

Series: Behold the Lamb's Bride (a study in Revelation 21-22)

Sermon Text: 21:9-22:5 Who we're becoming (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

Our hours worked and money spent are, in some ways, building into a vision of paradise--investing in a future where we can be safe, accepted, and flourish. But as I've listened to our conversations and reviewed all your app questions this week, I hear a common thread: exhaustion and frustration. We keep leaning on Babylon's playbook and struggling to rest in the gospel. The 2 cities found in **Revelation 17-22** represent 2 ways to live: In Babylon, people are used and abused. In New Jerusalem, people are being renewed. The question is: "Is paradise achieved by endless effort and erecting walls that never make us feel safe, or is it an unimaginable gift that we are somehow being prepare to receive?" Today's text responds with this refreshing...

BIG IDEA: Babylon demands we build its walls, but New Jerusalem freely opens its gates.

After getting a distant view of the new heaven and earth in **verses 1-8**, John received a close-up tour. He reminds us **Revelation 17-22** is 1 continuous vision shared by *the angel* with *the seventh bowl*. Look how **verse 9** opens: *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."* In **chapter 17**, the same *angel* revealed the judgment of Babylon for intoxicating nations. But here, **New Jerusalem** is God's counterculture--a people called *The Bride, the Lamb's wife*. So, while this text gives us hints of what heaven is like, this vision primarily describes the church renewed. Her centuries of stains from Babylon's suffocating smoke are suddenly gone. Counter to her compromised state in **chapters 1-3**, she is now a radiant *dwelling place, a bride prepared for God (21:2)*. How? Not from cleaning herself up, but because she's been washed by *the Lamb's* shed blood. As **chapter 19** reminded us, her fresh linens were not achieved but a gift imputed (credited) to her by faith in Jesus.

The Lamb's Bride is unveiled as a people with unshakable identity in **verses 10-14: And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed**

me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels (like the churches had angels in chapters 2-3), *and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed--on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* Without question: the new heaven and earth will be a physical space with streets, rivers and soil, but *the angel* is showing us the church, not a 5-star resort! Scripture says surprisingly little about heaven, deliberately keeping its exact geography a mystery because eternity is ultimately less about a destination and more about a people--a multi-ethnic family Christ died to save and make into His dwelling place/sanctuary. In this vision, the *city* has *12 gates* tattooed with *the names of Israel's 12 tribes* and *12 foundations* are branded with *the names of the Lamb's 12 apostles*. While confirming Jesus of Nazareth as *God's Lamb*, it also flips the script! We may expect the *foundation* to be the *tribes of Israel*, but John learned true Israel is built on Christ and His Apostles (cf. Romans 9:6; Revelation 7). The apostles revealed that God never had 2 separate plans (1 for Israel + 1 for the church). Rather, from the foundation of the world, God has aimed to form a single, multi-ethnic body united by the slain *Lamb's* resurrection (cf. Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:4; 2:11-22, Romans 11, Revelation 13:8). This currently compromised *Bride* is destined to shine like exquisite *jewels* after Jesus helps her become what He said in Matthew 5: "*The light of the world, a city on a hill that can't be hid.*"

Notice how *the angel measures* to unveil her as people of invincible security in *verses 15-17: And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.* John's first-century audience would have seen these mind-boggling dimensions as equal to the approximate footprint of Rome's vast empire. But John isn't drawing a geographic map; he is

showing that God's city completely outmatches and replaces every oppressive empire this world can muster. Just as in *Ezekiel 40-48*, the act of **measuring** signifies God's personal ownership and divine protection. In **chapter 7**, the symbolic math 12x12x1,000 represented the 144,000 redeemed, multi-ethnic people God had sealed and sheltered. But the key detail is the shape, **its equal length, width and height**. It forms a giant cube, the shape of the innermost sanctuary in Israel's Old Testament temple, known as the Holy of Holies (cf. 1 Kings 6:20). This area was secured by God's indwelling presence, but access was restricted to an annual visit from the High Priest. Can you see **the angel's** point? The entire **city** is the Holy of Holies! So, every single follower of **the Lamb** will be given unlimited access to God's presence, because together, we'll become His eternal sanctuary.

I'd say that **verses 18-27** makes our priestly access "*crystal clear*", where echoes of Isaiah 60 unveil **The Bride's** culture of openness: *The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.* If you're wondering why John was so fascinated by these **12 gemstones**, it's because the exact **jewels** were set into the High Priest's breastplate in Exodus 28. John's point is breathtaking: faith in Jesus adorns every believer with these emblems of access. Meaning, you won't need a mediator anymore--everyone in Christ gets full, direct access to the Father! John continued in **verse 22**: *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

Negative lists are usually a bummer in the Bible, but this one positively articulates stuff that won't be in the new creation. No **temple** is necessary when saints become His sanctuary. **The sun and moon** aren't needed when **the Lamb** is **our lamp**. His **light** will shine through us, fulfilling the hint we saw back in **chapter 1** where the churches were pictured as lampstands. And notice this: **the gates will never be shut!** In Babylon, ancient gates were bolted at night for fear of invasion, crime, and war. But in **New Jerusalem**, everyone written in the Lamb's book of life experiences God's permanent, protective presence--not because God gets soft on sin but because Jesus stepped outside the city's safety to handle all barriers to our citizenship on the cross. So, when John says **nothing unclean will ever enter**, he does not mean heaven will be an exclusive country club for the moral elite. He is declaring that Christ's work will turn broken and divided Babylonians into beautifully united people--never again will there be any abusers, betrayers, exploiters, or liars. If you live behind **walls** of anxiety, fear or shame, **the open gates** are **The Lamb's** invite to believe His resurrection broke ground on a future where the abused from every nation will finally be safe forever! This vision can free us to step out of Babylon's dark alleys in faith and even walk **The Lamb's** well-lit pathways of hope!

Unlike Greek texts which lack chapter headings, English Bibles pause John's vision at **verse 27** even though he continued into **verses 22:1-5** by unveiling **The Bride** as a healing garden: **Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month** (notice 12x12 is repeated). **The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations**. The story which began in a garden, now ends in a garden! The **tree of life** which represented God's presence in Eden grows up into an orchard of **trees** whereby God's vow is forever sealed: **"Whoever eats from it will live forever"** (cf. Genesis 3:22). Reassurances continue to stack up in **verses 3-5** that **no longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads** (as was written on the Old Testament priests' headband cf. Exodus 28:36-38). The curse of Genesis 3

is finally broken by “*Christ who became a curse for us*” as we’re told in Galatians 3. Once more borrowing from Isaiah 60 John wrote: ***And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*** Never again will sin stop God’s presence from filling the earth with life. The new garden is the total reversal of the original--what began as a single river flowing out of Eden to water a small garden will become an endless river of life flowing from the throne of the Lamb. As the prophets promised, “*a spring will go out from the house of the Lord...so everything will live where the river goes*” (cf. Zechariah 14:8, Ezekiel 47:1-9; Joel 3:18). In the end, God accomplishes by grace what we could never build through sweat: through the power of His Spirit, He pushes back darkness until His glorious garden covers every inch of earth!

These visions of restored life inspire us to take a renewed look at our present calling. Let’s be honest: Christ’s church falls far short of our final form, and the world loves bringing that up. It may seem logical to defend ourselves by pointing to our good works or our gradual progress, but a more helpful, gospel-focused response is to share this vision of beauty unleashed by Christ’s work! Deep down, humans long for a world without corruption, cancer, grief, and division. But most attempts to build one come straight from Babylon’s tired playbook--demanding we exhaust ourselves building higher walls to keep enemies out and ourselves safe within. ***Revelation 21*** reveals there’s a redemptively better way--God’s city won’t rise from human sweat, ambition or burnout. It comes down as a gift from the Father, ***Lamb*** and Holy Spirit. These glorious glimpses of eternity clarify our place in the present. They unveil the church as “*a people*” with an unshakable identity (***10-14***), marked by invincible security (***15-17***), living in a culture of openness (***18-27***) and blossoming into a healing garden (***22:1-5***). Jesus didn’t leave us to pull this off alone. He sent back His Spirit to indwell and empower us to lean into these realities right now—not by working ourselves to exhaustion but by resting in the finished work of Christ. And out of that rest, we can start living like a counterculture to Babylon. What does that look like? It can involve speaking up when companies exploit people for profit. It can mean forgiving those who’ve hurt us. And it can include stepping

out from behind our walls of anxiety and shame to bask in the Lamb's restorative light. Church, may this vision inspire us to stop building Babylon's walls and pull together to become ***The Bride*** whose ***gates stand wide open*** forever. Because, as we often say, God's people never need to take a next step alone!

Sunday to Monday Connection: Several made in the notes above

- **Question:** See above and below
- **Next Step:** See above
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. In what ways does Revelation 21–22 conclude the book of Revelation, the New Testament, and the entire Christian Bible?
2. How might the final chapters of Revelation help shape the mission of our particular Christian community? What are the implications for us as believers who live in an inaugurated, but still to be fulfilled, spiritual temple?
3. Are we aware of the presence of God in our midst? What does this mean for our understanding of the need for personal and corporate holiness? Do we truly conduct our daily lives as if we were living in His presence? How can this encourage us in the practice of prayer?
4. In what sense is Revelation a book both for and about the oppressed? How can readers who are not among the oppressed nonetheless read and heed Revelation?

Other charts:

Feature	The Prostitute (Rev 17-18) (Babylon, Systemic Rebellion)	The Bride (Rev 12, 19, 21) (New Jerusalem, City of Peace)
Location	Found in Wilderness .	Found in Wilderness , then Heaven .
Clothing	Purple and scarlet (Man-made royalty)	Fine linen, bright and clean (Divine purity)

Feature	The Prostitute (Rev 17-18) (Babylon, Systemic Rebellion)	The Bride (Rev 12, 19, 21) (New Jerusalem, City of Peace)
Decor	Covered in gold and jewels (External/Stolen)	Radiant with God's glory (Inherent/Internal)
The Cup	Holds a cup of abominations .	Drinks Cup of the Lamb (New Covenant)
Outcome	Becomes a haunt for demons .	Becomes the dwelling of God .

<u>THE OLD (17-20)</u>	<u>REPLACED BY (21-22)</u>	<u>REPRESENTING</u>
The Corrupt Prostitute	The Pure Bride	Restored Relationship
The Greedy City of Babylon	The City of Peace, New Jerusalem	Restored Society
The Selfish Beast	The Sacrificial Lamb	Restored Governance
The Chaotic Sea	The Calm River of Life	Restored Nature

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PROMISED IN</u>	<u>FULFILLED IN</u>
Tree of life in God's Paradise	2:7	22:2
Exclusion from the 2 nd death	2:11	21:7-8
A bright stone and star	2:17, 28	21:11-23; 22:5, 16
Reigning with Christ	2:26-27; 3:21	22:5
Name written in book of life	3:5	21:27
Bright garments as a reward	3:5	21:2, 9ff
Inclusion in the new temple	3:12	21:22ff
Participation in New Jerusalem	3:12	21:2, 10
God's name written on them	3:12	22:4

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Chapter Summary:** “After the final judgment, and thus elimination, of evil, John turns his attention to the great future God has in store for his own. The material is presented in three rather clear parts. The opening paragraph (21:1–8) appears to serve the twofold purpose of bringing closure to much that has preceded, and especially of functioning as a kind of catch-all introduction to the whole. That is followed in turn by an extended description of the ‘new Jerusalem’ (21:9–27), wherein God’s people from both covenants appear

together, albeit here by way of their primary representatives: the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The city itself, which ‘shone with the glory of God’ (v. 11), is then described in some detail, focusing first on its physical characteristics (vv. 9–21) and then concluding with an overview of what gives it its glory, the presence of ‘the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb’ (vv. 22–27). Then, despite one of the most disastrous of all the chapter breaks in the New Testament, in 22:1–5 the city itself evolves into a kind of restored Eden, so as to embrace not just a restored Israel (with a ‘new Jerusalem,’ which has no temple) but a renewed earth as well...As noted, this opening paragraph serves the twin purposes of both introducing the final events (through 22:5) and bringing closure to what has immediately preceded...At the same time the present vision (note the ‘I saw’ in vv. 1 and 2) is held together by a series of promises made to the righteous: God’s own dwelling with his people, the elimination of sorrow, and the beginning of the new order, where ‘everything’ is now made ‘new.’” (Fee, 289-290)

- **Link with Exodus:** “When people decide they are going to read the Bible, they often begin, naturally enough, with the book of Genesis. Encouraged by the fast-paced story with its drama, incident and passion, they often move on to the book of Exodus, expecting more of the same. And to begin with they are not disappointed. In fact, the first 20 chapters of that 40-chapter book are just as full of drama, if not more so. But then the trail appears to go cold. Suddenly we hit a seam of detailed instructions about what to do if you want to sell your daughter as a slave (21:7), what happens when an ox gores someone to death (21:28), what you should do when your enemy’s donkey has collapsed (23:5), and so on. Interesting in their way, but not quite what one had expected. Not such fun. And so some give up, and abandon the quest for whole-Bible reading. Which is a thousand pities; because the rest of the book of Exodus, from chapter 24 onwards, is one long drama about God dwelling in the midst of his people. Exodus is all about how the God who rescued his people from Egypt through the great plagues, and brought them to the awesome vision of Sinai and gave them the Law, then commanded his own dwelling to be built to specific instructions. And by the end of the book it was done...That is how the book of Exodus works. It is also, in more ways than most people realize, how the book of Revelation works. We have seen the great plagues, like the plagues of Egypt. We have seen the redeemed people standing by the sea, singing the song of Moses and the lamb. We have seen the great deception, the great idolatrous system, the great whore Babylon, clothed in gold and silver and jewels but inside full of vile, unclean and abominable oppression, lust, violence and degradation. Babylon is the parody, the bride is the reality, as the golden calf was the parody and the Tabernacle the reality. Now at last, as with the Tabernacle, ‘God has come to dwell with humans’ (verse 3). The jewels which Babylon wore, like the golden earrings out of which Aaron made the calf, are tawdry and worthless beside the precious stones with which the city’s foundations are decorated (verses 19–21).” (Wright, 192-193)

- **The measurements:** “This city stands in stark contrast to the idolatrous, oppressive city of Babylon portrayed in chapters 17–18, the city that is fallen and judged. The new Jerusalem is ‘God’s alternative to Rome’s empire’ and to subsequent incarnations of Babylon. One way Revelation portrays the New Jerusalem as God’s alternative to Babylon is by its very size: 12,000 stadia (1,500 miles) in length, width, and height means that the city ‘has a footprint approximately equal in size to the entire land mass of the Roman empire’; it is ‘large enough to encompass ... the world as John knew it.’ It is probably depicted as square because the ancient ideal of perfection, especially for a city, was a square; indeed, Babylon was remembered as a square (Herodotus, History 1.178). But Revelation goes a dimension further and portrays the city as a cube, because the Holy of Holies was a cube (1 Kings 6:20), and the victorious children of God are a community of royal priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).” (Gorman, 162)
- **Measuring sticks:** “This measuring of the city-temple here figuratively represents the placing of God’s boundaries around the city by which it is protected from harm and from the entrance of any form of evil. The measuring is thus the same as the sealing of believers pictured in 7:3 (on which see). In 11:1–2, the angel also measures the temple, which there represents the church as the place of God’s dwelling on earth. In that case, however, only the inner court (representing the security of the believers’ place with God) is measured, whereas the outer court (presenting the vulnerability of the church to attack and persecution) is left unmeasured. Now, however, the entire temple is measured, for in the consummated form of the temple God’s people are protected in every way, spiritually as well as physically (cf. v. 4).” (Beale, 482)
- **The significance of 24:** “The number twenty-four (the sum of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles) has also occurred in the scene of the twenty-four elders in 4:3–4. In both scenes, the glory of God shines like jasper (4:3; 21:11), suggesting that the twenty-four elders of ch. 4 are angelic beings representing the sum of all God’s people of both covenants (see on 4:4). The number twenty-four may also be based collectively on David’s organization of the cult of temple servants into twenty-four orders of priests (1 Chron. 24:3–19), twenty-four Levitical gatekeepers (1 Chron. 26:17–19), and twenty-four orders of Levites who were commissioned (1 Chron. 25:1–31) to prophesy ‘in giving thanks and praising the Lord’ (25:3). Jewish tradition (the Qumran peshar on Isaiah 54) explained the precious stones of Isa. 54:11–12 as symbols of the twelve priests and the heads of the twelve tribes who represented Israel before God. The Chronicles background is enhanced here because of the temple context throughout ch. 21 and the Jewish ‘priestly’ interpretation of Isa. 54:11–12 in association with the number twenty-four. The integration of the apostles together with the tribes of Israel as part of the city-temple’s structure (the structure prophesied in Ezekiel 40–48) confirms further our assessment in 7:15; 11:1–2; and 21:2–3 that the multiracial Christian church will be the redeemed group who, together with Christ, will fulfill the Ezekiel prophecy about the future temple and city. This is in line

with other NT passages where the whole covenant community forms a spiritual temple in which God's presence dwells (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:5)." (Beale, 479-480)

- **Israel and the Church:** "The wall's foundation stones were adorned with every kind of precious stone. This develops the theme of the bride's adornment introduced in v. 2. The list of the twelve jewels is based on the twelve stones in the high priest's breast piece of judgment (Exod. 28:17–20; 39:8–14). Eight of the stones in the Exodus lists are repeated here, and the others are rough equivalents. Written on each stone of the breast piece was the name of one of the twelve tribes (Exod. 28:21; 39:14), so that when the priest entered the temple to perform his duties, he represented all the tribes of Israel. The vision of Rev. 21:19–20 thus applies to the foundation stones of the new city-temple the jewels representing the tribes of Israel in Exodus. This means that the tribes of Israel, God's preeminent people in the OT, are being equated with the apostles as the foundation of the new city-temple, since the names of the twelve apostles are written on those foundations (v. 14). The apostles are thus the paramount representatives of true, end-time Israel, the church (see on v. 14)." (Beale, 486)

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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