

This morning we will hear the word of God to us from Revelation 21:15-27. This passage continues to describe the new Jerusalem. The description of the new Jerusalem takes up most of chapter 21. There is a lot detail. And that is a good thing because we want to know as much as we can about what it will be like for us in glorious future that God has in store for us. A few weeks ago we noted John Calvin's advice that meditating on the future life is a good way of increasing our longing to be there and that is what we are trying to do by taking our time in these last few chapters of the Bible.

I remind you that the new Jerusalem is a symbol for the people of God in the final state. The Bible uses many different symbols to teach us things about the people of God and the one we are looking at now is the symbol of a city. The glorified people of God in the age to come are compared to a city – the holy city Jerusalem. It is compared to the city where God dwells. The fulfillment of God's great plan of salvation is God dwelling in the midst of his people and the people of God are described here as a city.

The first thing that we will look at this morning is John's description of the measurements of the city. "Verse 15 says "And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls." This whole idea of measuring the city is rooted in the prophecy of Ezekiel where there are quite a few chapters describing the measuring of the new Jerusalem by way of prophecy. This is the fulfillment of that. God wants us to know the dimensions of the new Jerusalem of the state of glory.

The city is a very large cube. Again, don't worry about the incongruity between the idea of a city and the idea of a cube. It does not matter. Verses 16-17, "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal." There are two things to notice here. First the city is a cube. That is an allusion to the most holy place in the OT tabernacle and temple. In 1 Kings 6:20, which describes the building of the OT temple by king Solomon, we read, "The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high."

This was the place in the OT temple where God was most intensively present. The temple was all about God dwelling in the midst of his people. What set Israel apart from all the other peoples of the earth was that God had chosen her to be his people and the greatest blessing that went along with that was that God dwelt among his people first in the tabernacle and later on in the temple. The temple was all about God dwelling in the midst of his people. Fullness of life in the Bible has to do with our relationship with God and God dwelling with and among his people is at the heart of fullness of life. That is why in the final state the people of God are the temple because the glory of the final state is God dwelling in the midst of his people.

But the OT temple severely limited access to God. The Most Holy place – the room where God was most intensively present was inaccessible to most people most of the time. The only one who could enter it was the high priest and he could only enter it once a year and in order to do so he had to bring the blood of a sacrificial animal and sprinkle it before the Lord and he was warned that if he did not bring blood he would die. The OT temple was both about the presence of God with his people, but it was also about the great tension of the

holy God dwelling among a sinful people. The priest, representing the people, could only come into the presence of God once a year and he had to bring the blood of a sacrifice. So, God was with his people, but there was also the maintenance of distance because of the sin of the people.

Jesus' death on the cross took away that distance for all who would believe on him. When Jesus died, the curtain that made up one of the walls of the most holy place was torn in two from top to bottom. Hebrews 10:19-20 explains this for us when it says, "Therefore brothers ... we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh."

So, the Most holy place in the temple was a cube and Jesus' blood opened the way for us into the very presence of God. And that is the significance of the fact that the holy city of Jerusalem is described as a cube. The whole city is now the most holy place. The whole city is now the dwelling place of God. And the whole city is a symbol for the people of God. The most holy place, the dwelling place of God is the people of God. So that's the first point that the measurements of the city makes. The city is a cube. The cube stands for the most holy place in the temple. And in the new Jerusalem the most holy place is the whole people of God. There is no more separation. The sins of the people have been atoned once for all. There is no more separation between God and his people. And the people of God always have access to God. They dwell in the presence of God. They live in the most holy place.

The second thing to notice about the dimensions of the city is that the city as the most holy place is very very big. The length, width and height are each 12000 stadia. The note in the ESV tells us that 12000 stadia is about 1380 miles. Most of the commentaries put it at about 1500 miles so I will go with that. The difference does not matter. This is a very very big city-cube. 1500 miles long. 1500 miles wide and 1500 miles high. This is a symbol for the whole world. The ancients had no conception of how big the whole world really is. This was about as big as they could imagine and so it is a symbol for the whole world.

The point is that the holy city which represents the people of God with God dwelling with them will fill the whole earth. The most holy place, which in OT times was a cube measuring about 30 ft in each direction, in the final state, will be the whole world. The whole world will be God's most holy place. And God and his people will dwell together there.

Verse 17 mentions a wall. "He also measured its wall – 144 cubits by human measurement which is also an angels measurement." So, the wall is about 216 ft high. That is not very high compared to 1500 miles, but as we have seen before we are not to worry about how the various symbols fit together. The point is that it is a very big wall. And the wall is about security. In the ancient world walls around cities were for security and so that is what this wall symbolizes. It is a way of saying that the new Jerusalem will be a perfectly safe place. Ezekiel makes this point in OT language when he writes in Ezekiel 34:28, "They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid."

The last part of verse 17 is puzzling. Verse 17 says, “He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement which is also an angel’s measurement.” It was angel who was doing the measuring in this passage. The point of referring to human measurement and angel’s measurement appears to be that the human measurements have a heavenly meaning. The measurements were the kind of measurements that were used in construction in John’s time. But these human measurements in this passage have a meaning that goes beyond this life and so the human measurements are also angels measurements. Greg Beale explains this in his commentary. “[T]his vision of ‘human measurement’ is to be understood more deeply according to its symbolic, heavenly, or ‘angelic’ meaning. This reminds the readers that if their comprehension of his vision is limited only to a surface level (the physically literal meaning), they will misunderstand it.”

In the next few verses, verses 18-21, we learn that the city is built and adorned with pure gold and many precious stones. <sup>18</sup>The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup>The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup>the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup>And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."

This passage has inspired hymns describing heaven as having streets of gold and jewels everywhere, but again we are to think in terms of symbols rather than literal fulfillment. This passage is not intended to give us a mental picture of what the new Jerusalem will look like rather it is intended to teach us what it will be like using symbols. The gold and precious stones are symbols that point to beauty and value and glory – especially the glory of God. The point is made in a summary way in the verse that we focused on last week, Revelation 21:11 which described the holy city, new Jerusalem as “having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.”

So, verses 18-21 describe the holy city Jerusalem as being built from and adorned with gold and precious jewels. “The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. ... the twelve gates were twelve pearls ... and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.” This is beyond anything ever built on earth. It is beyond anything ever seen on earth. This massive wall built of jasper. Gold so pure that it is transparent. Pearls so huge that they can be used as gates. The point here is that the glory of this city is more glorious than anything has ever been on earth.

And the glory is the glory of God reflected in his redeemed people. Let’s think about that for a moment. We’ll try to understand what the symbols of gold and precious stones tell us about the glory of God. William Barclay in his commentary says that “Gates of pearl are a symbol of unimaginable beauty and unassessable riches.”

We can use those terms to refer to the significance of the gold and jewels of the whole description of the new Jerusalem as it reflects the glory of God – unimaginable beauty and unassessable riches.

God is beautiful. The glory of God is beautiful. The reason there is beauty in the world is to give us a sense of God's beauty. The reason there are gold and jewels in the world is to give us a sense of God's beauty. And one of the blessings of the final state will be seeing and reflecting the beauty of God. Isaiah 28:5 says, "In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people." Isaiah 33:17 says, "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty..." Psalm 27:4 says, "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple." Psalm 96:6, "Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary."

God is beautiful in his glory. The gold and jewels of the new Jerusalem are a symbol of that glory as reflected in his people. It's interesting to think about this because God is a spirit and so his beauty is not a physical beauty. God is invisible. Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God." Jesus reflects the beauty of God, but that beauty was not a physical beauty. It was the beauty of his character and the beauty of all of his attributes such as power and knowledge and wisdom and love. And yet the Bible does say that the pure in heart are blessed because they will see God. We will gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. We will see the king in his beauty. Certainly, we will see Jesus. We will have "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery has helpful definition of beauty. "Beauty is first of all an aesthetic quality that names what we find attractive, satisfying and excellent in an object or person." It goes on to say that "the positive qualities of artistic beauty provide a language for identifying the perfection of God and the pleasure that a believer finds in that perfection."

This provides us with some helpful language to think about how God is beautiful. God is attractive, satisfying, and excellent. Believers find pleasure in his perfection. We can think of the power and wisdom of God in the creation. We can think of his love and mercy in salvation. We can think of his justice both in salvation and judgment. We can think of his control of all things in his providence. And we can think of these things in specific instances in the Bible and in history and in our lives. God is the ultimately attractive one. It is delightful and ultimately satisfying to contemplate his beauty in the context of a loving relationship. God is beautiful not as an object to be admired, but as a person who loves us and delights in us – whom we love and in whom we delight.

So, the fact that the holy city Jerusalem is described as built and adorned with gold and jewels points to the beauty of the glory of God, but since the holy city Jerusalem is a symbol of the people of God, the gold and jewels here refer to the fact that we will reflect the beautiful glory of God. God is beautiful in his glory, and the people of God will also be beautiful as the new Jerusalem as they reflect the glory of God.

Already now we see the beauty of God reflected in his people. But it is not yet perfect. It is only a beginning of what it will be. Peter uses the language of beauty to refer to people when he says to wives “let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in in God’s sight is very precious.” (1 Peter 3:4) This is the kind of beauty that the gold and jewels that make up the new Jerusalem represents. The people who make up the new Jerusalem will be beautiful people because they will reflect the beauty of God.

Part of the glory of being part of the new Jerusalem will be that we will be living with beautiful people – that is people who perfectly reflect the glory of God – people with beautiful characters – people who will be loving and pure and God-exalting and even physically glorious. Remember what Paul tells us in Philippians 2:21, Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body....”

Even in our fallen state human beings are awesome creations of God. When we are redeemed, God is working in us to make us more like his glorious self as our characters are renewed. And much of the joy in this life is related to being a human being and enjoying other human beings. Just think of how much joy and satisfaction we experience in being creative and productive and thoughtful and pleasing God. Just think of how much joy and satisfaction in life comes from enjoying other people – appreciating them – admiring them – being with them – interacting with them. We ourselves will be jewels that make up the new Jerusalem and we will be surrounded by jewels – people who are beautiful, reflecting the glory of God – people who are precious and who together make up a city make up of jewels and gold. The gold and the jewels of the new Jerusalem are symbols for the glory and the beauty of the people of God who reflect the glory and beauty of God himself.

Verse 22 tells us that there will be no temple in the city. “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” We have seen earlier that the whole city is the fulfillment of the most holy place in temple – the place where God dwelt. Here are told that the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb is the temple. The point is that the glory of God and the Lamb fill the whole city. There is no more a special place where God is present in a special way. The temple was always about God dwelling among his people and meeting with them. In the new Jerusalem God and his people are always together. God’s glory and presence fills the whole city so that God’s people are always in the presence of God. So, to say that the people of God are the temple or to say that God is the temple is to say the same thing. William Hendriksen writes, “The radiance of God’s majesty and glory, in all its fullness, fills the entire city.... No sanctuary is needed, for the fellowship of believers with their God is direct and immediate. God tabernacles with his people; they are constantly in his immediate and loving and abiding presence.”

And remember what Psalm 16:11 says, “[I]n your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Verse 23 tells us how the city is lighted. “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” Light and darkness are important symbols in the Bible. Light is

good. Darkness is evil. Light is associated with God's glory – his holiness – with blessing – with life. The glory of God which is so wonderful and delightful will fill the holy city. There will be no dark places. There will be no shadows. There will be no evil. All will truly be sweetness and light because the glory of God will fill the city.

Verse 24, "By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations."

This is the fulfillment of many OT prophecies concerning the nations. God had promised Abraham that in him would "all the families of the earth be blessed." Isaiah had prophesied, that "in the latter days ... the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains ... and all the nations shall flow to it." (Isaiah 2:2-4) This begins to be fulfilled in the NT when the gospel goes out to the gentiles and many are converted and brought to Christ. Our text in Revelation 21 speaks of the ultimate fulfillment of the OT prophecies that the nations shall come to the Lord and bring him glory and honor.

These verses are interesting in that they suggest that our national identities will still matter in the new Jerusalem and that the best of godly culture will be brought into the new Jerusalem. Richard Philipps writes, "The statement that the nations 'will bring their glory into it' suggests a continuity between our present lives and the eternal glory to come. Christians will bring all kinds of our godly culture into the new Jerusalem." This makes sense when you think about it. The biblical story begins with a garden and ends with a city. A city presupposes culture. There is the fact that we will be there with our minds and our memories. The new creation, as we have seen, is a renewed creation, not a starting over from scratch. What has been accomplished in fulfilling the cultural mandate will in some cleansed form be part of the new creation.

These verses suggest that national identities will in some way make it into the new creation and that the achievements of human culture will in some way make it into the new creation. It makes sense that our cultural activities, our skills and accomplishments developed for the glory of God – they matter to God and in some way, will be brought into the new Jerusalem for the glory of God.

But nothing sinful. Verse 27, "But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Well, these things are in the Bible for us to think about – to dream about. There is not a lot of detail about the new Jerusalem and the new creation in the Bible, but there is enough to give us hope and to encourage us as we deal with the struggles and difficulties of this earthly life. The presence of God will be the heart of its blessedness, but God will be enjoyed and glorified in a way that is analogous to the way he is enjoyed and glorified in the here and now. We will worship him through gathering for worship in some way, but we will also worship and serve him through the rest of life whatever that will be like. And a huge part of the joy of

salvation in the here and now is living in the hope that what we know in part know we will know in its fullness in the hereafter.