

Revelation - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Behold the Bridegroom, Eternal State, The (21:1-8)

Revelation 20; Revelation 21:1-8

For the last two Lord's Day evenings, we have been looking at the testimony of Scripture, as to the nature, and character, of the thousand years, of which the 20th chapter of Revelation speaks particularly. I need not, therefore, detain you with many remarks about it, because, what is before us this evening, is that which is subsequent to the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. That He will reign for a thousand years, has been conclusively proved from the Word of God, and here in the scripture before us (verse 4), we find three distinct companies, that lived, and reigned, with Christ, for one thousand years. "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection" (vs. 5). The first resurrection, which includes Christ, and all that are His, is pre-millennial. It is marked off, by its own peculiarities, from the moment when "the rest of the dead" again live. This solemn event is not here called the second resurrection, because the separate taking out of the wicked, from their graves, for judgment, and the lake of fire, the Spirit of God would not, in this connection, call, by that blessed word, resurrection. He calls it the second death. "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of the Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (vss. 5, 6).

We have been looking at this blessed period, as given in Scripture, and we have seen the earth renewed, and blessed, under the sway of Jesus, and heaven, joining with earth, in owning, and praising Him. And now the Spirit of God carries us to the time, subsequent to this blessed millennial reign. "When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison" (vs. 7). The thought in the minds of many is, that if the millennium came in, then, of course, everything would be fixed, and settled forever. But not so. There is a period, fixed and limited, during which the blessed Son of Man, will have His mediatorial reign over the earth, but it comes to a close, for a reason which I shall show you presently, and now when it is ended, the first thing we find is this, that Satan is loosed out of his prison.

I understand, from this chapter, perfectly well, why the book of Revelation is so little read. I think I see clearly, why, even Christians, so little give themselves, to the study of this wonderful book. They often say, Oh, it is very difficult, and so full of figurative language, that we cannot comprehend its meaning. But that is not the reason. Do you think the devil likes that you, and I, should ponder, carefully, a book, that speaks, first of all, of himself and his angels, being cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:9), and then of his being cast, solitary, into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3), and then, finally, hurled into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10)? Do you think the devil likes, that you and I should be occupied with his threefold fall, till, at length, he finds himself the most miserable wretch in creation, for such, indeed, he will be, as, in eternity, he reviews the sorrow he has wrought through pride, terminating in endless shame? Nay, nay, you would not put into the hands of a man, a book that told of your downfall. You would put it at the back of the fire if you could. But there is yet another reason. This is the book that brings out the final issues of all things, and the book, that shows, what is to be the end of the pathway of that lowly, self-humbled, blessed One, whom the world refused. This book shows His final exaltation, and glory, His reign over a Satan-delivered earth, for a thousand years, and then His dealing finally, and definitively, with the great adversary of man. Little wonder that Satan has persuaded Christians, that the book of Revelation, is a book that had better not be opened. It is remarkable, however, that in the first chapter, as well as in the last (Rev. 1:3; 22:6-7,10,18-19), God speaks of the blessing connected with reading, and keeping the sayings, of this book, so I fervently commend it to your attention, henceforth.

We now see, then, that Satan is "loosed a little season" (vss. 3-7). He at once resumes his old tactics, the practice of which, for six thousand years, has rendered him an adept, and, for the last time, he goes out to "deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." The reign of Jesus has been marked by peace, plenty, and prosperity, and all, outwardly, have owned the Lord, but not every heart really, for we saw, on a previous occasion, in Psalm 18:44 and Psalm 66:3 that "the sons of the stranger shall lie."

While the manifest glory of Christ is irradiating the earth, they are quiet. So long as Satan — the prime mover of all evil — is off the scene, men are apparently not prompted to disobey, but, at this point, it would seem, that the Lord retires from the earth, veils His glory again, for a moment, and Satan is let loose. And what does he find? Alas Gog and Magog, ready to his hand, and he will "gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea."

These hosts must not be confounded with the Gog and Magog, of Ezekiel 38 and 39, the old historic enemy of Israel — the Assyrian. They appear, and fall before the millennium, whereas, what is given us here, is post-millennial. Those pre-millennial hordes came only from Russia, and contiguous Eastern countries, but here, they come from "the four quarters of the earth." Satan brings from east, west, north, and south, against Palestine, all that are opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. He easily manages again to "deceive the nations." It is his old business. He was a deceiver from the beginning, and he carries his character right on to the close (vss. 3,8,10). This is the last trial of man, a needed trial, because the natural heart had not been tested, where all spoke of Christ; and present blessing — long life on the earth — was the part of those, who owned a visible, glorious Christ. To have been unfaithful to Him then, meant to be cut off (Isa. 65:20). There was nothing to tempt them. But, alas, not even having seen Christ, basked in the sunshine of His glory, and enjoyed the fruits thereof, can secure the heart of man — mere, natural man. He is not to be depended on, and falls as soon as tempted. God they could not finally enjoy in that state, as proved by the ready way they fall into Satan's hands, It is the final effort of man, led on by Satan, to get rid of God from His own earth. This concludes man's history in responsibility. His last act is rebellion, even as his first (Gen. 3:11).

“And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city” (vs. 9). The saints spoken of here are clearly the millennial saints, those who had been on earth, in the enjoyment of the love of the Saviour, through that thousand years. Attacked by the enemy, they are, apparently, left to be surrounded by their foe. They are tested, not only by seduction, but by violence — Satan’s two great weapons with man. Had the Lord appeared visibly, Gog and Magog would, doubtless, not have come up, but the thoroughness of the trial, proves the faithfulness of the saints, who refuse Satan’s seductions. The attack of the foe is once more upon the land, from which the eye of the Lord has never been withdrawn. Against that land the enemy goes up, determined, if possible, once more to sweep away the testimony to God, and His Son. Jehovah has been universally worshipped, and owned, and Jerusalem, “the beloved city,” has been the very metropolis of the new earth, according to Isaiah 65:17-18. The enemy comes up against the metropolis, and we read, “Fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” The last open revolt of man upon earth, in time, is judged, by God, in the most solemn way possible. Fire from heaven devours them. What an excessively solemn thing!

Nothing, even on the new earth, but being converted to God will do for man. Not even a thousand years of displayed glory, prosperity, peace, and blessedness, under the reign of Jesus, will touch his heart, and, at the end of the thousand years, if the Lord retire, and Satan reappear, what material does the enemy find, of which to compose his hosts? It is only too true, that find, or put man, where you will, unless he be the subject of absolute grace, there is nothing in his heart but downright opposition to God. Affecting thought, opposition to God! Yes, my friends, opposition to God. If you are not a converted man, you are opposed to God. Till God, in His grace, converted me, over thirty years ago, I was opposed to Him. If you had then told me that plain, solemn, truth, in an unvarnished style, I have no doubt I should have been angry, but the truth would have been the same. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7), and, “The friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). One sees here the end of it all, that unless grace has really touched the heart, what it is, in its hidden springs, is sure to be made apparent, as in this final, and unsurpassingly solemn, exhibition of enmity against God.

But the patience of God is exhausted, and fire — always the figure, in Scripture, of God’s judgment — comes down from heaven, and destroys Gog, and Magog. Thus they perish, but for their leader, untouched by this divine judgment, is reserved a worse fate, for “the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and of brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever” (vs. 10). Thus God describes the final disposal, and overthrow, of His, and man’s adversary. I know that pretty flights of fancy, about Satan’s rule in hell, have been indulged in, and we have heard the phrase, “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven,” but do you think he really reigns in hell? I believe, that if there be one being, more miserable than another, in the lake of fire, for all eternity, Satan is that one. Therefore I say to you, most affectionately, do not, as you value your being, as you value eternity, as you value your immortal, precious soul, be his companion. There is only one way in which you can ensure not being his companion — it is by being the companion of Christ. If you are going to be the companion of Christ, in eternal glory, you must know the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in your earthly pathway. Whether you are a converted person yet I do not know. If you never have been, let me beseech you to turn to the Lord now. Bow to the Saviour now, because the day is coming, when you must bow to that blessed One. Here God describes the end of the one, who has deceived man from first to last — he is “tormented day and night forever.” The fate of his companions is no better. Do not then, I beseech you, be his companion.

Now the Spirit of God carries us beyond the limits of time. Every earthly enemy of God has been judged. The last foe, in that sense, has been dealt with by the hand of the Lord, and we come to a moment of unspeakable solemnity. “I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them” (vs. 11). Observe, the heaven, and the earth, fly from the face of Him, that sits on the throne, and I may ask, Who is it that sits there? Scripture leaves us in no doubt as to that point. It is clearly the Lord Jesus Christ. The One, who fills that throne, is without doubt the Son of Man. Have you any doubt about the point? Let us hear what Scripture says. In John 5 you will find to whom is committed the judgment. “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (vs. 22). Again: “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment” (vss. 26-29).

Nothing can be plainer than, that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is going to be the judge. All judgment is committed to the Son. Nay more, He is given authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Why, because He is the Son of Man? Because He has come into the scene where man is a sinner, under judgment, and He, who has come into this scene — the blessed Son of God — became man, a man on whom death had no claim, absolutely, and perfectly holy. He it is, that, by-and-by, is to be the judge. And another reason, too. Man took occasion, so to speak, by the humiliation of the Lord Jesus — for He emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant — to put Him yet lower. They cast Him out, and preferred a robber, and a murderer to the Saviour. And what is God’s answer to this? “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly, and earthly, and infernal beings, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:9-11). As man, He is worthy to receive, and shall receive, what He can claim as God, in Isaiah 45:23. All judgment is committed unto the Son, but He has to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Some one may, however, say, Shall we not all be called out, by-and-by, together, to stand before the Lord? No, the Word of God is very plain, and in this 5th chapter of John, we find that the character of the resurrection is different. There is the “resurrection unto life,” and the “resurrection unto judgment” — the resurrection unto blessing, and the resurrection unto sorrow. We have already seen, this evening, that there is an interval of a thousand years, between these two resurrections. The first resurrection — and blessed and holy is he that hath part in it — is before the thousand years, but “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”

In Acts 17 we also see that the Lord Jesus is distinctly marked out, as the One who will be the judge, inasmuch as God “hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance to all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead” (vs. 31). Another scripture states: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:1). He judges the quick — the living — before the millennium, and the dead, at the end thereof. Mark, it is the very last act of the kingdom, this solemn work of judging the dead. You have doubtless observed, that in the 5th chapter of John, to which I have alluded, the Lord Jesus speaks of two hours: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (vs. 25). That is the hour of blessing, the hour of grace, and salvation, the hour in which the Son of God is now calling men to come to Himself. That hour began with Jesus’ life ministry, and goes on up

to this moment. It is the hour in which men are getting saved; but that hour is coming to a close, for He adds immediately: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming" (not now, is) "in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment" (vss. 28-29). The first hour has lasted for nearly two thousand years, but I am persuaded the moment is drawing near, when, to use a figure, the hour-glass is going to be turned. The hour of grace, and life-giving, is rapidly drawing to a close, and the next thing is, the setting in of the hour of judgment, Oh, my friend, get ready, believe on the Lord Jesus, get to know the Lord, be decided for Him, for, if you are not one of those, who have part in the first resurrection, then you must have your part, in that which comes out here, at this great white throne.

Jesus sits upon that throne. He, who is now the Saviour, must then be the Judge. God has put all authority into His hand, once pierced for our sins, and He there sits, and wields the sword. The throne is called "great" because of the dignity of the One who fills it. It is called "white" because of the absolute purity of the judge. Everything must be according to the unsullied holiness of the nature, of Him who sits upon the throne. Now observe, "I saw a great white throne and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them." People have sometimes spoken of this as the Lord's second coming to the earth. But observe, there is no coming at all here. Why? Because there is no earth to come to. Heaven and earth have fled away, consequently the Lord Jesus must have come to earth, before this epoch, or He can never come at all. Evidently time is no more, and the relation of man to the earth, as it now is, ended. Hence, there is no thought of any coming here. Nay, heaven and earth flee from the face of Him, who sits on that throne, so solemn, so appalling, is the sight.

But, let us see, what takes place at that moment. You may get fuller light by listening to what St Peter has to say. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). God has but one way of purifying this sin-stained earth, and it is by fire. It will be a terrible day, indeed, when "the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." How it will be caused, it is not for me to say, but you all know that we live on the crust of a ball, whose interior consists of molten material, and flame. Whether God will let these mighty forces of nature then come into play, is for Him to decide, but all that Scripture says is this, "the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." So that, on the mightiest monuments of man's skill, and ingenuity, faith sees written in indelible characters, the words, "Reserved unto fire" (2 Peter 3:7). It will be an awful day for the man who is not saved. This thought, therefore, leads the apostle to add: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." This last clause, you observe, is repeated, that there might be no mistake whatever, as to the way in which God will cleanse the earth, and the heavens too. "Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:12-13). What Peter says he looks for, John writes that he saw. "We look for new heavens and a new earth," says Peter; but says John, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth," and you will find all about them in the 21st chapter of Revelation. Peter reveals them disappearing, in flame, and smoke, and John shows them reappearing, in all the beauty of the new creation, for eternity.

Jesus sits, then, on that great white throne, the earth and the heaven flee from His face, and now there comes a moment, unparalleled in its solemnity, in the history of men. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God." It is the closing moment of the second hour of the 5th of John. Is there any resurrection of the blessed here? Clearly not; they have been already raised more than a thousand years, and taken part in the millennial reign. The two resurrections are separated, as to time, by at least one thousand years, but they are separated more than that, by their utterly different character. "They that have done good 'have already come forth' unto the resurrection of life." If the Lord came this evening, every sleeping believer would be so raised. But what about the unbelievers? They are left for this day — left for the "resurrection unto judgment" here, before the great white throne. It is a judgment of persons, not deeds, though they be judged according to their deeds — a judgment only of unbelievers — and though standing before the throne, they are all spoken of as "dead." They have been delivered from the grip of the first death, only to taste the second death, hence, they are still called dead.

"I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne, and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life" (vs. 12). It is an assize; there is no hurry, there is no haste; and I may say more, if you stand there, you will have no advocate then, you will have no barrister to plead your case; further, you will have no plea. These dead — who are they? Those who have lived in sin, died in their sins, been buried in their sins, and now they are raised in their sins. Clearly they are raised in the body, but raised for judgment. But shall not we all be there? No, dear fellow-Christian, you will not be there — not a believer will be there. Nowhere, in Scripture, do we read of a general resurrection, and a general judgment. Not for ten thousand worlds, ten millions times told, would I be, in the class here described, for all are lost. If you are an unconverted sinner, you are in imminent danger of being in that class. Let me affectionately urge you now to step over the boundary line, from the power of Satan to God, and yield your heart to Jesus the Saviour, lest you have to stand before Him, as the Judge, in that day.

"The books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Observe that. Will the Christian's place in heavenly glory be determined by his works? No, God forbid. We get that place, through grace, on the ground of the death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for us, as poor sinners. There is, on the other hand, no doubt that we shall appear before the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10), and our position, in the kingdom of Christ, will differ, according to the character of our earthly service to the Lord, since we have known Him as our Saviour, but that is a different thing altogether. Here they are judged according to their works. The ground of judgment is twofold — positive and negative. Their works witness against them, and their names are not found in the book of life. Ah, is there not a single word to be said in favor of those trembling wretches that stand before the throne? Is there not one word of extenuation in favor of you trembling, guilty, sin-stained company of unbelieving souls, from Cain downwards, that have come forth — yea, been compelled to come from their graves — by the voice of the Son of Man, which they would not pay heed to, when He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Not a syllable! They heeded Him not, in the day of grace, when He called them, to give them life, but they must heed, and obey Him, in the day when He calls them to judgment.

There will be no mistake then, because the books will show the truth. I do not know what your name may be. There may be ten thousand men, of the same name as yourself, but when the Lord puts His hand upon the book, it will be your book, and that of nobody else. What you are, what you have done, and not done, what you have been, the whole record of your life, will be there, and what a solemn record for a

sinner, who dies now, in Gospel days, unconverted! Born in a Christian land, early sent to a Sunday school, perhaps “joined the Church” so called, but really loved the world, thought only of the world, put off repentance, and conversion, till a day that never came, never came to Christ, and at length, cut down, by some sudden judgment, at the hand of God, died, as you had lived, in your sins. As the book is opened, and the pages slowly turned over, on which is the record of your life, oh what an awful moment, for you, will it be, and if your blanched lips part, it will be but to confess — True, true. God have mercy on you, my friend, where you sit tonight, if you are still unsaved. By the blessings of the heavenly Gospel now pressed on you, and the certainty of coming judgment, I implore you not to miss God’s salvation, while it is offered now. Do not let this scene, of which Scripture speaks so solemnly, ever be enacted in your case. Why should it be? I beseech you, come to the Saviour as you are, in your sins, all shall be forgiven, and you will be among those — holy and blessed — that have part in the first resurrection. Come to the Saviour now, all shall be pardoned, and you may henceforth go on your way, a happy believer, serving the Lord, and, in the day of glory, be the recipient of a full reward at the hand of the blessed Lord.

But not so is it here. “The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it.” The sea, which has engulfed so many, and been the cause of the sorrow of such countless thousands, the sea must give up the dead in it.

You may say, They have passed beyond the reach, and the ken of men. Quite true! How many a body has been brought to shore that nobody could identify, and how many have never been cast up. But God will be able to identify every one at that time, and the sea will cast him up, for God’s identification, at the great white throne.

“And death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Now what does God mean by that remarkable expression, “Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire”? Death held the body, Hades being the condition of the disembodied spirit; but then, as the wicked are brought to life again, Hades is no more inhabited in that sense, and Death no longer holds the body. They are no longer needed. They are here personified, as the enemies of God, and man, and are thus cast into the lake of fire. Oh! pitiful doom of every unsaved soul, taken out of the first death, which sundered him from his fellows, to meet, and taste “the second death” — eternal separation from God. We come here to the point where death is annulled. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” That is fulfilled by the raising of the wicked dead.

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (vs. 15). This is a touching allusion to the wonderful grace of God, because the fact is, that if grace has not written our names in the Lamb’s book of life, we shall find ourselves along with the number judged according to their works. Nothing but sovereign grace will do for you, or for me. Another has well stated it thus

“Sovereign grace alone has saved according to the purpose of God. There was a book of life. Whosoever was not written there was cast into the lake of fire. But it was the finally closing, and separating scene for the whole race of men, and this world. And though they were judged every man according to his works, yet sovereign grace only had delivered any; and whosoever was not found in grace’s book was cast into the lake of fire. The sea gave up the dead in it; death and Hades the dead in them. And death and Hades were put an end to, forever, by the divine judgment. The heaven and earth passed away, but they were to be renewed; but death and Hades never. There was for them only divine destruction and judgment. They are looked at as the power of Satan. He has the power of death, and the gates of Hades; and hence they are forever destroyed judicially. They will never have power again. They are personified; but of course there is no question of tormenting them, or of punishing them; when the devil himself is cast in, there is. But death was not then destroyed; for the wicked dead had not been raised for judgment. Now they had, and the last enemy is destroyed. The force of the image, I doubt not, is that all the dead now judged (the whole contents of Hades, in whom the power of death had been), were cast into the lake of fire, so that death and Hades, which had no existence but in their state, were entirely and judicially ended, by their being cast in. The saints had long since passed out of them, but they subsisted in the wicked. Now these were, consequent on the judgment of the white throne, cast into the lake of fire — the second death. The limit and measure of escape was the book of life.”

The Spirit of God now opens up eternity — the end of all God’s dealings with men. The final destiny of all unsaved souls, has come before us — they are apportioned the lake of fire. I know many may say to me, I do not believe that. Beloved friends, I do believe it, for when God says, “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire,” He means what He says. God never tells lies, although men may. When He speaks, He speaks solemnly, and truly. But turn now and see how beautiful is that which follows, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). A few verses before, John saw them fleeing away from the face of the Lord, now he sees them coming out, in all the radiance, and blessedness of this ever new, because eternal, condition of matters — “a new heaven and a new earth.” Here you have them, just as the Christian will appear, by-and-by, in a real body — the resurrection body. What sort of body I do not know, but I know my body will undergo a wonderful change, for it will be “a spiritual body.” In the same way, I take it, God carries the heaven, and the earth, through that scene of fire, and they come out “new” — in a new character — altogether suited to, and fitted for God, with every trace of the serpent’s trail, and man’s sin, removed from them. They come out “a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

Now, righteousness suffers, in the millennial day it reigns, but in the eternal day it dwells happily, it is quite at home. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea.” This is not what Isaiah alludes to (Isa. 65:17). His new heavens, and new earth, are only new, in a moral sense, as suiting the millennium, and the sea also exists, for he speaks of “the isles afar off,” but here, every bit of the new earth is seen, brought into relationship with every other part, for “there was no more sea.” This would be impossible, as things now are, for man’s life. Of course, there must then be a wonderful change in the character of our life, because, as things now exist, we could not get on without the sea. It is the great reservoir, from whence comes the moisture, that is necessary for man, and the earth. I do not know what the change will be, but God brings out here, that which is very simple, and plain, and which faith delights to contemplate, “a new heaven, and a new earth, and no more sea.” God, if I might so say, in the new scene, will efface everything, that could bring to memory, the sorrows of man’s heart down here.

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Last Lord’s Day evening we were occupied in looking at this holy city — the Bride — the Church. Then we saw that she was merely descending from heaven, towards earth, but now she comes right down to earth, because the new earth is divinely suited to this heavenly city. Look how she comes out? In the 19th chapter we saw the marriage of the Lamb, to His Bride, on the nuptial day, preparatory to the millennial reign. But

now John sees her coming down, out of heaven, at the end of the thousand years. And how does she look? I have seen a good many brides in my day, and I have met them a few years after, and what furrows are on the brow, what cares evident on the countenance, and how soon gray hairs have appeared. A very few years will do it, in this scene down here.

But what does John see? He sees, coming down from heaven, her, who has been the Lamb's wife, for one thousand years, and she looks as bright, and as beautiful, and as fresh, as the day she went up. Not a gray hair, not a wrinkle, can be seen; her condition is what I may call perennial joy. No change can ever be, thank God. The Christian is going to fixed happiness, and unchangeable blessedness with Christ. This is all told out in the lovely words, "coming down... as a bride adorned for her husband." "And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The moment has come when God takes up His place, upon this earth, in happy relationship with men — not paying them a visit, as He did to Adam, in the garden of Eden, but tabernacling with them, and the tabernacle is the Church, the assembly, the body of Christ, those who are, through grace, now united to the blessed Lord.

Observe, it is not now a question of nations — of Jews and Gentiles — distinctions which had to do with time, and are now all gone by. It is God dwelling with men, as being their God, and therefore, for that reason, in these first eight verses of Revelation 21, where you have eternity brought in, you have no mention of the Lamb. Jesus as the Lamb does not appear here. His mediatorial kingdom is over. It is all God — God is all in all. The moment, of which 1 Corinthians 15 speaks, has arrived: "Then cometh the end when He gives up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father; when He shall have annulled all rule, and all authority and power. For He must reign until He put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that is annulled is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says that all things are put in subjection, it is evident that it is except Him who put all things in subjection to Him. But when all things shall have been brought into subjection to Him, then the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection to Him who put all things in subjection to Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28 JND).

The blessed Saviour has already reigned, as man, over a renewed earth, and a thousand years have gone by; the righteous are blessed, the wicked are judged, and every foe subdued. And what now? He surrenders His earthly kingdom, and thenceforward is Himself subject. We know, there never was a king in this world, that did not lose his crown, and his kingdom, either by some usurper stepping in, or by death sweeping him off, sooner, or later; but here is a king, who, after a reign of a thousand years, takes the crown from His brow, as man, and gives up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father. He who does this is God, but He has been a man, and while we joyfully remember, that His essential deity ever remains untouched, what we learn is, that Jesus passes into the eternal state as man, and He will never cease to be a man, and you and I, beloved fellow-believers, are going to be with Him forever. God Himself — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — shall tabernacle with men, they, as delighted to have God's company, as He to be with them. Blessed moment, that God has ever looked on to, and that faith looks on to now! Then see what follows. "And He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Oh how familiar you and I are with these terms. I see many dressed, in deepest mourning, as I speak, and you sorrowfully rejoin, Death has come into my house, and robbed me of the one that I loved best. Thank God, there shall be no more death, no more pain. Man's history on earth is all expressed in these four words — death, sorrow, crying, and pain, but then "the former things are passed away."

"And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write; for these words are true and faithful. And He said unto me, It is done, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

Extremely beautiful are the verses that follow, as though God saw, that the description would make the soul, that heard about it, for the first time, desire to be a participator in that blessed scene. He therefore weaves in the Gospel, in the loveliest way possible, as He now says "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." He gives the water of life! Yes, but more than that. I will give of the fountain, I will take you up to the source of it — My own heart. He that overcometh, who is that? The man that turns to Christ, and believes in the Lord, that turns his back, through grace, on all the deception, and guile, through which he is passing, and sets himself to follow the truth. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5.) Will not Satan hinder you? Of course he will. He puts countless obstacles in every man's way, before he gets life, and blessing. But God would cheer, and encourage, and stimulate the believing soul, so He adds, "He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." Blessed promise!

And now we reach the most solemn "But" in all Scripture, as the Spirit of God gives a categorical description of those who, alas, are not blessed. "But the fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (vs. 8).

I should like, as I close, to ask you this — If God sent down, from heaven tonight, an angel, with the commission, to visit Edinburgh, and write on his tablet the names, or the characters of the persons, who most surely, by-and-by, will be in the lake of fire, where would he begin? Do you fancy that that angel's visit would be to the slums of naked sin, or to the scenes of debauchery, that are, alas, too common? Nay, he would not begin his list there. And if he came into this hall, would the man, who is most sure to be in the lake of fire, be a notorious sinner? No! the list of the lost here commences with this — "the fearful," the person who is afraid to confess Christ. Now, there is many a person in this hall tonight, who is not a murderer, an idolater, or a liar — nay, he is a person of a good character, but, up to this hour, never has he boldly confessed Jesus, as his Lord, and Saviour. I call your earnest attention to this, that it is the fearful, the timid, and the cowardly, the person who is afraid to come out for Jesus, whose name is first given in this list of the lost.

If, my friend, you have been a timid person, until this hour, may God, by His grace, drive out your timidity, by the sense of His love. When you have got in your heart the sense that the Lord loves you, then your fear of owning Jesus will all go. I tell you what it is, there is nothing grander, or brighter, or more blessed, under the sun, than to be a Christian, and if you have not been a Christian, up to this hour, you have missed a grand opportunity. But, thank God, you have still time, and I say, now turn to Him, drink of the living water, believe His grace, and then go on your way rejoicing. Then I shall meet you in glory. I shall never meet you in hell, mind that. I shall not be there through grace. I charge you, beloved friends, meet me yonder with Jesus, meet me in the air, when the Saviour comes.

We have only now to wait, and watch for Him. He is coming for us, coming out from heaven, the Bright and Morning Star, who will take us up to be forever with Himself. The Lord keep us waiting, and watching for Him, and serving Him, till He come, for His own precious, and blessed name's sake.

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Behold the Bridegroom, New Jerusalem, The (22:1-5)

Revelation 21:9-27; Revelation 22:1-5

We were looking, last Lord's Day evening, at the earthly side of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. There passed before us the testimony of Scripture as to what the nature, and character of that day would be, with every foe, and every adverse power, subjugated to the Lord Jesus, Satan in the bottomless pit, and "neither adversary nor evil occurrent." We saw that those, under that beneficent reign, will be indeed blessed. We saw that death is to be a rare thing, the curse to be removed, the earth to be fruitful, the earthly Jerusalem to be rebuilt, and reestablished in more than her pristine glory; the temple to be rebuilt, the sacrifices reestablished, and Jerusalem to be the metropolis of a renewed, and absolutely blessed earth. The Jew — now despised, looked down upon, and often treated with contempt — in that day will be "the head, and not the tail" (Deut. 28:13). Jerusalem will be the joy of the earth, and from Zion will come out streams of deepest blessing, and all the earth will rejoice under the sway of Jesus. And where shall we Christians be in that day? I believe the scripture, which I have read this evening, answers that question most distinctly. What I desire to bring before you now, is, what I may call, the heavenly side of the kingdom of the Son of Man, the heavenly side of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus, and to show how the Church — it is a wonderful thing, and an unspeakable favor, to belong to the Church of God, the Body of Christ — will be in distinct relation to the renewed earth. In the scripture which I have just read, God gives us much light and information, of an exceedingly interesting, and very blessed character, upon this point.

Before I touch this subject, bear with me a moment, while I point out that, which I think may help some students of Scripture, in regard to this passage, and its position in the book of Revelation 1 can easily understand a person saying, Are not the subjects of these chapters in Revelation consecutive? I believe they are not. The book is, in a certain sense, a book of drama, and you find, every now and then, the curtain drops, and something entirely new will come before you — a new scene. Commencing with the 19th chapter, we find the marriage of the Lamb — the Bride, the Lamb's wife, gets herself ready, and the marriage takes place. The next thing is this, the Lord Jesus comes out from heaven, as King of kings, and Lord of lords, attended by the armies of heaven, on white horses; the heavenly saints attend their Lord; the Bride is with the Bridegroom, when He comes to deal with the earth. The next thing is, that every foe is put down; the beast, and antichrist are cast alive into the lake of fire, and their armies overwhelmed, and Satan bound, and cast into the bottomless pit. Then (chap. 20) the reign of the Lord is established; the heavenly saints, and two martyred companies, live, and reign, with Christ, a thousand years, and, at the end of that time, Satan is let loose.

Gog and Magog come to his hand, fire comes down from God, their destruction follows, and then the great white throne is set up. Time is over, the judgment is set, and you are carried, in the first few verses of chapter 21, into the eternal state, the description of which closes with the 8th verse of the chapter. We have here, then, a consecutive, descriptive account of events, commencing with the Lord's appearing, and coming to earth, with His people, right on, through the millennial day, to the great white throne; and then into the eternal state; and with the 8th verse of chapter 21 the prophecy of the book of Revelation closes, for you cannot get further than the eternal state. We have the history of God's dealings, with man upon the earth, absolutely closed in chapter 20, and in the first eight verses of chapter 21 we have the relationship of God, to man, in eternity. The eternal state is there most fully, and beautifully described, and the curtain, so to speak, drops. The question before us tonight is, Why does it rise once more?

Why does the Spirit of God commence an altogether new subject in the 9th verse of chapter 21, which is carried on to the close of the 5th verse of chapter 22? Because He would give us, and, in order to do so, turns back again, into time, to give us, details about a certain being — a certain company of people if you like the expression better — who will be in relation to the Lord of the earth, in the millennial day, and who will be in relation to the earth itself, in that day. In the verses read, I have no doubt we get the distinctive relation of the Church — the heavenly people of the Lord, that belong to Jesus now — to the renewed earth in that day. Some one may say, That is a very arbitrary way of dealing with Scripture. No, it is the way of the Spirit of God. You will find in numberless places in Scripture, that God's Spirit will, first of all, give you a little summary, and then turn back again, and give detail. Revelation 21:9-27 through Revelation 22:1-5 is not any exception, because you will find that, in another part of this same book, you have absolutely the same line of descriptive treatment by the Spirit of God, not with regard to the Church — the true Bride of Christ — but with regard to what calls itself the church — the false bride — Babylon, the Mother of Harlots.

Turn back, for proof of this, to the 14th chapter of this book, where the Spirit of God brings out seven distinct points, of, as yet, unfulfilled prophecy. The first thing that John sees is the one hundred and forty-four thousand, the earthly company. That brings us down to the end of verse 5. Then in verse 6, we get a second point, the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. In the 8th verse, we get the third point, "Babylon is fallen." Now Babylon's fall comes here, as the third of the seven, and you will see what follows. Next, we get what will be the judgment of those who worship the beast (vss. 9-12). That is the fourth point. The fifth point is how blessed it will be then to "die in the Lord" (vs. 13). Then (sixth), in verses 14 to 16, Christ comes, with a sharp sickle in His hand, and we have the harvest of the earth-discriminating judgment. Then (vss. 17-20) another angel comes out, and we have (seventh) the vintage described — the unmistakable vengeance of God, upon a guilty, blood-stained earth. Here, then, we see a summary of earthly events, commencing with the manifestation of the Jewish remnant, and closing with the final pre-millennial judgments. Now observe, Babylon was mentioned there in one verse (the 8th), but we do not get Babylon portrayed, and her fall described, till chapters 17 and 18, where you will find her characteristics delineated, viz., idolatry, corruption, worldliness, and persecution, as well as her destruction, given in detail.

The same mode of treatment is found in the part of Scripture before us tonight. We have first a summary of events, and then, for a particular purpose, the Spirit of God turns back, and gives us an immense amount of detail — not about the false bride, but about the true. Babylon is the false church; the new Jerusalem is the real thing. We have only to read these two scenes to see how strong, and doubtless purposed, is the analogy between the two passages. Nay more, if we observe the way, in which John is invited to behold the glory of the new Jerusalem, you will find, it is exactly similar to the way in which he is invited to look at the fall of Babylon. “And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb’s wife” (21:9). Again: “And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore, that sitteth upon many waters” (17:1). Do not suppose that Babylon is a built city, or the New Jerusalem either. Both are figures. They have an immense meaning to the student of Scripture, and “the new Jerusalem” teems with thoughts of the Bride’s glory, and happiness, to any one who understands the meaning of the term. I say this to show, that I am not taking unwarrantable liberties with the Word of God. I rather wish to show how absolutely the Scriptures hang together.

How beautiful that the Spirit of God should turn back then, in this 21st chapter, and show, that in the millennial day of the reign of the Lord Jesus, those who have followed a despised Saviour, those who have known an earth-rejected Saviour, those who have shared in His loss, and shame, and contempt, and scorn, during the long night of His rejection, and absence, will be identified with Him, in His glory. The Spirit of God delights to spend almost a whole chapter, in describing, and unfolding, what will be the beauty to the eye of God, what the joy to the heart of the Lord, and what the displayed glory to the eye of the world, in that day, of those, who have followed Jesus in the time of His rejection, and, hence, share with Him in His glory, and shine with Him, in the day, when the whole earth basks in the sunshine of His blessed favor. In figurative language here, the Spirit of God is bringing out that which had already fallen from the lips of the Saviour Himself, when He was here upon the earth. He shows us the moment of incomparable glory for the Church.

But who is the Church, the Bride? “I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb’s wife.” To see the Bride, I invite you, dear fellow-Christians, to look at yourselves tonight. I do not often do so, it is very rarely that I ask a Christian to look at himself, or herself — I always say, Look at Christ. But God is going to let us look, this evening, at ourselves, not as we are, but as He is going to make us, in Christ, in a day yet to come. Who, then, will compose that Bride? Let me ask you a question. Do you think you are a part of the Bride? I know, through infinite grace, that I am, so also are all sinners saved by grace; sinners of the Gentiles, sinners of the Jews, called by the sovereign grace of God, touched by His blessed Spirit, converted, and brought to know the Saviour, in the night of His absence. I can see before me tonight scores that I know form a part of that Bride. Are you, however, sure that you belong to it? If not, I would most strongly urge you to come to Jesus at once. Come as a sinner, as you are tonight, and you will find, that He will give you a title to glory, that will never fail. Come to the One who died, and rose again. Cast yourself upon the mercy, and grace of that blessed Saviour, and He will not cast you out, because it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). The passage before us shows that we are saved, gloriously, grandly saved. I would not miss it for ten thousand worlds, ten thousand times told. I shall have yet to show you what will be your portion, if you do miss what God now offers, but I say, with all the love, and energy of my soul, Do not miss it. Get washed in the blood of the Lamb, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will find that you are a stone in this city, so to speak. I see a great many of the stones before me tonight. The Lord will have them all beautifully polished by-and-by the same stones that are sitting down here tonight, will form part of this holy city, in that wonderful day. You have only to come to the Saviour, the Living Stone, and believe in Him, and you will find yourself a living stone also (1 Pet. 2:4-5), a member of the Church, the Bride.

By the Church, I mean sinners, brought to know the heavenly Saviour, since the day of Pentecost, born of the Spirit, washed in the blood of the Son of God, indwelt by the Spirit of God, baptized into that “one body,” of which Christ, in glory, is the head. The Church is the body of Christ. He went into death for it. He has made it His own by dying for it, as it says, “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). The Church, then, is composed of poor sinners, washed in the blood of Jesus, and led through grace to believe in Him. Anything down here, that man may call the Church, is neither here, nor there, in this respect. Being baptized, or a communicant, is utterly useless, for what I am speaking of tonight. These ordinances, most valued, and blessed, as they are in their place, never did, nor can, put a soul into Christ. The only real Church is composed of sinners, saved by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you can truly say, I believe in Jesus, I rest upon His blood, then I believe, I shall see you, by-and-by, shining in the very glory of God. You may have many a doubt, though you ought not to, for the Lord leaves no room for such, when He says to every simple believer in Him, “Where I am, there ye shall be also.”

Well, now, this Church, formed by the Holy Spirit, is united to her living Head in glory, and she is to appear, with Christ, in the character which is unfolded here. “Come hither, I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb’s wife.” It is not the first time she is brought before us, for we saw (chap. 19:7) that she got herself ready for the marriage day. In the 2nd and 3rd verses of chapter 21, where she is again seen, the moment is really later on, in the ways of God, than the 9th verse. John is carried away in the Spirit now, to a great and high mountain, and is shown “the holy city, Jerusalem.” The word “great” should be left out. It is not there as God wrote the verse. Babylon is called “that great city,” Babylon, “that mighty city.” Yes, man always wants something “great,” but God does not call His Church great. No, another adjective suits her better — “holy.” Babylon loves greatness, but we read of the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” In the 9th and 10th verses, she is seen descending out of heaven from God. She is descending, but she has not got down to earth, whereas in the 3rd verse you find that she is resting on earth, for “the tabernacle of God is with men.” In eternity it will be God and men together, and the tabernacle of God, which is the Church, is with men. By His Spirit, God has tabernacled in the Church from the day of Pentecost, but the world has not believed it. In the millennial day God will compel the world to believe, that He has been dwelling in the bosom of the Church, all through the long dark night of the absence of Jesus; and, further, He will make the world in that day to rejoice in the light of His glory. But in verses 10 and 11, she is only descending — it is, in fact, the position which the Church holds in the millennium. She is between heaven and earth, over the earth, clearly connected with Christ, but linked to the earth. What the character or extent of the communication between the heavenly Jerusalem, and the earthly may be, I do not know. Scripture is silent, and therefore we must not speak. This much we know, that we shall judge, both angels, and the world. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? ... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:2-3). What, then, do the angels do? They will be uncommonly happy to be the doorkeepers of this holy city, because “unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come” (Heb. 2:5) — the future habitable earth. It is Man who is going to reign over the new earth, Man, in the person of Jesus, and His Bride in association with Him.

When the lowly Nazarene reigns over the earth, and blesses it, those who belong to Him in the day of His rejection, will reign with Him, in the moment of His glory. In the 10th verse, the city is not again called the New Jerusalem, because there is no necessity. She is the new Jerusalem, that is her nature and character, and there is no need to emphasize that again. She comes down from heaven. Her origin is divine, her nature, her character, is heavenly — “out of heaven from God.” One is reminded of the scripture, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.... We shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:48-49). Do you not know that the Christian is a heavenly being? Yes, he belongs to heaven, he is taken out of the earth. The world says now, of a devoted, unworldly, Christ-loving, and Christ-serving saint, What a fool that man is! but it will alter its judgment, in the day, when it sees the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, the holy city “descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.”

Turn to the 17th chapter of John for a moment, to which this scripture necessarily carries one’s mind. The Son is there unbosoming Himself to the Father, and we find Him saying in the 10th verse, “Neither pray I for these alone.” He was not only praying for the apostles, but He was likewise praying for us — for all them that believe. There may be a very great difference between the members of the family of God, but there is one feature, which marks the whole family of God — that is identical — they all believe. The Lord says therefore, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” Blessed Lord! He was thinking of you and me, and He unfolds what belongs to us. “That they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.” If the Church had been one, the world might have believed, but now it thinks it has very good ground for its unbelief because Christians are not one, but split into endless sects. But listen, he goes on — “And the glory which thou gavest Me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one: and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me” (John 17:20-23). That will be the day, when the world sees the Church coming down, out of heaven from God, and it will then say, Ah! those Christians were right after all. We thought they were only deluded when they talked of being one with Christ, and the possessors of eternal life, but we know now they were right. The world will know it when too late to believe it. What the Lord prays for in the 21st verse is that the world might believe, but in the 23rd, He asks that the world may know, “that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me,” and the world will know, then, that the believer in Jesus now, is accepted in, and is one with, God’s beloved Son.

In that day the world will know this wondrous fact, that “the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them.” It is the glory which God gave His Son, as man, not the incommunicable glory, which belongs to the Lord Jesus, in the Godhead — this never can be given. But the glory which the Son of Man has acquired, on the ground of redemption, He can, and, blessed be His adorable name, He does, share with His loved, and blood-bought Bride. But He says more. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which thou hast given Me; for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). We shall see that glory; we shall be like Him, in that day of His glory, and more than that, we shall also appear with Him, in glory. Little wonder that the Spirit of God says here, “I saw the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” You and I, as sinners, are unfit for that glory, for “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” we read, in Romans 3:23. Then in Romans 5:1-2 we get, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Revelation 21 says John saw the city “descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” We are now made perfectly fit for it, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we shall possess, and enjoy it.

“And her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (vs. 11). The jasper stone is used in Scripture, for that which is expressive of the glory of God (chap. 4:3), which can be seen by the creature, for He has a glory, which no man can approach unto. “The building of the wall of it was jasper” (vs. 18). That which is used to express the glory of God Himself, this city is seen to have. Her wall (vs. 18), and first foundation (vs. 19), are jasper. The glory of God is the foundation, and protection, as well as the light, and beauty of the heavenly city, for the Church is glorified, with Christ, in the glory of God. She belongs to God. The Christian is born of God, and has the divine nature imparted to him, through the new birth. There is only what is the fruit of grace visible in this chapter, all is “clear as crystal.”

The city is divinely secure also, for it “had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel....And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (vss. 12-14). Another has said: “It has twelve gates. Angels are become the willing doorkeepers of the great city, the fruit of Christ’s redemption-work in glory. This marked the possession too, by man, thus brought, in the assembly, to glory, of the highest place in the creation and providential order of God, of which angels had been previously the administrators. The twelve gates are full human perfectness of governmental administrative power. The gate was the place of judgment. ... There were twelve foundations, but these were the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They were, in their work, the foundation of the heavenly city. Thus the creative, and providential display of power, the governmental (Jehovah), and the Church once founded at Jerusalem, are all brought together in the heavenly city, the organized seat of heavenly power. It is not presented as the Bride, though it be the Bride, the Lamb’s wife. It is not in the Pauline character of nearness of blessing to Christ. It is the Church as founded at Jerusalem under the twelve — the organized seat of heavenly power, the new, and now heavenly capital of God’s government.”

The place which angels hold here is interesting. They are now, and have ever been, the servants of the saints, as we read: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14), and when the Church is seen, by-and-by, in effulgent glory, they will be delighted to be the doorkeepers of the heavenly city. God, too, does not then forget His earthly people (Israel), nor the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The world is not to forget that the twelve apostles who served the Lord, and suffered in the earthly Jerusalem, are they, who, by their ministry, founded the heavenly Jerusalem, and thus it is only seemly, that the names of the apostles should be found in the twelve foundations of the city. In Ephesians we are told that we “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:20-21), which has its full answer, I apprehend, in the new Jerusalem.

The city is alike vast, and perfect, and measured, and owned of God. “He measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal” (vs. 16). It was a cube. Now a cube is the most perfect figure, being equal on every side — finite perfection. It has what you call finality, it is the most comprehensive, and holds the most — nothing contains as much as a cube — and therefore, it is given here, as the expression of perfection. Observe, it is finite perfection, divinely given. I do not say it is divine

perfection, because that is God Himself; but it is divinely given perfection, and therefore it is spoken of as a cube. The Spirit of God delights to show, the absolute perfection of the place in glory, which the saints have before God, on the ground of Divine righteousness.

“And the building of the wall of it was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. 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” (Rev. 21:18-22:1).

To again quote the words of another, “The city was formed in its nature, in divine righteousness and holiness — gold transparent as glass. That which was now, by the word, wrought in, and applied to men below, was the very nature of the whole place (compare Eph. 4:24). The precious stones, or varied display of God’s nature, who is light, in connection with the creature (seen in creation, Ezek. 28:13; in grace, in the high-priest’s breastplate, Ex. 28:15-21), now shone in permanent glory, and adorned the foundations of the city. The gates had the moral beauty which attracted Christ in the assembly, and in a glorious way. That on which men walked, instead of bringing danger of defilement, was itself righteous, and holy; the streets, all that men came in contact with, were righteousness, and holiness — gold transparent as glass.” Gold all through Scripture is Divine righteousness. White linen is practical human righteousness. When the Bride puts on the white raiment (Rev. 19:8), it is her practical righteousness. If you were to put a little bit of white linen into the fire, it would soon be destroyed, but put a bit of gold in, and it stands the test. That is the whole point. Gold is Divine righteousness, and you, and I, stand before God, on the ground of Divine righteousness, in Christ.

“And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.” As we have seen, we have these precious stones in Scripture three times. In the garden of Eden they are seen in connection with creation; then in Exodus 28, where they are seen in the breastplate of the high-priest, it is evidently a question of grace for a failing people; but, when we see these same stones, in the foundation of the heavenly city, the thought suggested is permanent glory. Those many-hued stones bring out the varied qualities of God, made known through His people. There will be different rays of His glory reflected through them, illustrated by these different precious stones, which are the emblems employed, to set forth the luster of God’s saints, in heavenly glory, and the way, in which He displays, the beauty, which He sees in them. Put a light through an emerald, and it is quite different from that of the ruby, and although we are all partakers of the grace of God, that grace will shine through each differently, and no two are alike. It would be an immense pity if all the saints were like a cartload of bricks — all the same shape, and color. Just as there are not two leaves of the forest alike, so there are not two saints of God alike. All are alike in being saved by grace, but all are different in the expression of that grace.

“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl.” Why was every gate a pearl? You remember the heavenly merchantman, in Matthew 13, “seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (vs. 46). You may say, That is a sinner seeking the Saviour. Indeed! a sinner selling? What has a sinner got to sell but his sins? Nay, the pearl of great price is not Christ, but the Church — the Church in its unity. Christ went and sold all that He had, truly, and gave up all for the Church. The pearl is the Church in her unity, beauty, and completeness as viewed in God’s mind, that so fascinated the Lord Jesus, that He parted with “all that he had,” to get that pearl.

“And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” When you walk through the streets of man’s city, you get your feet defiled. But what do I find there? Nothing to defile; nothing of that sort can by any possibility enter. We are there on the ground of Divine righteousness.

“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 lamp thereof” (vss. 22-23). There being no temple is a great thing. There is no concealment of God’s glory. A temple would speak of concealment, or of a special place, where God could be known, by those who drew near to worship. All this has gone by. Even now, we Christians, have fullest access to the holiest (Heb. 10:19-22). In the heavenly city God is fully displayed, the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple. They are approached in their own nature and glory, as another has sweetly sung —

“The Lamb is there, my soul—There, God Himself doth rest,
In love divine diffused through all,
With Him supremely blest. God and the Lamb—’tis well,
I know that source divine, Of joy and love no tongue can tell,
Yet know that all is mine. But who that glorious blaze
Of living light shall tell, Where all His brightness God displays,
And the Lamb’s glories dwell. God and the Lamb shall there
The light and temple be, And radiant hosts forever share,
The unveil’d mystery.”

There will be a temple in the earthly Jerusalem. Any architect, with a fair knowledge of his profession, might go to Palestine, and build Ezekiel’s temple today; God has given the measurements, and plans, so plainly, that Ezekiel’s temple could be easily built. But there is here no temple — oh, no, because a temple always implies the thought of God being hidden, being in an inner place. In a certain sense it is all temple — i.e., the Lord God and the Lamb pervade the city, and the saints are in the nearest contiguity to the Lord, in the closest relationship to the Lamb, enjoying the light, and basking in the sunshine, of the presence of the blessed Lord. Oh, what a contrast to the darkness of that eternal hell, which is the lot of the man who dies in his sins. God save you, if you are yet in your sins. Do not miss this scene of blessedness, and rest, and joy. There is no need for the sun, and the moon in that day. Why? Because “the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof.” The glory of the divine nature illumines all, and the Lamb is the Lamp — the Light-bearer. God, fully displayed, supersedes all created light. The sun at mid-day was put out by a brighter light, when Saul was converted (Acts 9). Even so will it be in this city. “The glory of God did lighten it.” It comes, shaded for us, through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although this city is the Church, brought out for millennial view, and gives our relationship to the millennial earth, it is the Church really in her eternal state, though the figure of “the city” ceases in the eternal state. What she is, she is going to be forever, but, first of all, set in relation to earth, as a visible and glorious object over it. Therefore we read, “And the nations shall walk by the light of it.” Only the redeemed nations will enjoy that privilege, and blessing I apprehend. Suspended above the earthly Jerusalem, the holy city will transmit the rays of the glory of God, by which it is absolutely permeated, and encompassed.

The light which it will then transmit, and shed on to the earth, will render it a magnificent luminary, of an altogether unknown quality, and the nations will walk in, and enjoy its light. This wonderful glory of God shines among, and through His own people. The city enjoys the direct light within, the world gets the transmitted light of the glory, and “the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor unto (not into) it.” They thereby acknowledge the heavens, and the heavenly kingdom, to be the source of all they possess, and enjoy; they render homage to Him, who is the Source.

“And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there” (vs. 25). The poet has said —

“And sing of Thy glory above, in praises by day and by night.”

I never sing that, for there is no night there, and the gates are ever open. Evil cannot enter in. Blessed thought. Divine security guards against this. No falsehood, no idol — “whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie” (vs. 27), no defilement can ever enter. Neither Satan’s deceit, nor man’s evil, can again produce corruption.

This glorious description of the New Jerusalem, forcibly reminds us of a passage, before quoted, in the Old Testament (Isa. 60), where the earthly Jerusalem is addressed. “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (vs. 1). Again — “Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night: that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought” (vs. 11). If the nations of the earth will not bow down to Jerusalem they will perish. But further — “Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders: but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (vss. 18-20). What is the meaning of that? The light that streams through the heavenly city — having God’s glory — would appear to irradiate the earthly, and we have the heavenly, and earthly, Jerusalem, in touch one with the other. You have reached “the dispensation of the fullness of times” when God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Eph. 1:10). Jacob’s dream is realized — “A ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven” (Gen. 28:12). The two spheres are in intimate relation, and accord. The night of evil has passed away, and the day of glory has set in. The affections of the soul are moved, as one also reads, that “only they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” enter in to the city. Sovereign grace is at the bottom of all blessing for man.

The first five verses of chapter 22 give us yet lovely details, as to the connection of the holy city with the earth, although not on it. “He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” The city is refreshed by the river of God, and the fruits of the tree of life — always ripening — are for its inhabitants. The fruit, only the glorified saints eat, whereas the leaves — that which is visible without — are for the blessing of those on earth. Observe there is only one river here, and only one tree. You recollect in Genesis 2 there were four rivers, and two trees — the tree of the knowledge of good, and evil, and the tree of life. When man sinned, he was driven out, that he might not touch the tree of life. But when driven out of the earthly paradise, God opens a heavenly one to him. In Eden there were four rivers, and with two of them, Hiddekel, or Tigris, and Euphrates, are connected some of the most sorrowful passages of the history of God’s earthly people. On the Tigris, was built Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which carried captive the ten tribes. On the Euphrates, Babylon was built, whither the two tribes were taken. When we come to the last chapter of Scripture, we have but one river, the river of life, and one tree, the tree of life, and that seen on both sides of the river. The tree of the knowledge of good, and evil, is forever gone. The day of man’s responsibility, and testing, is, forever, over, and everything is settled absolutely according to divine sovereign grace in Christ. There may be trouble on the earth, to begin with, but the Lord will put all right, in that day, for “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” It must be borne in mind that these are only God’s figures of fullest blessing. There will not be any real river, or visible tree, I take it, but, the river of water of life symbolizes the superabundance of life, and blessing, which will flow through the city — that is, the Bride, the Lamb’s wife — and, clearly, we are on millennial ground, in this chapter, for, in eternity, there are no nations or kings.

Then comes the climax. “There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him” (Rev. 22:3). Sometimes we are hindered here, but, thank God, there will be no hindrance in that day, nothing to hinder the heart going out to the Lord, to the fullest. “And they shall see His face.” Yes, we are going to see the face of the blessed One, who died for us on the tree. “And His name shall be on their foreheads.” On the forehead, of many a man on earth, will the name of the beast have been imprinted, but here, everybody delights to own, I belong to Jesus. “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever” (vs. 5). There is no night, nor need of light, for the Lord God gives it. The “candle” man makes, and the “sun” God has made, but neither are required there. All that suits, and is needed in, this world, is past, for the heavenly saints — the Bride, the Lamb’s wife — and they “shall reign forever and ever.” We shall pass into eternity, in the unclouded enjoyment, of that which the Spirit of God brings before us in these verses. Oh, what a day for the Church, what a day for Christ, what a day of unmingled, unparalleled glory, and what a great mercy for you, and me, if we can say now, “I belong to the Saviour.” If you are His now, then you will be most certainly His, in that day.

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