

Revelation 21:1-22:5: Pictures of Paradise

Attention

- 1) The Church on earth, or the Church in Heaven? Which is the subject of the picture in Revelation 21-22?
 - a. The context of this passage compels me to conclude it is the latter: the glorified Church in Heaven.
 - i. Though not a chronological book, the sequence places this after the Final Judgment (20:11-15).
 - ii. New Jerusalem is associated with the new heavens and new earth.
 - iii. The former things associated with mortality have passed away.
 - iv. New Jerusalem appears to correspond to the eternal punishment of the wicked. (21:8)
 - v. God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. (21:22; cf. Eph. 2:22)
 - vi. Citizens shall see the face of God. (22:5)
 - vii. The tree of life is there, but that tree is promised to those who overcome. (2:7; 12:11)
 - b. These factors are difficult, at least for me, to reconcile with the Church on earth prior to Christ's return.
- 2) So why would some think these chapters picture the church on earth? Because of the many similarities.
 - a. The church of our Lord is described as God's holy city (Ga. 4:26) and as the bride of Christ (2Co. 11:2).
 - b. The parallels between the church now and the church then are instructive, not to be lightly dismissed.
- 3) The Church on earth should aspire to reflect the glory of Heaven, though its reflection will be imperfect.
 - a. What we will experience there is what, insofar as possible, we ought to seek to produce here.
 - b. The spiritual life is about imitation and preparation, seeking harmony and unity with the Savior above.
- 4) Consider four features of the Heavenly Jerusalem and some of the corresponding applications for today.

I. Perfect Fellowship

A. *Then*

- i. The fellowship of the New Jerusalem will be perfect; nothing unholy or unclean will ever enter.
 - a) The citizens of that city will be sons of God and heirs of the inheritance He promises. **21:7**
 - b) The evil, unholy, unbelieving, dishonest, and cowardly will be cast into a lake of fire. **21:8**
- ii. It is not gold or mansions that make it Heaven; Heaven's glory is the presence of God. **21:22-23**
 - a) The call of God is a call toward holiness; 'Be holy for I am holy;' without it, none will see the Lord.
 - b) Heaven will be a place where that fellowship is perfectly realized because only saints will be there.

B. *Now*

- i. Fellowship in Christ's church and churches on earth is imperfect; some are included God will not accept.
 - a) Jesus pictured the kingdom as a net that captured many fish, both good and bad. **Mt. 13:47-50**
 - b) It is not only in the world we dwell among unholy men; it is also, unfortunately, in the church!
- ii. It may be inevitable that our fellowship here will be tainted, but we should not be content with it so.
 - a) Local church fellowship should reflect God's choices about fellowship. (cf. Ac. 9:26-28; 18:27; 1Co. 5)
 - b) We should not tolerate here those we know would not be accepted there; Christ's bride must be pure.
- iii. Further, we must recognize the practical necessity of living holy here so that we may be accepted there.
 - a) Just because I am accepted by the church here doesn't guarantee Christ will know me! **Mt. 7:21-23**
 - b) I can't take for granted entrance to Heaven but must seek it with fear and trembling. **Php. 2:12-13**

II. Perfect Provisions

A. *Then*

- i. The picture of Heaven we find in this passage is not just a city, it is the restored garden in Eden.
 - a) There is a pure river of life flowing from the throne, and the tree of life, bearing year round. **22:1-2**
 - b) The Lord will provide for His people, giving the water of life to everyone who thirsts. **21:6; Mt. 5:6**
- ii. The first two chapters show man living in paradise, all of his needs met, enjoying the fellowship of God.
 - a) The next eleven hundred and eighty-five chapters show his pain, unmet needs, separation from God.
 - b) The last two chapters show the restoration of what was lost at Eden; every need fully met by God.

B. *Now*

- i. Much of man's hardship, pain, and frustration has been the result of desiring other things than God.
 - a) The secret to contentment is mastering your desires; only then can you truly accept what you have.
 - b) As long as our hearts are set on things we don't have, we'll never be satisfied with what we do.

- ii. Dissatisfaction with God's provisions led to the first sin; not true need, but a sinful longing for more.
 - a) Adam and Eve had everything man should want, but they wanted something more. **Ge. 3:4-6**
 - b) How much better if they had perceived what was truly valuable and good and been content!
- iii. We must learn to distinguish between the true needs of our soul and the greedy desires of our flesh.
 - a) It is not merely learning to want less; we must learn to want one thing but want it more. **Ps. 73:25-26**
 - b) We would not be satisfied in Eden if we do not long for, love, and content ourselves with God here.

III. Perfect Protection

A. Then

- i. John goes into some detail to describe the fortifications of God's city, New Jerusalem. **21:9-27**
 - a) The features of the physical structure are built around the number 12, a place for God's people.
 - b) In fact, the description incorporates features of God's holy nation in both testaments. **21:12, 14**
- ii. The city pictured in this vision is enormous, and its fortifications render it impregnable against assault.
 - a) Yet it is not so fortified because of external threats; the city is a place of peace; its gates never shut.
 - b) It needs no army to defend it because it is well built and rests on a perfect foundation. **21:14, 27**

B. Now

- i. That city, the glorified church, has the same foundation as the church today. **Eph. 2:19-22**
 - a) The stability of the city is derived from the strength of its foundation: the apostles of the Lamb.
 - b) Without a strong foundation, that city would be like a house built on sand. (cf. Mt. 7:24-27)
- ii. If the apostles will be the church's foundation then, we need to make sure we're building on them now.
 - a) Men have tried different ways to establish authority: subjective (Gnostic) and ecclesiastical (Catholic).
 - b) But the only true foundation for doctrine and practice is the revelation given through the apostles!
- iii. It is an ancient idea, not a new one, that men should read their Bibles and do what it says.
 - a) 'Hear and obey' the Master is the foundation for a spiritual life. **Mt. 7:24-27**
 - b) What is your life being built upon? Is it built as strong and secure as New Jerusalem?

IV. Perfect Joy

A. Then

- i. How could anyone be unhappy in a place like New Jerusalem? It is perfection. It is the fullness of joy.
 - a) That city is the end of all pain and suffering. Death will be swallowed in victory. **21:1-5**
 - b) It will be the end of life in a sin-cursed world and the beginning of life as God intends it. **22:3-5**
- ii. Heaven has been represented in many different ways in literature and movies, but none can do justice.
 - a) This city is the completeness of joy; there is nothing lacking there, nothing to mar the experience.
 - b) That is the place our Savior has prepared for His people. But are we the people prepared for it?

B. Now

- i. We read this description of New Jerusalem, but still many Christians aren't anxious to go.
 - a) I spent 24 days in a hospital eleven years ago; it was a good experience; I liked the people a lot.
 - b) But I didn't think twice about leaving when it was time to go; I was anxious to go home.
- ii. How did the apostles view their eternal prospects? With reluctance? Was it something they dreaded?
 - a) How did Paul view his life and his imminent death? **Php. 1:19-24; 2Ti. 4:6-8**
 - b) How did Peter instruct believers to view the certainty of this world's end? **2Pe. 3:11-14**
- iii. You can't cling too tightly to this world and expect to have the opportunity to embrace the next one.
 - a) You cannot love this world and the Father, or the things of this world and the things of the next.
 - b) You must decide where your true citizenship lies: in America, or in New Jerusalem. **He. 11:13-16**

Action

- 1) The Savior went to the cross, rose from the grave, and ascended to God's right hand to prepare a place for us.
- 2) He is the way, the truth, and the life; none will enter there except those who enter through Him.