

This morning we will hear the word of the Lord from Revelation 21:9-14. This section begins a more detailed description of the end-time city of Jerusalem. There is much that is interesting and edifying in that more detailed description.

The first verse of this section is parallel to the first verse of chapter 17. Let me read them in sequence. Revelation 17:1 says, "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....'" Revelation 21:1, "Then came one of the 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.'" This corresponds to one of the great themes of the book of Revelation and of the whole Bible; the purposes of God for the renewal of his creation involve both his judgment upon the wicked and his salvation of his people. The Bible will not let us to forget that if we pay attention to it. Life is serious business. There is future glory for those who believe in Jesus and follow him. There is future suffering for those who refuse Jesus and reject his salvation.

But we have made our way through most of the judgment passages of the book of Revelation and so we now get to spend some time thinking of the glories that await us as a people who have been rescued from our sins and placed into God's kingdom through God's gracious and merciful salvation that he has accomplished in Jesus and applied to us through the Holy Spirit.

The text here makes the same move that we saw when we looked at verse 2 of chapter 21. John speaks of a bride as a city. In our text for today the angel says he is going to show John "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" and he shows him a city. Verse 10, "And he carried me away in the Spirit to great high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God...." He is talking about the glorified people of God and he refers to them both as a bride and as a city. The last time he spoke about the people of God as a bride and as a city his focus was on their holiness. This time the focus is on her glory and that will be our focus as well this morning.

In the verses that follow the idea of the bride fades away and the idea of the city comes to the fore. First he describes the holy city, Jerusalem as glorious. Verse 11, "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." We will come back to this verse. But first we will quickly look at the next few verses. Verses 12-14, "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."

We must remember that the city is a symbol for the people of God. So, the text is telling us something about the people of God using the symbolism of walls and gates and foundations. The most important point of these verses is that the people of God, who are being described using the symbol of the holy city of Jerusalem, are made up of the OT people of God and the NT people of God. The names of the twelve tribes of the sons of

Israel refers to the saved people of OT Israel. The names of the twelve apostles of the lamb stand for the NT Church. That is the point of the references of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. The holy Jerusalem is made up of the saved people from both the OT period and the NT period – OT Israel and the NT Church.

The fact that the city has a great high wall is making the point that the people of God are secure in their fellowship with God. This imagery comes from Isaiah 26:1-2 which looks at this same reality from the perspective of OT prophecy, “In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks...” During the whole existence of the people of God in this age, sin brings danger and judgment among the people of God. In the OT, the people experienced God’s judgment by means of pagan nations defeating them and ultimately destroying Jerusalem and the temple. In the NT the sin of God’s people has devastating consequences in the church and there are those who fall away. There is a sense in which God’s true people are secure in that God promises to preserve his own. But there is also a sense in which all who profess to follow Christ are in constant danger because we are engaged in spiritual warfare and some professing Christians are defeated in that spiritual warfare and fall away from the Lord.

The great high wall of the holy city of Jerusalem of the final state symbolizes that the saints who make up that city are finally secure in their relationship with God. They will never be tempted to sin ever again. Those who make up that city will never fall away from the Lord. The victory that Jesus has won for them means that there will never again be opposition to God and that there will never again be a tempter disguised as a snake to tempt the people of God to rebel against God.

The twelve gates with the twelve angels refer to the fact that the righteous may enter in. The 12 gates make the point that the righteous may freely enter in. It is based on Isaiah 26:2 which says “Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.” This gets at the fact that God’s welcomes sinners into the holy Jerusalem through the salvation that he has provided in Christ. This does not mean that there is any chance of salvation after the final judgment, but just that God is wonderfully free with the gospel of salvation in Christ. The same idea is expressed by Jesus when he says in Luke 13:29, “And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.”

The many gates are about welcome to all who have believed in Jesus from every corner of the world. They are about the great welcome to all who are righteous in Christ. Revelation 21:27 says that “nothing unclean will ever enter it” but at the same time there are gates everywhere for those who have been made new in Christ. The many gates facing all directions reflect the welcome of God to all his people from every corner of the world to enter in the holy city which is the holy people among whom God dwells. The angels at each of the gates keep the unrighteous out, but they let the righteous in.

So that is the general picture. John is giving us some details about the holy city Jerusalem that he saw “coming down from heaven from God.” What we will do in the rest of this sermon is reflect on the fact that the city is glorious with the glory of God. Verse 11 describes the city as “having the glory of God, its radiance like a most

rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” To understand more fully the significance of this, it is necessary to consider the significance of the glory of God and also the significance of the fact that God shares his glory with his people. The fact that the holy city Jerusalem shines with the glory of God corresponds to the biblical teaching that in the final state, the people of God will be glorified. We are going to explore the significance of that.

We begin with the idea of God’s glory. The word “glory” is often used to describe God. The concept of glory in the Bible is rooted in the idea of weightiness or heaviness and building upon that it becomes honor and majesty and splendor. When it comes to God’s glory those ideas are multiplied in intensity so that God is so glorious that human beings cannot see him and live. One theological dictionary describes that aspect of God’s glory as “the unapproachable and mighty manifestation of the immediate presence of God.” The same dictionary goes on to say, “The biblical concept of glory carries with it connotations of inexpressible beauty and majesty.” (Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Terms.)

The story in Exodus in which Moses asks God to show him his glory is important for our understanding of this concept in Scripture. This is after Israel sinned by worshipping the golden calf. In the aftermath of that sin, as Moses was pleading with God not to destroy the people, he asked God “Please show me your glory.” In response to that request God said, “I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you the name of THE LORD. (Exodus 33:19) This is where God tells Moses that no man can see his face and live and that while his glory passes by God will put Moses in a cleft of the rock and allow him only to see his back.”

It is very significant that when the Lord does pass by Moses to show him his glory, he declares his glory in words. Exodus 34:6, “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.’”

The glory of God then has to do with his weightiness – that is his great significance. It has to do with him being worthy of being worship and honored. It has to do with his beauty and splendor so that it is associated with bright light. It has to do with his goodness and all the different ways that goodness is expressed. It has to do with the fact that God is the perfect embodiment of all that is good and admirable and right and beautiful. Every attribute is the highest possible expression of that attribute – he is almighty in power – he is infinite in his knowledge – he is the highest expression of love. God is perfect in every way. He is the standard of all goodness. He is the source of all goodness. To get insight into any of his characteristics is to be awed by what we see.

And the purpose of creation is to display that glory. In Psalm 19:1 we read, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” In Isaiah 43:7 God speaks about his people and of them he says, “whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” Psalm 96 calls all people: “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!”

Now this concern of God to display his glory and to be worshipped for his glory sounds self-centered and to some extent it is, but it is also at the same time profound generosity. Since God is the perfection of all perfections, it is an expression of love and generosity to reveal himself to others so that they can enjoy his glory - knowing and worshiping and serving him. This is what we are created to do – to glorify God by worshipping him and serving him and enjoying fellowship with him. Glorifying God honors God, but it also is at the heart of all joy and satisfaction and fullness of life.

So, God is glorious. He is infinitely and perfectly good. He is perfectly just. He is gracious and merciful and loving. He is absolutely praiseworthy and there is nothing about him that is dark or disappointing. 1 John 1:5 says, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

And Jesus shares that glory. John 1:14 says “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Hebrews 1:3 says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” So, God is glorious and being glorified is his purpose.

Now the reason that we are spending this time reviewing the meaning of the glory of God is that our text describes the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God as “having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” So, the saints in the new creation reflect the glory of God. They are glorious with the glory of God.

That is interesting in the light of the fact that God has said that he does not share his glory. In Isaiah 42:8, God says, “I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.” What God means here is that he will tolerate no situation where something or someone else is glorified beside him. God does not tolerate the worship of idols because when idols are worshipped, they receive worship that rightly belongs to God.

But God does share his glory with human beings in a very specific way and the result of that is that God’s glory is displayed. When the saints of God reflect God’s glory the goal is that God’s glory is displayed through them and that God is honored and glorified because of his glory made visible in the lives of his people.

And this belongs to the very heart of what it means to be human and what humans are for. The most important thing about us as human beings is that we are made in the image of God. The idea of humans made in the image of God has many implications, but one of the most obvious is that images reflect an original. That is what images are for – to reflect what they are images of. An image is an image of something else and the significance of an image is the thing that it is reflecting. As human beings, made in God’s image, our purpose is to reflect the glory of God and in that way display the glory of God so that God will be admired and worshipped as he is reflected in our characters and in our lives.

God's purpose from the very beginning was to fill the earth with images that reflected his glory. The task that God gave to Adam and Eve at the very beginning was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The people who were to fill the earth were made in the image of God so that God's purpose was to fill the earth with people made in his image who reflected his glory. That is one of the ways that God would fill the earth with his glory.

Then sin entered the world and human beings no longer reflected God's glory as they had before the fall. But God's plan was still to fill the earth with his image bearers who were being renewed in his image. One of the ways of understanding the meaning of what Jesus and the Holy Spirit accomplish in our salvation is that believers are being renewed in the image of God. And to the degree that we are renewed to that degree we are reflecting the glory of God. And the goal of that renewal in us is called glorification.

Romans 8:29-30 express these ideas. Verse 29 there is that "those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...." Verse 30 says that those who are predestined are also called, also justified and also glorified."

So, we read in Habakkuk 2:14, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." This prophecy will be fulfilled when the earth is filled with image-bearers reflecting the glory of God. God's goal from the very beginning was to fill the earth with his glory by filling it with people made in his image who reflected his glory in their persons and in their lives. This is the purpose of the great commission. And the ultimate fulfillment of that is expressed in our text where the holy city of Jerusalem is described as "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."

In the new heaven and the new earth, the earth will be filled with the glory of God in that it will be filled with people made in God's image who reflect that image perfectly in their lives. This is the ultimate fulfillment of God's original intention to have his image bearers fill the earth and, in that way, fill the earth with his glory.

So this gets at the heart of what it means to be a human being. It gets at the heart of what human beings are for. We were created in the image of God to fulfill a certain purpose. There are many aspects to this. There are many fruitful ways to think about the significance of the fact that human beings are made in the image of God. But this is one of them. And it is a very significant part of our purpose – we are made in the image of God so that we reflect his glory in our characters and in our lives and that goal is ultimately realized in salvation as we are conformed to the image of Christ.

One of the joys of the new creation is that we will do that perfectly. We will be all that we have been created and renewed to be. We will radiate the glory of God by our attitudes, by our priorities, by loving God with all our hearts, by delighting to worship him and serve him and serve other people. In our dealings with others, we will reflect God's justice and his wisdom and his kindness and his patience. We will reflect his truth and his

creativity and his goodness and his generosity. We will be glorified, but we will find our joy in giving glory to God.

This is intimately related to loving God with all our hearts. If we love God with all our hearts, we think highly of him, we admire him, we delight in his character and in his ways and in his accomplishments. And that will make us want to be like him. There is something in us that desires to imitate those whom we admire. We see this in an unhealthy way when young people emulate movie stars or music idols. We see it in a healthy way when we follow the example of those who attract us by their godly attitudes and way of life. We are designed to follow the example of those we admire. And the most important example of that is seeking to be like God in the way we think and in the way we act and in the way we speak.

This is how we are designed to find joy and fulfillment and purpose. This is a goal worthy of great effort and focus. We are drawn towards it by the vision of what it will be like in perfection. We will know fullness of joy when we perfectly reflect the glory of God in the new creation.

And that, of course, begins here. If we can't see the glory of God now and want to reflect that glory in our lives, we wouldn't enjoy the new creation even if we could get there. This idea in our text that the holy city Jerusalem will reflect the glory of God is telling us that one of the joys of the new creation is that the people of God altogether will fulfill God's purpose in making us in his image. We will fulfill the purpose for our existence in reflecting God's glory in our characters and in our motivations and in our attitudes and in our actions. That will be very enjoyable. That will be very satisfying. It will be a big part of experiencing life as it is meant to be experienced.

But the process begins in this life. Salvation is about being renewed in the image of God – conformed to the image of Christ. God begins the process towards glorification the moment we believe in Jesus and the process of renewal begins. This belongs to the wonder of the salvation that Jesus has accomplished for us and is accomplishing in us. This is something to be excited about and enthusiastic about. We are gradually being made more and more like God so that we can more and more fulfill our purpose in life by reflecting his glory in our lives. This is part of the way that God is glorified. And what happens in this life is the beginning of what will be in perfection when the holy city Jerusalem comes down from heaven "having the glory of God."

One of the ways that this happens is through us dwelling upon and thinking about the glory of Jesus. Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where he writes, "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

There is something about beholding the glory of the Lord which is transforming. It has to do with being attracted to what we see when we behold the glory of the Lord. There is a very profound biblical principle that we become like what we worship. That happens in a bad way when we worship idols and in a good way when

we worship Jesus. And it happens in a final way when we will see Jesus when he appears. 1 John 3:2, says, “we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

So, we know what we have to do to experience to a greater degree now already, what we will know in perfection in the new creation. Think about Jesus. Consider his beauty and his glory. Nurture your attraction to him and that, the Bible says, is transforming. By beholding the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another until the time of his appearing when “we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.” May we increasingly then experience the joy and fulfillment of reflecting the glory of God in the here and now as we look forward to doing that in perfection when we are part of the holy city Jerusalem which will have the glory of God.