit – they needed to see the view from Above.

Secondly, the book is the unveiling of Jesus Christ and NOT so much the end times. This is the main benefit this book bestows – the vindication of Jesus.

Last, this book is almost the key to the Bible. It's like all the big truths and symbols and signs and themes from the whole Bible come together HERE at the hub.

Revelation is the New Genesis... the New Exodus ...the New Joshua...the target/landing-place of the Prophets... It's "The Gospel of John Part Two"...the Book of Acts viewed from above... And now we have reached the end of Revelation and of the Bible.

Today, we get the final unveiling and a symbolic glimpse of how it all ends and begins – the New Jerusalem comes down from above. It's a vision that's meant to inspire, in Christians, an astounding sense of composure as we walk through a sometimes-treacherous world – this is meant to engender joy.

Let's look at: 1) THEN 2) NOW 3) HOW (a vision of THEN [future], how it inspires us to live NOW [present], and finally the wherewithal for doing so – the HOW)

There's a stark contrast between the two women – the Harlot Babylon and the Bride (Wife of the Lamb).

The Harlot is gone and "here comes the Bride". She comes down from above as Paul wrote, "But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother." (Gal 4.26) This New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God is the Temple where God dwells and YET She dwells in Him (like a wheel in a wheel).

She's a Bride, she's a City, she's the Church made up of believers in Jesus Christ from all different labels and traditions and denominations. There are believers from Egypt and Viet Nam and Bangladesh all made ready and adorned by God to dwell at the center of the New Creation – new earth and heavens.

Let's look at how the Church will be THEN; what WON'T and what WILL be there.

What won't be there is pain, sadness, sin. There will be, in the Bride, the City, the Church of the New Creation – there will be nothing to spoil life and spoil relationships – no scavenger snarling wolves/hyenas, no sorcerers or cults or immorality leading to grief and broken hearts and shame... Murder, idolatry and lying will all be done away...banished forever.

There will be no Temple. No need for sun and moon; no darkness (a symbol of evil and ignorance and lies).

There will be no curse (weeds and thorns and sweaty frustration and endless annoyance are gone). All disappointment, all unsatisfied thirst, hunger and unmet desire will be gone. There will be no potholes (up North they have some serious potholes!)

But the really wonderful part is what WILL be present in the glorified Church of the New Creation. Eugene Peterson (Reversed Thunder) reduced it to three qualities. Let me expand on his categories: symmetry, light and fertility.

The Bride, the City, the Church is a cube – there’s perfect symmetry. Just like the Holy of Holies at the center of the Temple (1 Kings 6.20) was a 30-foot cube, so the Living Temple that’s the Church is also a cube. The glorified church is a 1,500-MILE cube – enormous.

But the symmetry is a symbol – the entire Church will BE the Holy of Holies, God’s dwelling. The whole Church IS the Holy of Holies and God lives IN the Church...and yet God is the Temple (like a wheel in a wheel in a wheel [Ezekiel 10]). It represents not only God’s immediate presence where the Bride sees the Face of the Groom in unbroken intimacy but it symbolizes harmony and balance and permanence and the way it’s supposed to be. Everyone there BELONGS.

God’s name is on their foreheads (22.4). Where there’s prophecy, tongues, knowledge, they pass away but love never fails. It’s the Kingdom of LOVE.

It’s that constant longing of the Hebrew Prophets called “shalom” where everything IS the way it was always meant to be; safe, secure 72-yard-thick walls! A City with foundations whose architect and builder are God. (Heb 11.10)

Second, LIGHT. We talk about things “coming to light” and in some way that could be the theme of Revelation – unveiling, coming to light, made visible. In the perfected Church, God is the light. Every person sees things in the Light of God from God’s perspective, which is always truth, beauty and goodness. King David wrote (Ps 36.9): “In Your light we see light” i.e. “Your perspective, Lord, is the way things really are.”

And the completed Church is suffused with light, with true perspective. Everyone sees things as they really are. The light refracts through all these precious stones like the stones on the breastplate of the Hebrew priests representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel that are near the heart of the priest and near the Heart of God. Heaven will be very colorful. (Maybe it’s a symbol for all races/colors of humanity?)

God’s light refracts off all these multicolored gems so that everything is bathed in color and beauty. The nations bring their own cultural treasures INTO the Church so that the best that every nation and culture has to offer is received and sanctified and included.

And where there’s light, there’s freedom – the truth will set you free. The gates of pearl are only open – it’s a truly free society – “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8.32)

And finally, fertility will be one over-riding facet of the completed Church. The water of life and the tree of life remind us of the Tree from Eden and the Rivers that ran through the original garden. But now the Garden is become a City – a Garden City. The tree of life is bursting with fruit and constantly watered by the Life of God flowing from His Throne.

The members of the Church serve God and reign with Him but without the annoyances and toils of work under the curse. Work becomes only a source of pleasure and fulfillment. The old wounds are healed by the leaves of the tree. Nations that just seemed to be ever and only bogged down in corruption and violence and poverty and ignorance will be healed and become what God intends.

It's all significant and important. Joy is the serious business of heaven. And it's all so overwhelmingly true, good and beautiful that John AGAIN gets affected by what he sees... he falls down and worships the angel for a second time and gets a sharp correction: "don't worship me worship God!" (22.8-9)

Now, what were the early Christians supposed to DO with this final vision? What was it to inspire in them?

Well, what we've been saying from the start is the word – COMPOSURE. And it does seem to have had that effect on the early Christians. Some of them went to the arena, to face the lions but THEY remained: serene, in a self-controlled state of mind; calmness; tranquility.

It's been the testimony of believers in Jesus Christ for 2,000 years. To be properly fixated on the world to come does not make believers weird or hyper-spiritual or unconcerned about the present world and the here-and-now. In fact, it was the believers in the early centuries of the Christian Church – people with THIS vision before their eyes – who cared for abandoned babies and the elderly and the diseased.

The Roman Empire got very worried and confused: we don't understand how these people keep winning the hearts of all Romans. They have no buildings, no priests, no money or power but they are genuinely concerned for one another and even for those OUTSIDE their tribe. They're composed and they serve and they live in HOPE.

They live in worship. This is how we fight our battles. Worship is war... They persisted in believing and they looked for the Holy Spirit to make them HOLY.

They lived with lust for life...knowing that an infinite stream of Life-Water and Life-Fruit and Healing Leaves would soon be opened to them. Therefore, they wanted to show life and healing and satisfaction and forgiveness to their pre-Christian neighbors and to the whole society right up to the rulers and authorities who were so skeptical and hateful toward them. They lived longing for the New Creation and the New Jerusalem with its open gates.

They invited their neighbors to worship – “don’t seal up the words of this prophecy – testify! (22.10)” They did. Their hearts resonated/harmonized with the “inviting Spirit”: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’” (They invited and people came). That’s what Revelation is meant to produce in those who hear it and study it and take it to heart. It begets courage in those who believe. It turns them into overcomers even though they’re not naturally overcomers.

Remember that repeated refrain from the Seven Letter at the start of the book? “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God... He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death... He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God... He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne...” (Rev 2.7, 2.11, 3.12, 3.21)

Well the way these weak and sinful people... people like you and me...the way they overcame and pressed on and triumphed eventually over the Roman Empire, the courage came from the Bottom Line.

I mean THĒ bottom line of this passage and as it turns out thē bottom line and FINAL WORDS of the entire book and of the entire Bible: “The Grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen.”

When you’re able to see and continue seeing... when the eyes of your heart are made receptive to the idea that the Church overcomes only by grace, that we are forgiven by the doing and dying of Jesus and by His OVERCOMING the Final Enemy, i.e. Death... when you see yourself as a hypocrite and a rebel and YET that YOU HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY GOD as a member of His family, an intimate, a friend of God, a CHILD of God – with a place at the Table and a new name that doesn't depend on YOUR performance or the car you drive or the success you've achieved but only by “The grace of the Lord Jesus.”

When you see that “ALL” need this grace and without it, NO ONE will overcome and have victory over the Dragon and over Babylon and over your own self... When YOU see that the New Jerusalem isn’t built from the ground up by our best efforts and sweat and will-power...“It comes down out of heaven from God having the glory of God!” When you put your hope there again and again...then the New You begins to emerge... the YOU (it’s the real you!) that’s fit for the New Creation and is more than a conqueror: “in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” (Rom 8.37)

Grace is the Bottom Line – grace received by trust and humility – a constant recognition that this water is without cost (22.17) but it’s only given to those who repent and believe, repent and believe...

“The Spirit and Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say “Come” and the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” (22.17) Grace is the Bottom Line.