



THE CITY OF GOD

In Revelation chapter twenty-one we find the climax toward which the entire book of Revelation has been progressing, the complete and eternal triumph of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom on the earth. In this chapter all of the promises of God and the hopes and aspirations of His people are finally realized. The first seven verses of this chapter center around the fellowship that the redeemed will enjoy with their Lord and Saviour and the remaining verses describe the place He has prepared for them.

After the millennium, when all sin and sinners have been forever destroyed, the earth made new, and the "holy city, new Jerusalem" established as its capital city, God's promise to His people is that "he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (verse 3). It is from this point forward that there shall never again be such things as death, sorrow, crying, or pain, "for the former things are passed away" and they now live in the eternal presence of the Son of God where there is only joy and rejoicing (verse 4).

Every citizen of Christ's kingdom will have been tried and tested but John says, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things" (verse 7). According to the force of the Greek language this statement would be more correctly translated "He that continually overcometh shall inherit all things." The spiritual growth of the Christian is a life-long struggle, and he can only come out victorious as he continually submits himself to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is these faithful and obedient servants alone that will receive the gift of eternal life.

In verse 8 we find a great contrast between the faithful and yielding and the unfaithful and unyielding, the latter of which are to be destroyed by the second death which is the opposite of eternal life. It is most interesting that this list should begin with "the fearful." What is it that these people were "fearful" of? They were afraid to give their lives fully to Jesus. They were afraid to take their stand on the side of truth. They were fearful of the ridicule of friends or family. They were afraid they might lose social prestige or perhaps their employment and so they refused to accept what they knew to be truth. These people were not murderers, or adulterers, or drunkards, or thieves, they were fearful. They refused to accept the message of God, they refused to do what was right and so they forever lost the kingdom of heaven.

A dazzling description of the heavenly city, new Jerusalem, is found in verses 9-21. But notice that the glory of the city comes from it "having the glory of God." As His glory is reflected off the precious stones and gold of which the city is built it would radiate a brilliance

far greater than that of the sun. This is why John declares that "the city had no need of the sun... for the glory of God did lighten it" (verse 23). And because He shall ever be there with His people "There shall be no night there" (verse 25). Notice, however, that this passage does not say there will be no sun, but rather there is no need for the sun (cf. Isaiah 24:23; 30:26; 60:19-20).

The size of the city is said to be "twelve thousand furlongs" (verse 16). A furlong is 1/8 of a mile, thus making the city 1,500 miles in circumference or 375 miles long on each side. This would make the capital of the new earth nearly as large as the combined states of North and South Dakota. The city is further said to have walls 144 cubits high (verse 17). A cubit can range anywhere from 18 to 21 inches. Taking the smaller figure of 18 inches would make these walls at least 216 feet high or about 20 stories. Entrance into this city will be through twelve gates - three on each side - and each of these a single, flawless pearl. As for a possible significance of these "Pearly gates" one commentator has offered this suggestion:

"Pearls are produced by suffering. When a grain of sand works its way into the oyster shell, there seems only one thing for that lowly creature to do. To deny the existence of the sand is futile, for it is there. To rebel is useless. So, slowly and patiently, the oyster begins to build layer upon layer of a plastic, milky substance which at last covers up the cutting edges of the sand, leaving a lovely coating all over, which hardens to become a beautiful pearl. Thus the trial is conquered and the misfortune turned to blessing. All who enter that fair city will pass through a gate of pearl, a symbol of suffering. By the abundant grace of God they have turned their trial into triumphs; every gnawing sin was covered with the righteousness of Christ." Roy Allen Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, p. 204

The size and sheer beauty of this celestial city is beyond human comprehension, but it is nevertheless a reality. Jesus Himself said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2) but what He has prepared for us is beyond our wildest dreams for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Those who truly love Jesus will one day soon be able to walk with Him on golden streets, but in order to walk with Him there we must first walk with Him here. The question He asks is, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Is your life in agreement with the will of God?