

Beautiful Bride, Beautiful Place

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Date: 02 March 2025

Preacher: Challum Finbow

[0 : 0 0] page, let's see, where are we? 1,249 of the church Bibles. So we're going to be reading chapter 21, starting from verse 9 until 22, verse 6.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, come I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb. And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with 12 gates and with 12 angels at the gates.

On the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. The wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length and as wide and as high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth oinks, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The 12 gates were 12 pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the lamb's book of life. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

[3 : 2 0] No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever. Well, it's going to be really helpful for you if you keep your Bible open at Revelation chapter 21, and if you've got your sermon sheet, sermon sheet, service sheet even, those three headings might just come in handy. Thank you, Jonathan, and to the whole church for the warm welcome that Claire and I, as a family, have received here as we've been coming to St. Silas. And see if you've come tonight for the first time to try church, I want you to know that the person that invited you did so because they have something so precious to share with you, and they want you to know that.

Let's, before we look at this word, just ask God to be with us. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you are good. Lord God, we ask that we would love you more, that we would love Jesus more, and that as we look at this, we would have a surer and more certain hope for the future. We ask that you would do this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. So as you may know, Revelation is written by one of Jesus' followers called John, and this vision is a message to the early church from the risen and reigning Jesus.

Now, it's not telling us what heaven will be like when we die, but about the eternal future brought about when Christ returns. Now, if you are new or newish to church, you might just have heard what I said or what Amy read out from the Bible and have thought, what? Oh, sorry, I'm in the West End.

What? What on earth? Can you look at the passage with me at verse 9 and 10 of chapter 29?

[6 : 03] Notice it. Notice it. John is told by one of the angels, come and see. Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. The Lamb is Jesus, and the bride is the people of God. So here comes the bride.

Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, what on earth? What on earth is this? Verse 10. John is shown on earth, the future holy city, New Jerusalem, come down from heaven.

Not as reaching up, rather on earth, the city comes down. We can't reach God. But in his goodness, he comes down. Joy to the world. The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.

Who on earth is Jesus? He is God come down as man. What on earth is this city that has come down?

It is the new, beautiful city that Jerusalem never was, where those who belong to Jesus will dwell forever.

[7 : 29] And this city is the contrast of what we've been hearing about, this horror show of Babylon, this symbolic, this symbolic, worldly city that persecutes God's people, intoxicates humanity.

It destroys life on earth. Notice, it's not that city that lasts. The city on earth to look to is the descending, new, and beautiful city of God.

This is the glorious city John sees, and to which Christians belong. Well, okay, you still with me? Yes, there's people there. Good.

There are two big problems if this is your first night with us. Firstly, whilst this piece of literature is mind-blowingly constructed like Picasso or Dali, the problem is you're starting at the end.

And secondly, much of what we are looking at is symbolic, where John is amazingly threading action from elsewhere in the Bible all together.

[8 : 38] And so my job tonight for you, as best I can, is to decode this so that you get the truth being described. The thing was so full of symbols and mixed metaphors that it can be quite overwhelming, can't it?

But just because something is not literal, it doesn't mean it's not true. Let me explain that. You invite me for dinner.

I eat and eat, and I even eat some of your share. I'm a white load, Rory. And the next day you say to your pal, never invite Callum for dinner.

He is a pig. Well, your friend does not think, when Callum eats at people's houses, he transforms into a four-legged animal who snorts and rolls about in his own muck.

No, they know the truth you're getting at. He's very greedy. He eats too much. Symbols, metaphors, point us to truth, and usually a single truth.

[9 : 49] In this case, Callum is greedy. Incidentally, if you invite me for dinner, I promise to be well behaved. In fact, as we've got this newcomer's lunch next week after the service at 11.30, we can even put that to the test.

But what are the truths here? That John wants the early church living under tremendous pressures to be encouraged by. What does he want us to come and see?

Well, firstly, that the Lord will make a beautiful, secure people in a beautiful, secure place. And secondly, that God's glorious people will dwell with him in God's glorious place.

And that through Christ, we will be a life-given people by the light-giving God. So, first heading there, beautiful, secure people, beautiful, secure place.

And this will be probably the longest section. So, if we're getting through that, you think, oh, my word, don't worry, the last two will be quicker. Now, I have to admit that in the Scottish winter, sorry about this, Tim, I need, by about November, something to start looking forward to.

[11 : 06] And I'm already thinking of my holiday in the sun to keep me going through the wind and rain. And the life of the early church was so hard.

They needed assurance that the eternity ahead was certain and would be worth the temporary pain in the here and now. See, as you run a marathon, the steps get harder and harder.

And to keep you going, you really need to believe in your destination. And so, as a Christian right now, you could be quite weary. You might need encouragement.

In fact, as we look around the world just now, you might feel uncertainty and fear. And then for tonight, God and his kindness is explaining to us as people that the future that is to come is certain.

And he's explaining it with these pictures. The beautifully dressed bride, the descending new city. So, come and see this first picture in verse 9 and 10.

[12 : 15] I will show you the bride. John sees a city come down. So, which is it?

Bride? City? Is it a beautiful people? Or is it a beautiful place? And of course, the answer is, well, it's both. Because a city is a place made up of and reflective of its people.

It's not literal, but the truth is the city is the people of God. And in the new creation, the Lord will remake and make a beautiful place for the people he beautifies.

And do you notice, verse 9, that Jesus is so committed to this vision that he marries us. Together, all of us together, are the beautiful, spotless bride.

We walk down the aisle as a bride. And notice the change at verse 9. Wife of Jesus. Con, shoe, mation.

[13 : 35] A wife, verse 11, made beautiful in every way. Because we shine with, not our own glory, but the glory of God.

Glory. God's glory. Making us all together have the brilliance of a precious jewel like jasper. Shining as clear as crystal.

Where we live will be beautiful beyond current understanding. And we will be beautiful beyond our current understanding.

God will make it so. We will no longer sin. We will no longer be sinned against.

We will have Christ's ability to be sinless, pure, holy. We will be impeccable.

[14 : 41] We will be made a bride. Fitting for the beautiful perfection that is Jesus. The world as we know it should be.

We, as a people, as we know we should be. And so, to keep us going, we are told, come and see this beautiful people.

And this beautiful place. But you'll notice the title didn't just say beautiful. It said secure. Because we are a secure people.

In a secure place. Throughout verses 12 to 21, we get this amazing description of a city. And in Sesame Street fashion, it's brought to you by a special number.

Did you notice the number 12? Well, we'll get to all things 12. But first, what's the point of a city?

[15 : 44] What was the point of a city in the past? Well, it's most basic function is for security. Get in the city.

Behind the walls. Be safe. Unfortunately, that's not the experience of the early church or of us in this age.

We share the city, don't we, with dangerous people. The very cities and places early Christians lived were often so anti-Christ, it could cost you your livelihood, your home, and even your life just to be a Christian in that city.

Those city walls, they held no protection for the Christian. No security. But this city promised by Jesus has eternal security.

Depending on how old you are, you might not have realized this yet. But in life, security is the key to flourishing.

[16 : 47] Try living in an insecure nation with insecure leadership and insecure food supplies. Or an insecure family and an insecure home.

In an earthquake, all you want is stability. Babylon pretends to offer all sorts of security now, but it's a city that will fall.

But the heavenly city will be eternally secure. Come and see, verse 12, a great high wall. Security.

Protected by 12 angels. Security. Nothing can ever harm you again.

To anyone who has suffered trauma. What a promise. Now, if you look carefully at verse 13, Rory, you will notice this is a minecrafter's paradise.

[17 : 52] Why? Well, this city's a square. With three gates on each side. And three fours are? Twelve. Twelve. And on each gate is the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

What is a square and twelve thing all about? And come and see twelveness again in verse 14. Look what the city is built on.

We built this city on... Rock and roll, somebody said. Dodgy, dodgy theology there. We built this city on the words of the twelve.

Twelve foundations, the apostles. Twelve foundations and on the names of them, the twelve apostles of Jesus. Twelveness. It's all about being the people belonging to God.

The twelve tribes were all God's chosen people. The twelve apostles were the new Israel chosen by Jesus, sent out with his words. Twelveness in the city is all about the city being the people.

- [19 : 04] The twelve specially chosen and sent out ones with the words of the master teacher. The city's built not on rock and roll, but on the gospel message.
- And so, in this age, our age, when anyone tries to change the words of the apostles, Jesus didn't really mean that about sin.
- Or, he's just one of the ways to God. When people try to dilute the apostolic words, they're taking a pickaxe to the foundations.
- They're taking a pneumatic drill to Zion. And I say to you, don't listen to them, and don't do it. Your eternal security is on that true foundation.
- It will damage you. Not the city. The city's secure. It's built on the message of the ones Jesus has sent out. And come and see verse 15.
- [20 : 06] It's already measured. Do you remember at school, you had those, depending on what age you are, those plastic rulers for measuring? Remember them?
- Quite flexible. Good for ping-pong with your pals with stuff, yeah? Come and see, there's nothing flimsy about the tools the Lord uses. The angel is measuring out the city with a golden rod.
- No expense spared to bring you in. For what? For what? Or actually who God measures. He builds and protects.
- He knows every person of his city. And do you notice what he's building is very, very 12. 12,000 stadia.
- With walls so thick that it's 144. 12 times 12 cubits thick. Is that secure enough for you?
- [21 : 08] A very secure people. 12,000 stadia. That measurement is like 1,400 miles. It's 2,200 kilometers.
- It's massive in its 12-ness. And so the Lord's not building a teeny, tiny people. He's making us super-sized, super-secure people.
- And if you're a little persecuted church standing firm in 1st century Smyrna, or 21st century Somalia, or a wee church in Glasgow, or you're a lone Christian in school, college, or your workplace, what a beautiful picture for you.
- Babylon makes you feel small. But the Lord's including you in something massive. If, if you've kept building only on the foundations of the apostles, and if so, now come and see.
- This foundation is beautifully decorated with 12 stones. Verse 19 to 20. Jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, amethyst, ruby, chrysalite, beryl, topaz, turquoise, jacinth, can't say that one obviously, and amethyst.
- [22 : 26] It's even more shiny than walking down the Argyle Arcade. Foundations of the apostles decorated with 12 beautiful stones.
- Well, what's that all about? Well, there's probably an Old Testament reference, again, indicating that the city is the people of God. For in Exodus, we read that Aaron, the high priest, when he was to go and represent the people before the Lord, he was to wear 12 precious stones with the name of one of the 12 tribes.
- Let me read from Exodus. Whenever Aaron enters the holy place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart, on the breastplate of a decision as continuing memorial before the Lord.
- And so these stones, Aaron wore, give the idea of a people being represented in the holy place, where one man represents all the people before God.
- High priest on the inside before God, representing the people, and they're all on the outside. But now, in this future city, John's describing, there's a big difference.
- [23 : 36] The high priest doesn't take the 12 stones and represent the people in the holy place with the people on the outside. No, the 12 stones, where are they? They're in the holy place.

In this future, we are in the holy of holies. We are in the temple. Our relationship with God is beautiful.

It's secure and can never fail ever again. We are in the temple. And how do we know this? Because verse 16, height, breadth, and length all equal in this place.

That's the holy temple. Because the city, being a cube, isn't some sort of reference to a future world of Minecraft. No, the holy place is a cube.

The temple described by Ezekiel was a cube. The holy of holies was a cube. All sides equal representing perfection.

[24 : 41] The city is the temple, the holy place. And now we have a beautiful people, perfectly secure, forever in the holy place of God. all because of the work and words of Jesus was that apostles have spread throughout the world.

It is glorious. And so in this future vision, you see the bride, the wife of Jesus, has now become God's glorified people in God's glorified place.

I wonder what you think the most beautiful street in Glasgow is. Buchanan Street, University Avenue, Shettleston Road.

What do you mean you've never been? The potholes are paved with gold, let me tell you, on the east. Seriously, I wonder, what's the best street you've walked down? Champs-Élysées, the Ramblers.

Well, none of them's like this. Do you see it? Verse 21, a great street of gold, as pure as transparent glass. The people, the city, still beautiful beyond imagination.

[25 : 51] And now in verse 22, John states, as he was symbolically saying, I did not see a temple. Even better than a glorious temple is the glory of the Lord Almighty and the Lamb filling the whole massive city because the Lord and the Lamb are the temple.

This new creation is now the meeting place of God with man. It is glorious. Verse 23, do you notice the sun and moon aren't needed because the city's light is from the glory of God.

The Lamb is its lamp. So glorious, a place that all those in the city, this new earth, walk in his light. Throughout this section, John is referencing Isaiah 60.

You can check that up later. Showing, for example, in verse 24, it's not just a one nation glory. It's not a make one nation great again.

It is an all nations glory. No racism here. No subservience. No war. Rather, the glorious presence of God so transforms the city's inhabitants that all desire to give and bring splendor.

[27 : 05] At last, the rulers, the kings of the earth and our people will know it is more blessed to give than to receive. To bring splendor.

So come and see verse 25. For those who are inhabitants, there's no barrier. The city will be the focal point of all worship where we bring our glory to the city.

And even though we have massive city walls symbolizing protection, actually, the environment is so safe. We never need to shut the gates because all the people coming are safe people.

Verse 27, nothing impure will ever enter it. Nor will anyone who does anything shameful or deceitful. A glorious place made up only of people made like this, made glorious.

No child neglect or abuse. No violence or hatred. No poverty or famine. No lies or betrayal. No fear.

[28 : 15] You know, living in a city, especially if you have a child, there's always a part of you on alert because we all know what happens, don't we, in cities like Babylon, but not this one.

Not ever. Because these people are made good by God. And so maybe you're thinking right now, okay, sign me up. Well, who's allowed to go?

We read only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. It's a place for those being made pure by the Lamb, by Jesus.

Those with faith in the Lord Jesus and His death and His resurrection. A glorious people and a glorious city because the presence of the life-giving God is always there.

And here we go. We're nearly landing, folks. Well done. Come and see life-giving people, light-given, light-giving God. Have you ever been in a place where everything you look at is just, wow?

[29 : 24] Maybe when you were wee and you went into one of those sweet shops, you still get in Scottish towns all the sweets and jars and they all look good and then you're told you need to pick just one.

Well, what do you pick out of these five verses to conclude the talk with? Well, if your name is in the book of life, verse 27, each of these chapter 22, verse 1 to 5 pictures will be something you have an eternity to know.

You don't have to pick. And so the angel's now showing John a new aspect to this transparent golden street. It has the river of the water of life flowing down the middle of it.

Verse 1, this river of life trickles. Is that what it says? It says flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Again, don't worry about making the pictures make sense visually. Rather than trying to build a blueprint of the city in your mind, we're being given truths about our future relationship with God.

[30 : 33] So what truth are we being invited to come and see? Well, those whose names are in the book of life are given life, a life given people.

Who is giving life? Where does it flow from? The throne of God and the Lamb. The people are given life from the Father and the Son and it's abundant and free.

It fulfills Jesus' statement in John 10, I have come to give life. In all its fullness. And so unlike the banishment from the tree of life in Genesis 3, there is verse 2, continual access to a life-giving tree.

In fact, the tree of life is so accessible, it seems to be on both banks of the river of life. With 12 types of fruit. What tree has 12 types of fruit?

And it's 12 fruits that are always in season. And so this symbolism is telling us abundant life for the people. And the tree of life's leaves heal all the old hearts.

[31 : 48] So what are we being told? Well, we no longer dwell in the realms of death. In this city, we are given abundant life beyond our current understanding where all the old pains and hurts and torments, they are no more.

Because, verse 3, the curse is no more. The curse of death that was the result of sin is no more. All of that pain is gone.

And I stand here tonight with much pain in my heart. Because when I was here earlier on today, I realised my friend that I had, from my teenage days, had died.

I watched his body decay and shake with Huntington's death. No more. Death meaning decay.

And our sinful nature, the curse that makes us live with this feeling that something is wrong in this world, it is gone.

[33 : 01] We will be a people no longer living under curse, but a life-given people, belonging to God and the Lamb, unopposed, serving God and the Lamb joyfully.

And come and see, verse 4, do you see it? His face, that beautiful, vision of God, the beatific vision, and if you want to know more about that, Jonathan and Robbie have both written essays on it.

We will belong to him. His name, where is it? On our foreheads. And he will light your life.

Verse 5, night and all its terrors are behind. you're not going to need your phone or even the sun, because the light-giving God is there with you forever.

We will be a beautiful bride in a beautiful place, a glorious and secure place for a people made beautiful, a people given life by the light-giving God, a people you are invited to come and be a part of, a place that people of faith will see.

[34 : 37] Let's pray. Father God, thank you for this vision of the future that is certain in Christ. Christ, and we know it's certain, Lord God, because you would not send your son in vain for some cheap, disappointing, let-down future.

Lord Jesus, we know you died for our sins, and we know you rose to glory. Of that we are certain. And we know because of your great love for your people, the future that you promise is beautiful, the secure future as your bride, as your wife, it's certain.

Lord Jesus, you would not give your bride less than you have promised. Lord Jesus, we have heard your words in this book about Babylon, that she might have jewels that attract, but in reality she's deception, she's deadly.

Lord Jesus, we found your words to be true, that the world is alluring but poisonous. And so, Lord Jesus, as we've discovered your words about that city to be true, help us trust in your words about the everlasting city, that you promise your bride.

Lord Jesus, give us faith that we need to see this city. And Lord, keep us. Jesus, keep us in your love so that we will have this abundant life as part of your great love, as part of your great people, this day and forevermore.

[36 : 22] Amen. Folks, we are going to sing together in response, so let's stand together and give God praise. Let's stand and sing.