

Press on to your heavenly home

Revelation 21:10-14, 22, 23

¹⁰ He carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and he showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It has the glory of God. Its radiance is similar to a very precious stone, like crystal-clear jasper. ¹² It has a large, high wall. It has twelve gates. Twelve angels are at the gates, and twelve names are engraved on the gates, the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. ¹³ Three gates are on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. ¹⁴ The city's wall also has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the Lamb's twelve apostles. ²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God has given it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

In our Gospel reading we hear Jesus promise that while we wait to dwell with him in glory, he will dwell within us and give us peace. John is given a vision of a place where we will enjoy perfect peace and glory forever. Last week we covered a portion of the vision in which John saw a new heaven and a new earth. This vision would bring comfort to anyone suffering in life. It brings peace knowing you will exist in God's continual presence. Today the vision continues with John getting a better look at the New Jerusalem. It's where there's safe access for all believers. It's where true worship is found of the One who provides light. This Scripture urges all of us to press on to your heavenly home.

In this portion of the vision an angel is assigned to take John to get a better view. John writes, *"He carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and he showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."* This isn't the first time we heard how John was in spirit, in a spiritual state to receive special visions. This time John is taken to a great and high mountain to view the holy city. Just as Moses had seen the whole promised land from the top of Mount Nebo, so John from the top of this mountain was able to see the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. The Jews referred to Jerusalem as "the holy city" because the temple was there. The temple was where God and his people communed in spiritual worship. How appropriate that this place where a perfect, endless communion with God and his people exists is called the Holy City. God's people enter there through the death and resurrection of Christ. God made that clear to his Old Testament people through the endless sacrifices that were made at the temple. They all pointed to the Lamb that God himself would provide to be sacrificed once on a cross to take away the sins of the world. After a brief stay in a tomb, he left it empty conquering death for himself and for everyone.

With a mountain top view, John could see the New Jerusalem is a special place. John mentions, *"It has the glory of God. Its radiance is similar to a very precious stone, like crystal-clear jasper."* In the Old Testament the glory of the Lord was the bright light by which God showed his presence to his people in the wilderness and at other times. This

glorious radiance is precious for all who enter the city. The city has high walls so its inhabitants can feel safe. It has gates on every side so believers from every corner of the globe may enter. Angels are assigned to each gate to ensure safe access by every believer. With protective walls and angels God's people can safely enjoy his presence.

In heaven God's will be completely free from all threats. That's comforting for us who live on this side of eternity. We see threats all around us in this world. Threats come to our health, to our safety in life. Threats may come from co-workers, from neighbors, possibly even from a relative or a friend. But the worst threats that come to us involve our spiritual life. Though defeated by Christ on the cross, the devil still controls our world flinging flaming arrows temptations. We face material gain in life. That may threaten to replace the heavenly treasures that are ours in Christ. We desire to be popular or successful in life. It may threaten the goals we have for eternal life. It's things that we see in life that get us to question and doubt the unseen promises of our Lord. We can't wait to get to heaven to be free from all of this world's threats. In the New Jerusalem we will experience forever the perfect answer to our fervent prayer: "Deliver us from evil." Within the protective walls of that city, we'll find a comfort in the protection of God's holy angels. All of God's people will be in the glorious presence of our Savior forever.

We may not be able to fully picture all the descriptions of the city. Maybe that's why the verses chosen for this text do not cover the whole vision. The city is described as having twelve foundations. John tells us the foundations represent the twelve apostles. We already heard that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on the gates. That show us that any who enter are God's spiritual Israel. They are members of his church. Paul told the Ephesians that they were "*fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*" (2:19, 20). The inspired Word of God through which the apostles proclaimed the saving truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, establishes the foundations of his church. That church is so secure in Christ that even the gates of hell cannot overcome it. The gospel of Christ is a saving gospel because it proclaims that the Lamb of God has been slain to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). With sin forgiven through the atoning death of Christ, the devil's threat is silenced. Hell's power has been vanquished.

The unquestioned beauty of that blessed place should create in all of us a longing to see what that world is really like. One of our hymns expresses it well: "*I know not, oh, I know not What joys await us there, What radiancy of glory, What bliss beyond compare*" (CW93 214:1). Having described the appearance of the New Jerusalem with its walls and foundation, John calls attention to the city itself.

John had expected to see a temple in the Holy City. The temple had been at the very heart of Old Testament Israel. It was the center of its worship life. It's where the saving

grace of God was dispensed and where believers approached God with sacrifice and thanksgiving. But then John sees in the New Jerusalem something far better than a structure for worship. There is no need for a temple. The very presence of God is there. God's people have a direct, personal, intimate spiritual communion with their God. The members of the church are in the presence of the Lord Almighty, that all-powerful, gracious God. They are in the presence of the Lamb who was slain for sin. In God's presence all believers enjoy the unending thrill of everlasting worship. It may seem strange that God and the Lamb are called a temple. The omnipresence of God assures us that when God dwells with his people in the New Jerusalem, he will dwell with them everywhere. His special, intimate presence turns the whole place into a temple. God's visible presence will make the whole city a place for worship.

What we on earth receive occasionally through Word and Sacrament, we will enjoy constantly in heaven in God's presence. We will bask in God's grace. His grace is illustrated by light. No sun or moon are needed there. The glory of God will be a constant light for God's people. The Creator's presence illuminates the dwelling place of the glorified church. The glory of God also radiates from Christ. He is the Lamb who is described here as a lamp. At the Mount of Transfiguration, our Lord's face shone with the brightness of the sun. He will shine that way for God's people through all eternity.

This light is a source for life. As sunlight gives life to plants, Christ gives life to his Church. Jesus is the "sun of righteousness" who has risen to offer healing light to all. Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). The light that shines from the glorified Christ makes our dwelling a magnificently beautiful place and bestows on his believers everlasting life.

How important that we remember why we have a place in the New Jerusalem. It's not something we deserve or earned. Just like our first parent fell into sin and were cast out of the garden never to eat from Tree of Life and live in sin forever. God equipped angels with the flaming sword to keep them out. What makes us so certain that the angels guarding the gates to the Holy City will allow us to enter. Well, we look only to the Lamb who was slain. He covered all our sins with his precious blood. He finished his work of saving us and proved it by rising from the tomb. He's the reason we have access to the New Jerusalem. Our citizenship is in heaven, as Paul told the Philippians, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. With glorious bodies free from sin we'll enter the New Jerusalem. We'll safely dwell there in God's presence. We'll be illuminated by his glory. We'll worshipping him always. Keep pressing on. How glorious it will be!