

Place: Lurgan Baptist 7:12:2004

Reading: Revelation 21:9-27

“ EXPLORING THE FUTURE,”

30. THE CITY OF GLORY

There are mansions and then there are mansions. George Vanderbilt definitely built a *mansion*. In 1888, the thirty three old Vanderbilt began buying large parcels of land in Asheville, North Carolina including the 100,000 acre Pisgah Forest for his backyard. He then commissioned two of the most distinguished architects of his time to design a superstructure and the surrounding grounds called the Biltmore Estate. Rivalling the great manors of Europe, this house was designed to be a four-story edifice with a 780-foot long facade. The construction required over a thousand workers. Countless tons of materials were used. Limestone was hauled in from six hundred miles away in Indiana. Marble was imported from Italy. The delivery of such elaborate materials required a specially built private railroad !

Thirty two thousand bricks were made on the site every day. A woodworking factory was built just to process the oak and walnut timber for the floors and panelling. For six years an army of skilled workers laboured to build this country estate, a self-contained community in the Smoky Mountains. Then on Christmas Eve, 1895, George Vanderbilt unveiled his prized Biltmore House. As he welcomed family and friends for a holiday celebration, Vanderbilt formally opened the most ambitious home ever constructed in America ! A walk through the mansion, reveals a house beyond anyone's wildest imagination. It boasts four acres of floor space, a total of 250 rooms. Thirty four master bedrooms. Forty three bathrooms. Sixty-five fireplaces. Three kitchens. An indoor swimming pool. And a gymnasium. It was maintained by a staff of eighty who also lived in the house.

The Biltmore mansion was immediately acclaimed the greatest house of the Western Hemisphere ! The youngest in a family known internationally for building palatial homes, George Vanderbilt had truly outdone them all. But my despite its opulent grandeur, even the Biltmore estate pales in comparison to the architectural accomplishments of the Lord Jesus in Heaven ! For in the unseen world Christ is building a mansion that will overshadow anything ever built by human hands. Did He Himself not say, “ *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go*

and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself.” (Jn 14:2-3)

My there are mansions and then there are *mansions* !

The Lord Jesus is building a mansion. What kind of place is Christ preparing ? How does it compare to the finest estates of this world ? With what materials will He build this mansion ? What will be the measurements of His heavenly home ? The answers to these questions, and more, are found in the next instalment of John's vision of Heaven recorded in (21:9-21) You see, just as a person preparing to travel to a foreign country desires information about that country, so believers long for a glimpse of that glorious place where they will live eternally. Knowing their eager sense of anticipation, the Lord has provided Christians with a description of heaven. Though only a few select details are given, they are staggering, mind-boggling and overwhelming.

Now there are few passages of Scripture on which there is such a wide divergence of opinion among dispensational premillennialists as (21:9-22:7) Some see this as descriptive of the eternal state, while others see it as descriptive of the millennial age. Some take this as a literal city and others as a symbolical representation ! The first view then says that (21:9 - 22:7) describes the millennium. The second view says that (21:9 - 22:7) describes the eternal state. The third view says that (21:9 - 22:7) describes the eternal habitation of the resurrected saints during the millennium ! Now whatever view you take, I think we can say that these saints in this city are in their eternal state and that the city enjoys its eternal glory ! Charles Ryrie says this, “ *Perhaps the best way to understand this entire section is to regard the New Jerusalem as the abode of the redeemed of all ages. Conditions within the New Jerusalem are conditions of eternity. Of course the redeemed will be inhabiting the city during the millennium as well as during eternity. Always the conditions within the city are eternal, even when the city is related to the millennium.* ” So here in this section there is brought before us, our eternal home, **THE CITY OF GLORY** ! Notice:

(1) WHAT IS MAJESTIC IN THIS CITY

My human language is inadequate to fully describe the unimaginable magnificence of the believers indescribable home. Unwilling to take the language of Scripture at face value, many seek for some hidden meaning behind John's description. But if the words do not mean what they say, who has the authority to say what they do mean ? Abandoning the literal meaning of the text leads only to baseless, groundless, futile speculation. The truth about the heavenly city is more

than is described, but not less and not different from what is described. It is a material creation, yet so unique as to be unimaginable to us. Now first and foremost, John is struck by the sheer glory of God's dwelling place ! The chief characteristic of the New Jerusalem is that God's glory is manifest in it. Look at (21:9-11) A solitary angel one of the seven who dispense God's wrath during the Tribulation summoned John to embark upon a careful inspection of the eternal city. Supernaturally, the angel transported John to a great mountain and from this high vantage point he could see the vast magnitude of the city more clearly. Do you know what its like to fly over the great cities of the earth by night and you look out of the window of the aircraft and you see the sparkling lights of those cities illuminating the sky for miles. Well, here's John and he's sees the heavenly city flashing in the sky like a giant diamond !

What strikes his attention first ? Well, this city shines like a celestial jewel with blinding brilliance. My for all eternity the glory of God will be seen in His holy city. It is the only light the city will need. Here then is the Majesty of the heavenly city. It will be a city,

“ *having the glory of God.* ” (21:11) Bible scholars often speak of the Shekinah glory a word that does not occur in the Bible but is used by some Jews and Christians to describe, “ the visible presence of Jehovah.” God's glory (doxa) is the radiance of His dazzling splendour, the abiding Shekinah glory of God. Have you ever traced the glory of God in the Bible ? Think with me for a moment about:

(a) THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE PAST:

Do you recall that daring request that Moses made to God ? He said, “ *Show me thy glory.* ” (Exod 33:18) God replied, “ *I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee.* ” (Exod 33:19) So God caused His glory to pass before Moses while his servant hid in a rock. Why ? because no man can see the *full* glory of God and live. And after seeing merely the afterglow of God's glory, Moses face glowed like the noonday sun ! Do you remember what happened when the Tabernacle was built ? “ *A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.* ”

(Exod 40:34) After Israel had been in the Promised Land for a number of years, God instructed Solomon to build a Temple. (2 Sam 7:12-13) When the Temple was built, “ *the cloud filled the house of the Lord so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.* ” (1 Kings 8:11)

You see in the OT the Shekinah was the symbol of the sum of all that God is the

brilliant outshining of the totality of His attributes and His nature. But when the Temple was turned into a place of idolatry, God's glory departed. (Ezek 8:1-4 9:1-4 10:1-19 11:22-23) Ichabod was written across the Temple door, meaning “ *the glory has departed.* ” The glory of God was gone ! My that glory did not return to earth until the Lord Jesus was born. John wrote, “ *We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* ” (Jn 1:14) But Christ was crucified and soon ascended to Heaven, to the right hand of God the Father ! (Acts 1:9-11) where God's glory now resides. But when He returns, He will come “ *in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* ” (Matt 24:30) Until then, the glory of God is displayed in Christ's body, the church. (Eph 3:19-21) This is,

(b) THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE PRESENT:

In (Jn Ch 17) we have our Lord's intercessory prayer ! Look at (Jn Ch 17) for a moment and notice that Christ mentions the glory of God at least eight times. Notice how He opens His prayer ! (Jn 17:1) Look at (Jn 17:22) You and I as Christians already share the glory of God because we have trusted Christ as our Saviour ! Do you what this can mean in your life ? It means that you can wash dishes to the glory of God ! Make visits to the glory of God, use your telephone to the glory of God ! Indeed Paul says, “ *Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever you do all to the glory of God.* ” (1 Cor 10:31) (a) (b) But what about,

(c) THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FUTURE:

Well, come back to (21:11) My the celestial city's brilliance, or bright light, is the effect of the divine glory shining throughout the city a shimmering radiance and eternal effulgence ! Her beauty resembles a sparkling crystal, diamond stone blazing with the glory of God. My God in all of His perfection, is so brilliant and dazzling that He is blinding ! John Walvoord says, “ *As the glory of God is the sum of His infinite perfections in their manifestations, so the New Jerusalem reflects all that God is.* ” (1)

(2) WHAT IS MENTIONED ABOUT THIS CITY

Now when we get down to look at this city we see that God can never be accused of skimping or economizing ! Here is a magnificent city fully capable of holding the vast population of redeemed saints and elect angels.

(Heb 12:22) Notice John mentions:

(a) *THE SHAPE OF THIS CITY:*

Look at (21:16) Another Translation puts it this way

“ *The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide.*” The word, foursquare, means “ *equal on all sides,*” so the city might be a cube or a pyramid. H. A. Ironside, W. Smith, J. Walvoord and others prefer to take the shape of this city to be that of a pyramid and the reason is, this is because of the awkwardness of a low wall mentioned in (21:17) as being 144 cubits or 216 feet. They say that the very low wall seems to harmonise better with a pyramid-shaped city. On the other hand, there are those who advocate a cube shaped city cite

(21:3) Do you recall that the Tabernacle Building itself was divided into two rooms ? There was The Holy Place and The Holy of Holies and its interesting to observe that this room was cubical in shape, “ *the inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high.*”

(1 Kings 6:20) Does this not suggest that this entire city is a huge Holy of Holies , the very place where God makes His dwelling. (a) But look at:

(b) *THE SIZE OF THIS CITY:*

Look at (21:16) Do you know what that means ? Its 1,500 miles long and 1,500 miles wide and 1,500 miles high ! This is huge ! An Australian engineer calculated that would 2,250,000 square miles. To give you a reference point, London is 140 square miles. At the ratio of population in London, the heavenly city could hold 100 billion people ! It could hold even more than thirty times the population of our world right now and still have plenty of room to spare. Think of this it has been estimated that approximately thirty billion people have lived in the long history of the world. Even if everyone who ever lived was saved which is not the case that would still allow each person 200 square miles on the ground alone. If only half were saved, that would be 400 square miles per person. And that's not even considering the cubic miles !

The point is, there will be plenty of room for everyone who makes it to heaven ! And my that's just the city.

Oh, the vastness of the New Creation ! When our Lord Jesus came to earth there was no room for Him, but when His people get to Heaven they will find there ample, palatial accommodation ! John mentions (a) (b)

(c) *THE SPECIFICATIONS OF THIS CITY:*

1. Notice that he mentions **THE WALL:**

(a) **THE SIZE OF THE WALL:**

Look at (21:12,17) A.T. “ *He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement which the angel was using.* ” That means that though measured by an angel standards common among men were used ! You see this description of the city is to be taken quite literally ! Now 144 cubits is 216 feet, but a 216 foot wall around a 1500 mile high city would be like a one inch curb around the Empire State Building ! But if this refers to the width of the wall then it would not be out of proportion to the rest of the city ! (1)

(b) **THE MATERIAL OF THE WALL:**

For (21:18) says “ *And the building of the wall of it was of jasper.* ” The wall is made of jasper and the city itself is made of gold, a precious metal usually used in Scripture to symbolise deity ! My how stunning it is,

(c) **THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WALL:**

Look at (21:19-20) Building foundations are usually underground, but these foundations will not only be visible but beautifully garnished with precious stones. Jasper is clear crystal. Sapphire is a blue stone, and chalcedony is probably greenish-blue. The emerald of course is green: and the sardonyx is like our onyx, a white stone streaked with brown though some scholars describe it as red and white. Sardius is a blood red and chrysolite is golden green. Beryl is green and topaz is a yellow green. Chrysoprasus is probably golden-green.

Jacinth is violet and amethyst is rich purple ! My our God is a God of beauty and He will lavish His beauty on the city He is preparing for His people !

My there is no cheap stuff here ! There is no budget cutbacks on this building program. There is no finance committee. The New Jerusalem is *budget-buster*.
Only the best for God !

2. Notice that he mentions **THE GATES:**

Gates are entrance places and exit points apparently allowing travel in and out of the New Jerusalem ! Will believers be able to travel through these gates to leave the city to go to faraway points on the new earth and in the new heaven ? Will we

be able to journey to the outer confines of God's universe in order to minister and serve Him ? Will we repeatedly enter through these gates to worship God and fellowship with other believers ? One thing is sure in our glorified bodies we will have unlimited capacities to travel ! Think about Christ's resurrection body. He could walk through walls,
(Jn 20:19) travel through space (Acts 1:9-11) mysteriously appear (Lk 24:31) and suddenly disappear. He could walk, talk, sit eat and drink !

And Paul says, “ *As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.* ”
(1 Cor 15:49 1 Jn 3:2 Phil 3:21) My think of it, there will be no speed limit in heaven ! You will finally be able to push the pedal to the metal and travel fast !
Did you notice,

(a) *THE NUMBER OF THE GATES:*

Look at (21:12) “ *Twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve names of Israel, twelve names of the apostles, twelve foundations, twelve pearls, and the measurement of the wall of the city is twelve by twelve cubits.* ” My no dimension or detail of the city is out of balance because there is no attribute of God out of balance. All His works and ways are perfectly in order ! (1 Cor 14:33)

(b) *THE MATERIAL OF THE GATES:*

Look at (21:21) Yes, each gate was made of a single pearl ! Why did God choose pearl ? Perhaps because the beauty of a pearl comes from the pain of an oyster ! It is beauty born out of pain ! You see a pearl is formed when a tiny grain of sand gets inside an oysters shell, causing the oyster to become irritated and uncomfortable. And the oyster relieves its pain by covering the irritating grain of sand with a soft, lustrous solution that hardens into a beautiful growing pearl ! My what a picture of our salvation ! ***We have come into the place of God's blessing out of the pain of Christ at the Cross !*** But that's not all ! You see as we come and go through the gates of pearl of the New Jerusalem we shall be forever reminded that the beauty of our home is only because of Calvary ! John mentions (1) (2) but:

3. *Notice that he mentions THE STREET:*

John says in (21:21) The word street (plateia) is in the singular here but is used generally to describe all the streets of the city ! My can you imagine what it will be like, walking up and down twenty four caret gold streets ? A little Swedish girl

was walking with her father one dark night along a country road. Looking up at the cloudless sky, studded with stars, she cried,

“ *O Daddy, if the wrong side of Heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be.* ” But my Heaven will be Heaven as much for what will *not* be there, as what *is* there ! For notice:

(3) WHAT IS MISSING FROM THIS CITY

Look at the *blessed absences* of Heaven ! You see:

(a) THERE WILL BE NO SANCTUARY:

Look at (21:22) The word for temple (naos) is the word used for the sanctuary, or God's dwelling place, the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Israel. You see no longer is the structure necessary for the saints are in the immediate presence of the Lord. John says, “ *I saw no temple.* ” Why ? Because God *Himself* is now the temple ! The very thought of a temple suggests a localizing of God but in that city God's glory will fill and permeate the *entire* place *and* God will be all and in all. a

(b) THERE WILL BE NO SUBSTITUTES:

For (21:23) says, “ *And the city thereof.* ” When God ordained the affairs of our present world, He commanded the sun to rule by day, and the moon to rule the night. During the millennium, “ *the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold.* ” (Is 30:26) But my the heavenly city will have need of neither, for it is to be lighted by the glory of God and the Lamb ! The light that blazed from the face of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration

(Matt 17:1-4) will be the sole illumination in the heavenly Jerusalem and we will walk in the light of His countenance ! Notice:

(c) THERE WILL BE NO SECRETS:

For John continues, “ *And the nations into it,* ”

(21:24-26) The word “ *nations,* ” (ethne) is the word for Gentiles. The meaning here is not that political entities will enter the New Jerusalem, but rather that those who are saved Gentiles, who belong to the non-Jewish races will be in the new city ! You see in the eternal state there will not only be saved Israelites

(21:12) and the church (21:14) but also saved Gentiles who are not numbered among either Israel or the

church ! Because the gates of the New Jerusalem will never be closed, there will

no shutting out worshippers from bringing their praises to God ! Everything is out in the open. There is no hidden agenda. There will be no secrets. The mystery of God will be over and all things will be made plain. Paul says, “ *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* ” (Rom 8:18) One day the tangled network of life will be unrivalled and “ *we’ll bless the hand and bless the heart that planned when clothed where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel’s land.* ”

***“ We’ll catch the broken threads again
And finish what we here began
Heaven will the mysteries explain
And then, ah, then we’ll understand.”***

(d) *THERE WILL BE NO SIN:*

“ *And there shall in no wise that defileth.* ” (21:27) All the major cities of the earth today are great centres of sin. But not this city. Nothing unclean will ever come into it. We will live in world spiritually clean from the pollution of sin ! My in the New Jerusalem there will be no funeral homes, no hospitals, no abortion clinics, no divorce courts, no brothels. There will be no pornography, no dial-a-porn, no teenage suicide, no Aids, no cancer, no rape, no missing children, no gay right marches, no drug problems, no murders. There will be no tears, no suffering, no separations, no starvation, no arguments, no accidents, no emergency departments, no doctors, no nurses, no heart monitors, no false teachers, no false teeth, no financial shortages and no locks ! My in the new Jerusalem there will be no dentists and no traffic wardens. Do you recall what John says, “ *Beloved it doth as He is.* ” (1 Jn 3:2) “ *We shall be like Him.* ” Can you imagine yourself looking like that ?

Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor, was once carving a statue of a head. A woman who regularly swept out his studio wondered who he was sculpting. One she finally recognised who the image was. It was obvious now. The master sculptor was carving the face of President Abraham Lincoln in marble. Very much surprised, she turned to the sculptor and inquired, “ *How did you know that Mr. Lincoln was in that piece of stone ?* ” To which he responded, “ *That’s simple. I just chisel everything that does not look like the President.* ” My that’s what God is doing in our lives carving us into the image of Jesus Christ. Today our likeness to Christ may not be as close as we would like it to be. But one day in Heaven, when we step into His presence all sin will be chiselled away from us Resulting in

perfect Christ-likeness. “ *We shall be like Him.* ” We will never to confess sin. Never need to apologize. Never have to resist Satan again. Never have to resist temptation. Never. (d)

(e) ***THERE WILL BE NO SINNERS:***

AT says this, “ *No one who practices abomination (sinful perversion) and lying shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.* ” (21:27) You see Heaven is an exclusive place. Its not for everyone. But for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life ! Is your name there ? Do you know Christ personally ? Are you heaven bound ? A prominent citizen in a town was dying, surrounded at his bedside by his family and doctor ! As he thought of his massive wealth he had worked all his life to amass, he whispered with a note of despair, “ *I'm leaving home, I'm leaving home.* ” Across town, a similar yet very different scene took place. There lay a solitary figure in meagre, bare surroundings a poor woman who had barely eked out a living for her children. Her modest home contained only the most of life's essentials. But in her heart dwelt the hope of heaven.

Before she died, she was heard to say expectantly, “ *I'm going home, I'm going home.* ” My this is our eternal home ! Do you like it ? Talk about moving up to a better neighbourhood. Oh, how glorious will be our eternal home ! “ *We speak of the land of the blest, that country so bright and so fair, and oft are its glories confessed, but what must it be to be **THERE !*** ”