

THE CITY OF GOD: Hebrews 12:22

We're still on Hebrews chapter 11. Maybe some of you wish that I would quit harping on it, but it's right there in verse 22, and if it's there, I've got to preach it, and I want you to get it.

Verse 22, "But you have come to Mount Zion." We talked about Mount Zion last week, and we identified Mount Zion. He further identifies Mount Zion. You have not only come to Mount Zion, but you have come to the city of the living God. He very plainly identifies the city of the living God as the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the city of God to which we have come. I think as we identified Mount Zion, we need to identify the city of God. To do that, we will turn to a great passage in the book of Revelation, chapter 21, and let chapter 21 identify the city.

In verse 1, John said, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no longer any sea." And as we have seen, we don't take the symbols of the book of Revelation literally, although some scholars try to, it is impossible to make sense out of it if we do. We look to scripture to interpret scripture. In II Corinthians 5, verse 17, Paul says that in Jesus Christ, and in what God is doing in and through Him, "the old things passed away; behold, new things have come," and Revelations 21, verse 5, "Behold, I am making all things new." This includes the heavens and the earth.

But notice verse 2, John said, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." John sees in symbolic form, and in picture form, in a vision, what the Hebrew writer says, "To which we have come." He sees that city, the heavenly Jerusalem. He describes her as a bride adorned for her husband. And at that point he said, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold,' (or look, pay attention to what you are seeing) the tabernacle of God is among men." When the holy city, the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven he says, "God has tabernacled among men, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be among them."

The emphasis is that God is dwelling in His people. Twice he says, "That he is among them," once he says, "He dwells among them," and another time he says, "He tabernacles among them." I think we get the point. And that is the place where "God shall wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." Now, actually, in reality and physically, these things have not passed away, **but in the presence of God, this verse becomes true.**

Verse 5, "And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold I am making all things new.'" Then He told John to "Write, for these words are faithful and true. And He said to me (John) 'It is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.'" This is the same thing that Jesus said when He bowed His head on the cross and said, "It is finished." God has done what He had set out to do. He said, "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water life without cost." This was a promise from the prophets that would happen when the Messiah comes. And in John 7, verse 38, Jesus said, "He who believes on Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his

innermost being shall flow forth these rivers of living water.” In John 4, verse 14, Jesus said, “but whoever drinks of that water that I shall give him shall never thirst again, he will never thirst again.”

Revelations 21, verse 7, “He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.” There are some who will not be a part of this. They will know nothing about it. They will not be included in it. He says, verse 8, “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake of fire that burns with fire and brimstone.” They have no part in the city, they have no part in life. Their part, all they have to look forward to is the lake of fire, which he identifies as, “the second death.”

Now notice, verse 9, “One of the angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me saying, ‘**come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb**’.” **This is the key statement, I’m going to show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.** Ephesians 5, verse 32, Paul tells us that is the church. The church is the wife of the lamb, Christ is the lamb. The church is the bride, Christ is the bridegroom.

Verse 10, “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me” the bride, the wife of the lamb . . . He showed me the church, but he puts it in these words, “and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” That is the same city to which the Hebrew writer says, “We have come.” In reality, we have come (past tense, we are already there) to the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, verse 11, “having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.” Then he goes on through this chapter.

For the first five verses of chapter 22, he describes this city, which he calls the bride of Christ, Jerusalem, and the holy city. Today we want to look at one aspect of this city, it is the city of God. **You have come to the city of God. You have come to the new Jerusalem, to the holy city. It is the city of God.**

The first thing we will say about it is what he says in verses 2 and verse 10. The holy city, the new Jerusalem, the city to which we have come, which is the bride of Christ, he says it “comes down out of heaven from God.” In verse 10 he emphasizes that again, it is a city “coming down out of heaven from God.” The emphasis is that God is dwelling among His people, and this city is coming down out of heaven . . . It is coming from heaven to the earth, and it is coming from God.

Now let's look at the prophesy concerning this. In Isaiah 65, we'll read, first of all, verses 17 through 19, and then we'll come back to this passage. Notice this city in prophesy. This is what Isaiah says about it, verse 17. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind,” these are the same words that John is using in Revelation 21. Isaiah tells us what he is talking about, verse 18, “But be glad and rejoice forever

in what I create;" he explains what God is going to create, "For behold, I create Jerusalem *for* rejoicing, and her people *for* gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people." He is not talking about the physical Jerusalem because it's already created, it's already there. He is talking about a new Jerusalem that He creates in which there will be rejoicing and gladness, and a place where He will be rejoicing and where He will be glad in His people. So, the new Jerusalem is from God.

If you want to know what God is doing in the world, what He is accomplishing in the world, you look at the church. People are expecting God to do great things, but whatever God does, He is going to do it in His people because that is where He dwells. Now I know the truth of what David says . . . you know, there is nothing that can contain God. The heavens cannot contain Him. God cannot be limited in any way.

But throughout the Old Testament, and the prophesy is always there, and it is fulfilled in the New Testament, that God's desire has always been to dwell in His people and dwell among them, that is what Isaiah is prophesying will happen in chapter 65 . . . God will create Jerusalem, "For Behold, I create Jerusalem," a new Jerusalem to be specific, and it is the new Jerusalem described in Revelations 21.

Let me say, briefly, three things about this fact: first, this is through Christ. God dwells in His people through Christ. Colossians chapter 1, begin in verse 19, "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." Whatever God wanted to reveal to man about Himself under the new covenant, He revealed it in Christ. God will never reveal any more about Himself than what He has revealed in Christ.

Christ became the human instrument through which God made Himself known to the world under the new covenant. Verse 20, "and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself." God is not going to reconcile anything, or make anything right, outside of Christ. Everything that God does, He does through Christ, "having made peace through the blood of the cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or in heaven." Everything that God is doing, He is doing it through Christ. Verse 21, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, He has now reconciled you (we have been reconciled, we are a part of what God is doing) in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." God is doing this through Christ.

That is what he says in Ephesians 5, beginning in verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." You husbands should all think of your wives as Christ, and love her just like you love Christ, and just like Christ loved the church. Verse 26, "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself" **Now notice, he doesn't say that Christ is going to present her to Himself sometime in the future. This idea of the bride of Christ, the wedding taking place, and the marriage supper of the lamb taking place somewhere in the future . . . I do not think is what he is talking about. He is talking about something that**

takes place right now. Verse 27, "That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or a wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." When we look at the church today, we say, well that is not true, that is the way she is going to be. That is not the way she is going to be, that is the way she is now. When Christ died for her and paid the price, the ransom, whenever He shed His blood and purchased her, that means that the spots, and the wrinkles, and all such things were taken away at His death. If there is a spot, a wrinkle or any such thing there now, if she is not holy and blameless, then she is not a part of the bride of Christ, because the bride of Christ is without wrinkle, or spot, or any such thing; why, because Christ loved her.

And of course, verse 28, he tells husbands to love their wife in the same way. Verse 32, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking in reference to Christ and the church." He is not talking about something in the future, he is not talking about something that is going to be, he is talking about Christ and His church. What God is doing in the city of God, He is doing through Christ. By the same token, when we say, He is doing it through Christ, we know that Jesus is not here in physical form, He went back to heaven, He does not walk among men in a physical body, His body, the church, is physically in the world, we are doing it as Christ directs the church, Christ is the head, we are His body (Colosians 1:18).

The second point: God is doing it through His Spirit. I Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 9, I hope this scripture becomes meaningful to you. It is quoting from the Old Testament, "but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.'" Usually, the only time you will hear this is at a funeral. But go on, read verse 10, "For God has revealed them," **what has He revealed? He has revealed the things which the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, and things which have not entered the heart of man** "For God has revealed *them* to us (past tense) through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." The spirit searches the depths of God.

Verse 12, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God." That same Spirit which searches the very depths of God has been given to us. We have that Spirit. This is no small matter. This is not something that just gives you goosebumps, or makes you emotional, or puts you on a spiritual high. It is not something that you feel.

It is something you have experienced because you are in Christ. He has given you the Spirit, which is from God. The purpose of that, why he did it, according to this text, is so we might know the "things freely given us by God." That we might know things which the eye of man has not seen, and the ear of man has not heard, and things which has never entered into the heart of man before, we can now know them, and should know them. Those things which the world does not hear, and cannot hear, and the world does not see, and cannot perceive, by the Holy Spirit he says, "We know them."

It's amazing to me the number of people who claim to be overwhelmed with the Holy Spirit, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, and who have such a shallow knowledge of the things of God. The reason He gives us the Spirit is that we might know the things freely given us by God.

Verse 13, Paul said, "We are speaking these things, not in words taught by human wisdom," now notice this, "but those taught by the spirit." That is why we need to use scriptural words, spiritual words to describe spiritual things. Such words as the trinity, the rapture, and all of these good things that people preach so much about today, are not found in scripture, they are not spiritual words, they have no spiritual thought, and they are not from God.

Now notice something else, on down in verse 16, he quotes from Isaiah 40, and asks the question, "Who has known the mind of the Lord that we should instruct him?" The answer ordinarily would be nobody. Certainly, the world doesn't know the mind of the Lord. But Paul says, "We have the mind of Christ." Where did we get it? We got it when He gave us the Spirit that we might know the things from God.

What God is doing in His city, what He is doing by dwelling in His people, He does not only through Christ, but also through the Spirit. And if that is true, then II Corinthians 5:17 through 20 is true also, "All things are new." We need to understand this. In Christ all things are new. No wonder he says, I saw a new heaven and a new earth. No wonder the symbols of Revelation and the prophesy of Isaiah picture a new heaven and a new earth, because, to the Christian, all things are new, including himself. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, the new things have come (past tense, it is done, the new things are here and available to us by faith; just like "But you have come (past tense) to Mt Zion and to the city of the living God," we are there in the city now, by faith in God and faith in what God tells us about us)." When did these new come? They are coming all the time. They come in Christ, see? If any man be in Christ, to him all things are new.

All these things are from God, that is why the city is coming down out of God from heaven. These things are from God. God was in Christ reconciling the world. II Corinthians 5, verse 20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors." And it goes on in chapter 6, verse 1, "We are working together with God." Imagine that, we are working together with God. God is not only working, but we are working with Him, in Christ. The church is in partnership with God. He talks about that in chapter 6, and he closes that chapter by saying, verse 16, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND I WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE." The entire emphasis is God's presence among His people. So you see, this is from God.

Now, go back to Revelation, this city of God to which we have come. In Revelation 21, notice the second thing about it, begin in verse 10, "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and

high mountain, and showed me the holy city, the Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." That is the first thing, it comes out of heaven from God, God is among his people. Here is **the second thing, verse 11, "having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper."** **Now I understand what he is talking about.** He is talking about the city of God. He is talking about the church, which has no spot or wrinkle or any such thing. **He is talking about the bride, the wife of the Lamb, the church, and it has the glory of God.**

What is the glory of God? I think it is many things in scripture. But if you go back to the Old Testament, when Moses built the tabernacle and they presented it to the Lord, they had all things ready as God said for them to do. The cloud of smoke, the cloud came down and filled the tabernacle. Later on, it filled the temple, it filled Solomon's temple in the same way. That cloud was described as the glory of God or the presence of God. When they finished the tabernacle in the temple, God made His presence known, and His presence was called the glory. The glory cloud of the Old Testament signified the presence of God. **The church, then, has the glory of God in it, because God is dwelling in His people.**

There is an interesting thing about the glory of God. Go back to a story found in I Samuel, chapter 4, this is the death of Eli, the priest, and his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, according to verse 19, "was pregnant and about to give birth; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was taken (the Philistines had come up and stolen the ark of God, David brought it back about a 100 years later, but this is when the Philistines stole the ark), and that her father-in-law and her husband had died, she kneeled down and gave birth for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death" (she died in childbirth) "the women who stood by her said to her, 'Do not be afraid, for you have given birth to a son,' but she didn't answer or pay attention."

It's a sad story, the ark had been stolen, her father-in-law had died (had been killed), her husband also had died, she is having this baby, and later she dies in childbirth. But before she dies, verse 21, "And she called the boy Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel,' because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken.'"

The ark of God, remember, symbolized the presence of God. When the Philistines stole the ark and took it, it meant that the glory of God was taken away also. All of this was a physical emblem of the presence of God. When the ark was taken, Israel had sunk so low that the glory of God was gone also.

There is another passage over in Ezekiel. This is an interesting scenario of what happens with the glory of God. We are first introduced to the glory of God in Ezekiel's vision in chapter 8, verses 3 and 4, in the middle of that verse, it says he was brought into the visions of God in Jerusalem, in the vision, he looked to the entrance of the north gate on the inner court of the Tabernacle, and saw where the seat of idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located, then verse 4, (remember this is a time when Israel had sunk into idolatry, they had brought idol

worship into the very court of the temple itself, and Ezekiel sees in this vision all of this idolatry going on, but he says, "Behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there," in the court of the temple.

Now go over to the 10th chapter of Ezekiel, verse 4. "Then the glory of the Lord (in these chapters he is describing the idolatry of Israel that continues to occur in the temple) went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of God." Ordinarily, the glory of God would have been in the Holy of Holies, but now, the glory goes up, "to the threshold" (the entrance to the temple). Go now to chapter 10, verse 18, "Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim . . . (verse 19) and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them." In chapter 11, verse 23, "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood over the mountain, which is east of the city." **That is the story of the glory of God departing from Israel. It is put in the form of Ezekiel's vision of the temple. The glory goes from the most holy place, then to different places, eventually leaving Israel because of their sin.**

Now, if you go over to Isaiah chapter 60, beginning in verse 1, Isaiah gives a prophecy about the glory of the Lord, but this is in the future, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples" (that is the understatement of the year, darkness is going to be upon the face of the earth, not physical, but spiritual darkness is going to settle upon the minds and the hearts of the people, a deep darkness), then he said, "But the Lord will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. And nations will come to your light, and the kings to the brightness of your rising."

All of that sounds good, but what is he talking about? Go to verse 14, Isaiah chapter 60, "And the sons of those who afflict you will come and bow down before you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the sole of your feet; and they will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." **He is talking about the city of God, the glory of God will be brought back, he is talking about the Zion of Israel. He is talking about Hebrews 12:22, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God." It was not brought back to the temple, and it was not brought back to the Jews, it was brought back to the new Jerusalem, the city of God, the bride, the wife of Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church.**

The glory of God has returned to the earth, God dwells in His people, and God dwells in His church. The only presence of God in the world today is in His church. The only way the world is going to be influenced by God is through the church (Is 60:14, "all of those who despised you will bow themselves at the sole of your feet" and Rev 21:24, "the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." The kings of the earth are going to surrender their glory to the city). **What I am saying is: do not take for granted the church.** It may be a small and struggling congregation, it may not seemingly have any influence in the peoples around it, but that is the

only place on earth that the glory of God is. The glory of God, or the presence of God, will only be in those who are faithful to His word. **Just because you have an ornate temple with all of its priests, and all of its functions, and all of its ritual, does not mean that the glory of God is there.**

We saw in Ezekiel that the glory departed because things just were not right in the temple. Paganism and idolatry were being brought into the house of God. The glory of God left it. The temple was simply an empty shell. Today, a church can have all of the ritual, and all of the trappings, and everything that the world says a church ought to have, and it have no glory in it, it is just empty.

The third thing we want to discuss is verse 16, where the city is spoken of as a cube, about length, and width, and height. If we rely on scripture to interpret scripture, length, and breadth, and width, and height, according to Paul in Ephesians, refers to the love of God. The church not only has been brought down from heaven by God, not only is it filled with the glory of God, it is also filled with the love of God.