



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 21: 9-22; Revelation 22:

1-5 Revelation

"The City of God"

TRANSCRIPT

We are coming to the end of our study in the Book of Revelation. We have a rather lengthy text this morning. It's Revelation chapter 21 verse 9, through chapter 22 verse 5. It is lengthy, and there's a great deal of detail in this text, which I try to deal with. But, you don't realize what you're doing so much when you're in the study as you do when you're in the pulpit. You get a different sense of things from the preaching of it. And I realize that so much detail here that it could be that you miss the forest through the trees.

I think if I could summarize this very simply, and we'll bear this in mind as we go through the reading and then through the teaching that there are two main thoughts, in my mind at least, that John is communicating in this vision. It's a vision of eternal state. It's a vision of Jerusalem to come, that comes down out of heaven, the new Jerusalem. The eternal state. I think there are two points that he's making here, and that, first of all, is the glory of it. The magnificence of it. And secondly, the intimacy of it. It'll be a splendid realm in which we live. A new heavens, a new earth, a new Jerusalem. And he describes it analogically through analogy with magnificent stones and colossal walls, and things of that nature to bring out the splendor of it. But at the heart of it all is God. It is the Lamb. It is Jesus Christ. That's really the glory of heaven and the world to come. It's not the splendor of it; it's the person that we will see and we will be with. That's the great vision that John has, and that's the great blessing that we will have.

But do we really consider that a great blessing? That we'll see Christ, that we'll be with Him? Well, we should, and that's certainly the focus here, and that should be, well, maybe the prayer that each of us have. That that will be our great desire: to know Christ, and to see Him, and to be with Him. Well, with all that in mind, let's begin reading with verse 9 of chapter 21:

Then one of the seven 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."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony, one way to pronounce it. I think the proper pronunciation is cal-sid-nee. The fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; 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 one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its

light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we come to a glorious text of Scripture, one that tells us of our future and the greatness of it. We give You praise for that, and we give You thanks for that because we who have believed in Jesus Christ and have done so because our names are written in the Book of Life are there and have that that glorious future, and have believed because of Your grace. We thank You for the Lamb, a name that's so prominent in this text. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ who came as a Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and we thank You that He died in our place so that we who have believed in Him have forgiveness, have been made sons and daughters of God. We're Your children and we have this inheritance. And Father, as we study it, I pray that You'd impress upon us the greatness of it, and may it give us perspective on life that we need, that this life in which we live is brief. It's temporal. It's passing away. But what we are moving toward is eternal. That's to be the focus of our lives. And if we have that as a focus of our lives, we'll live proper lives in the midst of this temporal world in which we presently live.

So, bless us, Lord, with proper understanding of things. Pray for those that have particular needs. I know the needs are great. We all have needs, Father; we're dependent upon You for everything. You bless us in many ways. Bless us beyond all

that we ask or think, but You bring trials into our lives as well. Some are physical. Some are spiritual, emotional. We pray for all of those that You'd bless. Bless those who are in ill health. We pray that You'd provide for them and give them healing mercy. And for those that are discouraged through the hardships of life, encourage them. Hold them up. Help all of us, Father, to focus on the great promises that You've given us, and to know that You're always with us. It's the great promise we have of the future that You will be with us forever, and we'll be with You. But, You're with us now. You'll never forsake us. We give You praise and thanks for that. We pray that You'd prepare our hearts for time of study and worship together, and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Someone has said that the Book of Revelation could be characterized as a tale of two cities. One city is a harlot, and the other is a bride. Both cities invite humanity to come to them and share their destinies. The harlot city is destined for destruction. The bride city will stand for eternity. In John's final vision in the Book of Revelation, he sees the eternal city, the bride, coming down from heaven.

And in verse 9 of chapter 21, through verse 5 of chapter 22, he describes it. He first describes its walls and gates and foundations. Then, he describes its great dimensions and its rich materials, before describing the blessings within it. It is a glorious city.

But, to understand the vision John is given, we must understand that it is a vision. He sees a real city that will be an actual place where the saints will dwell forever. But, he describes it in figurative language. This is not a literal description of the city, but a symbolic representation of the new Jerusalem. Now, I say that because I think that's made very clear to us from the very outset of this book, and throughout our studies in the Book of Revelation, we have frequently gone back to the first verse of the book. Because if we don't understand that, we'll never quite fully grasp how the book is to be interpreted.

And there in the very first verse, John tells us that these things that he reveals in the book were communicated to him in symbols. That's the meaning of the word "communicate." It means something like "signified," or maybe we could translate that, "sign-ified." And really, the only way we could have any understanding of what

awaits us in the new heaven and the new earth is through pictures. It's through analogies. It's through symbols.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 9 that the things God has prepared for those who love Him have not entered into the heart of man. We've never seen them. We've never heard them. We have no frame of reference, really. It's beyond us. Later in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, he indicates just how different these future things are with a statement that he makes about the resurrection. In verse 35, he asks what kind of body we will have. He doesn't answer with a description. He can't really give a description. What he does is he makes an analogy between a seed that is sown and the plant that grows. The grain becomes wheat. The seed becomes a flower. There's a real connection between the two, but very little or no comparison. How could anyone look at a sunflower seed, you know, that thing that the baseball players sit in the dugout chewing and spitting out; and imagine that a sunflower will grow from it. Well, who could study an acorn, and I mean study it hard. Look at it diligently. Day and night, and examine it, and examine the materials of which it's made, and consider its shape and all of that. And then, arrive at an oak tree that's inside of it. Because it will become that.

We'd never see the outcome of that. We can't imagine an oak tree from an acorn, or a sunflower from a seed. And it's the same with the resurrection body. It will be that much different, that much more glorious. If you want to get a sense of how great the resurrection body will be, look at your body in comparison to a seed, an acorn, and then compare that to an oak tree: the glory of it, the splendor of it. That will be the difference between the resurrection body and this present body. And the difference between the new heavens and the new earth, and this present world in which we live; and the new Jerusalem to come. They will be so changed as to bear little resemblance to what we now see. They're beyond our experience. They're beyond our ability to comprehend. They will be of a completely new and different dimension.

Now, that being the case, where do the words to describe something like that come from? Well, they don't exist. So, John uses words we do have to suggest the beauty of it, the infinity of it, the joy of it. He pictures it with rare gems, and tall walls, and clear rivers. Everything he says here falls far short of the reality to come.

But, it is a city. It is glorious. We know that. And, it is the destination of our pilgrimage on this earth. It is our future home. The city of God. John is on a mountaintop when he sees it come down from heaven. He described it earlier in verse 2. This isn't a second descent of the city, and this isn't a case of bad editing on his part. John gave a general description of the new heaven and new earth and the new Jerusalem in the first part of the chapter. Now, he focuses upon the city of that new heavens and new earth, and does so in some detail. It's very similar, I think, to Moses' account of the creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

Critics of the Bible like to say that that shows that Moses didn't write the Book of Genesis. There are two creation accounts and they conflict with one another. So, it's a demonstration that there was more than one author, or more than one school behind the Book of Genesis. But that's not the case. Moses is the writer and he knew exactly what he was doing. In chapter 1 of Genesis, he gives a general description of the creation, the six days of creation. But in chapter 2, he focuses upon the crown of creation, the most important aspect of creation as it will be from that point, an unfolding of the entire book. And that is the creation of man. And there, he gives a description of it in much more detail. He expands upon it.

And here, we have the same thing. Here, John focuses upon the city. He expands upon that city and describes it in detail. Its descent from heaven is a real event, but it also indicates something very significant about this blessing to come. This eternal blessing, this city to come, which we will inherit. It's we who are in Christ will inhabit for eternity. That is not man's achievement. Men could not build this city. Men could not merit this city. It comes from heaven. It is a gift of God. What was described in verse 2 as a city adorned like a bride is described here in verse 11 as a brilliant city, like a very costly stone.

Then, John describes it in some detail. He describes it outside and inside. In verses 12 through 14, he describes it as having four walls which were great and high. Each wall has three gates. Each gate has over it the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. According to verse 14, the wall and city were built on 12 foundations. And on each foundation is written the 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible, and my text has "12 foundation stones." But, in the Greek text, it's simply "foundations." It is the same word used here, as is used in Luke chapter 6 and verse 48 of a house built on a

foundation that withstood storms. That foundation was solid and firm, and so the house stood. So, we now have a description of a city built not on one foundation but 12 foundations.

What does all that mean? What's the significance? And this city that's described of having these great walls, why does it have these walls? Well, John was writing to people who lived in cities surrounded by walls, and ancient cities needed them for protection. So, they build large walls. Babylon's walls were famous for their height and width. But Babylon had enemies. There were no enemies or evil, for that matter, in the new heaven and the new earth. So, there's really no need for walls.

And I think that's the point, here. The great walls signify the eternal security of the city and its citizens. It's symbolic of that security that we have. And it's what the 12 foundations represent as well. What city has 12 foundations? The city should have at least a foundation be built well upon the bedrock if it's to stand. But this city not only has a foundation; it has 12 of them. And this one does have that, to signify that the city to come will stand firmly and stand forever. It cannot be shaken. This is an eternal city.

The names of the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles signify the saints of the old and the new covenant. They will be united. They will dwell together as one people of God and dwell together forever. They're all united in one person: the Lamb of verse 14. In fact, you'll notice the way the description is given and what is written on these walls, verse 14, the names of the 12 apostles are on the foundations, and the name of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

In fact, the word "Lamb," is used frequently in this passage. He's really the focus of this passage. That reminds us that we are all one people only in Christ. All saved in the same way, the only way, and that is through Christ alone. He is on the foundations of the city. No one outside of Christ, no unbeliever can be a part of this city. Universalism is an error. Only those in Christ will be members of this city.

But the believers who will be part of it will be many. This is not a small company. There will be multitudes together in that place. That's suggested by the 12 gates. They indicate abundant entrance. There's not just one gate of this city. There are 12 gates. Three gates on each side of the city, of the four walls. It indicates, as I say, abundant entrance. God's entrance, God's grace is abundant, and will save an innumerable multitude.

Well, that's suggested not only by the numerous gates, but also by the colossal dimensions of this city that are given in verses 16 and 17. The angel who was guiding John has a gold measuring rod. And with it, he measured the city. It's laid out in a square. It is a city of perfect symmetry. Each side is the same: 15,000 miles in length, width, and height. More than one commentator has commented on the size of it and described it as size that one said: beggars the mind. Another put it as a mind-boggling city in its size.

Well, to get a sense of the magnitude of the city, 15,000 miles is the distance between London and Athens. Or, also the distance between New York City and Houston. It's hard to imagine a city of that size that forms a perfect cube. But that is the description given to indicate the perfection, the vastness, and the completeness of the New Jerusalem.

But also, and more significantly, I think, the Holy of Holies in the temple, the place where God dwelt symbolically with His people, the place where His throne was, or the footstool of His feet of this world, the Holy of Holies was the shape of a cube. Well, this is the city of God. It is where He will dwell. He will be present with us. And that really is the essence of heaven. It is the essence of the world to come. God's presence with us and our presence with Him and knowing Him personally.

John will make that very point in a moment when he says that the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it. But first, he reveals the materials of the city: what it is made of. According to verse 11, the whole city shines with the brilliance of a rare jewel, like a crystal-clear jasper. And the material of the wall surrounding the city has the same splendor. In verse 18, John says it was jasper, which some think probably has the idea of a diamond. And the city, John says, was pure gold, like clear glass. Again, it resembles the Holy of Holies in the temple of Solomon, which was completely covered with gold.

But this is gold of a completely different order from what we know as gold. This is gold that is transparent and shimmers in the glory of God that fills the city. The 12 foundations of the city are 12 jewels, listed in verses 19 and 20. They give a variety of colors to the city. Sapphire is blue, emerald is green, chrysolite is yellow or gold, jacinth is red, amethyst is purple. Just to name some of them. But you get a sense of the radiance of the place, of the various colors and the splendor of it. And they're reminiscent of some things. They're reminiscent, first of all, of the breastplate

of the high priest. Aaron's breastplate had 12 stones for the 12 tribes of Israel. And so, perhaps that's suggested here, and suggests the worship that will go on there, and our place in it as priests. But also, in Ezekiel 28 and verse 14, we read of the holy mountain of God, where Lucifer lived before his fall, and where he walked, we're told, among the stones of fire.

Well, perhaps that's reflected here, which is to indicate that this is God's mountain. This is God's city. It is paradise, which is rich and glorious, as signified in these precious stones on which it is built. Its gates and streets are equally magnificent. In verse 21, John writes: "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls." That's obviously other worldly pearls that he's describing there. We can imagine gates that are made of pearls, but a pearl makes these gates. This is one great pearl that he's describing, and that signifies something that's beyond this world, and signifies the opulence of the city, the glory of it.

The street of the city is made of pure gold like transparent glass, which may represent all of the streets of the city collectively, or one central street. Ancient cities usually had one main street running through them. John may have had that model in mind. But, its glassy appearance may also suggest something beyond this world. It may suggest, as some think, the Milky Way, which is a kind of starry road through the sky, and that's the picture that John may be giving here.

All of this is a way of indicating the unimaginable glory of the eternal city of God. It is the new Jerusalem that comes out of heaven. But this Jerusalem, we read, has no temple. He told that in verse 22. And John writes: "for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Now, this is really the principle reality of the city. God dwells there with His people. The temple was structured in such a way as to restrict access by the worshipers. There was great access in the court of the Gentiles, but it was restricted to just Israelites when one entered the court of the women, and then the court of the Israelite was just for the men.

And then, we came into the court of the priests where only priests could enter, and then into the holy place, and the Holy of Holies was the inner-sanctuary. And of course, only one person can enter into the Holy of Holies, and that was the high priest. He could only enter into that once a year, and he could only do so with the blood of sacrifice. And so, he entered it once a year, with great fear and trembling, to sprinkle the blood of atonement upon the mercy seat.

So, you see, an increasingly restrictive structure to the temple. There's no temple in this future city, and no restrictions because sin is atoned for, and will be removed altogether. The universe will be completely cleansed of the curse. It will be gone. So, there will be direct and immediate access into the very presence of God. We will live in His presence. We will live in His glory. His glory will light the city.

In verse 23, we were told that the city has no need of the sun, or the moon, to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it. And its lamp is the Lamb.

Well, all of this describes the holiness, the purity of the city. It is illuminated by God's glory. So, it is a city of purity, and that's the emphasis in the remaining verses of the chapter. Since it is lit by God's glory, John writes in verse 25, that there will be no night there. He repeats that in chapter 22 in verse 5. There will no longer be any night.

Well, night's significant. Night is symbolic throughout the Bible of things that are not good. Signifies separation from God. Unbelievers, we learn from our Lord's statement in Matthew chapter 8 and verse 12, will be cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing at teeth. So, the outer darkness or darkness signifies separation from God. But, darkness is also a symbol of danger. In Psalm 91 and verse 5, David speaks of God's protection and how He will be our refuge, and shield, and we will not be afraid of the terror by night.

Well, night's full of terror because it's full of danger. Unseen danger. It represents unbelief. It represents rebellion. It represents all of that which is opposed to God, who is light, the opposite of darkness. But darkness will be abolished. And in the new Jerusalem, the city of God, there will be no danger. No uncertainty. No one will oppose God, so there will be no separation from God. The gates of the city will never be closed, we're told, because there will be no enemy, no reason to close the gates. All who are on the new earth will be righteous. And because they're righteous, they will have free and complete access to God.

Again, all of this is symbolic of our union with the Triune God. We will be in constant fellowship with Him, and it will be fellowship that is constantly growing and increasing. The nations are described in verse 24 as walking by the Lord's light, living in the constant glow of His glory. We're told in verse 27 that "nothing unclean" shall ever come into it. It's a holy city.

In chapter 22, John moves from the imagery of the magnificent city to that of a lush garden with allusions to Eden, and references to Old Testament, or at least allusions to Old Testament prophecies. John sees the river of life. He sees it clear as crystal, flowing down from the throne of God, flowing through the middle of the street of the city, with the tree of life on either side of the river. That gives you again, an otherworldly sense of things. You can imagine a tree growing on one side of the river or the other side of the river, but this one tree grows on both sides of the river, which is difficult to imagine. But that's the picture that he gives. He describes the tree as yielding its fruit every month, and says that its leaves were for the healing of the nations.

Again, all of this recalls the garden of Eden and paradise restored. What man lost will be regained. Ezekiel's vision in chapter 47 of his prophecy is of a river flowing from the temple eastward to the Dead Sea where it heals the waters. As they enter into the salty, mineral-laden waters of the Dead Sea, that sea will be transformed into fresh water that's teeming with life, teeming with fish. And the aim of John's picture here is to give that same kind of image, that of health and satisfaction, and that which will propagate life and produce life.

Well, again, this is a vision. Its significance, and I want to underscore this. Its significance is found in the symbols, not in the literal architecture of the place. All of this represents a real place, but it is a place beyond our keenest and clearest imagination. So, we shouldn't think of a city with streets like Dallas or canals like Amsterdam. If we can paint a picture in our mind of a city of jewels, and height, and width, and great walls, and we've got this city firmly fixed in our minds, and we think: that's what it's going to look like. I think we've missed the point. All of that is a kind of stepping stone in our mind to go from the images to the reality behind the images, and explain to us the greatness of all of that.

And here, this description of this river running through the city has the point to make central to all of this, central to this new Jerusalem, central to our existence there, is eternal life. It is a picture that I think would've been very pleasant for many of those in the ancient world, to whom John wrote. Many of them lived in arid lands, particularly those in Palestine of that day. It's a hot place with a dry climate, and this picture of this river would've been one that communicated to them what was intended

to be communicated: that which is refreshing. The water is clear and constant. It flows from the throne of God, which reminds us that God is the source of our life.

Men rebel against that. They don't like that idea. In fact, that, from the very outset, has been the rebellion of man. From the day, the moment that Adam took the forbidden fruit, it was his declaration of rebellion against God. I am not going to live under Your authority, is what he was saying, and men have done that in every generation. It's called autonomy. They want to live self-directed lives, independent of God. But the reality is: no one can do that.

As Paul told the philosophers of Athens, God is the one in whom we live and move and exist. Believer and nonbeliever alike, live and move and exist in Him. We have no existence apart from Him. He gives us our existence, our life. He wills it to be. We cannot live independently of Him. We may try to do so in our minds, but that's a delusion, and it will come to ruin for those that continue in it.

But this river of life that flows through the city, it reminds us that God is the source of our life, constantly. He is now, and He will be forever. We will always have our life from Him, and He will supply it abundantly. It is a clean life, a refreshing life, a life that is deeply satisfying. The tree illustrates that with its abundance of fruit and medicinal leaves. You wonder again, as you read this, why the nations would need to be healed. We're told in verse 3 that the curse has been removed. There will be no more sickness in the world to come; there's no need for healing. But I think that's the very point that's being made, that the leaves are a reminder that there is constant eternal health. And the fruit that is born by the tree every month, regularly, constantly throughout the year as a reminder that we will always be fully satisfied. There will never be any want or need in the world to come. The environment will be perfect, and it will be spiritually pure. It will be holy. It will be rich. It will be abundant in all of the things that are good and glorious because God is faithful, and He will always provide focus. Every moment of our existence, God will provide.

And He's the greatest feature of that city. His presence there. His throne and the Lamb will be in it, John says in verse 3. And His bond-servants will serve Him. The world to come will be a place of fellowship with God and activity. It will not be a place of idle pleasure. This is not going to be a realm of paradise where young men lounge around with their 70 virgins or however many it is. It'll be a place of worship

and service. We're not told the nature of our service or activity. But in verse 5, John does say that "we will reign forever and ever." We will be kings and priests for all eternity. And the millennium will reign over the regenerated earth and the new heavens and the new earth, we will reign over the renovated universe. It will be an eternal existence of great activity and productivity without fatigue.

At the end of that great chapter, Isaiah 40, one of the magnificent chapters of the Bible. They're all great chapters. There isn't one bad chapter in the Bible. I don't mean to suggest that. But certainly, some are more lofty than others, and Isaiah 40 is one of my favorites. And at the end of that chapter, there's that promise to those who wait on the Lord, that such people, those people will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired.

Now, that's true of us today. We can apply that to our own experience. God rejuvenates us, and He supplies our needs, even when we're tired, and when we are beaten down. God's with us, and He'll supply us with whatever we need. But that's certainly going to be true of the future. That can certainly be applied to the eternal state. It will be our experience. We will be in a state of constant activity and, at the same time, constant rest. Of being refreshed by our service and worship. We will live by the ever-flowing river of life and live in the glow of God's glory. He will constantly infuse us with life and energy. He will always be in our midst.

And John writes in verse 4: "They will see His face." The face of the Lamb. That's really the greatest blessing of this chapter. We will see Christ's face. Moses, the great law-giver, was not allowed to see the face of God. Remember? He's on the mount, and the Lord said, "No man can see My face and live." So, Moses was only permitted to see God's back as He passed by. When Isaiah was given his vision of God in Isaiah 6 there in the temple, he says that he saw the train of His robe filling the temple.

Now, that's just a vision. That's not the reality. That's a vision. God doesn't have a train, doesn't have a robe. He's a spirit. But, this was a vision that was given of God to Isaiah. He's not actually looking at God. In fact, what he's seeing is only the hem of His garment. And yet, when Isaiah saw that, he was undone. He said, "Woe is me. I'm a man of unclean lips. I dwell among a people of unclean lips." It affected him deeply, just the hem of God's garment.

But, we will look into the very face of God. We will see the face of the Lamb, of Jesus Christ, and it will have a transforming effect upon us. It had an effect upon Moses; when he came down from the mount, his face shone with light. Isaiah, when he saw the vision of the Lord, it transformed him. His mouth was touched with the coal from the altar, and it was made pure, and he was able to be a prophet. He was transformed by that vision of God. And John speaks the same way in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 2. He says that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we'll see Him just as He is. The very sight of Him will have a transforming effect upon us.

Now, that won't happen initially when He returns, but it will be the result of our constant communion with Him throughout all eternity. We will be constantly changed in His image, always growing. That's the sense of the next blessing, that His name will be on their foreheads. Now, you remember that the name of a person in a Bible is more than just a label of identification. It is a revelation of the character of that person, and the name of Christ is the character of Christ. And what He's saying here is His name will be on us in the sense that His character will be on us. It will be increasingly reflected in our lives, forever. That's what exposure to Christ produces. It's what it produces in this life.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18, Paul speaks of being transformed into the same image from glory to glory as you read the Word of God, as you study it, as you see Christ, as you see the Lord in this, it affects you, actually affects you. It actually changes you. It transforms you from glory to glory.

Well, what will it be like in that future day when we're unhindered by sin, we have new minds, new bodies, we are equipped for something far greater than anything we've ever experienced in this life. We'll be constantly being transformed. The same thing will happen, only much greater way. As we know Him, we become like Him. If you want to be like Him, get to know Him. If you want to have a better life, a purer life, spend time in God's word, knowing Christ. Well, in that day, we'll know Him deeply, face to face. That's the greatest blessing described here.

But I must confess, the greatness of it is beyond me. I can tell you it's great, and I can mean it. But to really sense the greatness of it, well, it's beyond me. I confess that. But then, think of what the Lord said to His disciples in John 15. "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." And then He says, "You are My friends." Friends share with one another. They share

their deepest thoughts. That's what Christ will do with us. He'll share His mind with us. And in so doing, He'll unlock the mysteries of the universe. In fact, more than that: as vast as the universe is. I can't comprehend the universe. It's nothing. It's like a speck of dust on the scales before God, who is infinite and eternal. We'll know His mind, which will take us far beyond the universe into things that we can't even imagine. That's what He'll give us. And He'll be with us, as I say, and we'll know Him in an ever-growing personal way, the one who loved us from all eternity, laid down His life for us, and snatched us like brands from the burning.

As I said, I really can't grasp the greatness of it. But that's the essence of heaven. That's the essence of the world to come. That's the essence of the city of God. We will be among a multitude of friends, all of them intimate friends. People ask me, probably you've wondered this, you've asked others yourself. Maybe someone's asked you: will we recognize people in heaven? Of course we'll recognize everyone in heaven immediately. I don't think we'll tap someone on the shoulder and say, "Who's that over there?" We'll know who everyone is immediately, because we'll have minds that are far greater than anything we have now, and we'll know it all. And these friends, this innumerable multitude of our best friends will be those whom we have no jealousy, rivalry. It's just pure friendship. That's great.

But, best of all is the best friend that we'll have is the Lord Jesus Christ. Careful about using that. I'm not at all comfortable with speaking of our Lord and God as our friend, but we'll be on the most intimate terms with Him because He's called us friends. Just think of that. Knowing the Almighty.

Aristotle was a pagan, but had some insight. One day he was walking around his school in Athens. That's how he taught. He was the first of the peripatetic teachers. And what peripatetic means is "walk around." And he would teach as he walked around. And so, he was walking with his students when he said that "friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies." Well, we will have a single soul. There will be many bodies, but a single soul with our Lord, and with one another. We'll be completely united with Him and with each other in love and joy and understanding. One soul.

Well, from that, Aristotle went on to say: "Without friends, no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods." Now, that's not bad for a pagan. That's not bad for a saint. In fact, that's very good.

And I think it gets to the point here, and the essence of heaven and the world to come. The city of God. It's a glorious city, but it's far more than beautiful stones. At the center of it all is the throne of God, is the person of our Lord. Without our Triune God, there would be no real life. It would mean nothing to us for all of its splendor. What gives it greatness is the person who's there, and we'll be with Him, and we'll know Him. That's the goal of our pilgrimage. The city of God, and the throne of God, and the person of the Lamb. That's our great hope. It's what we're to be living for. It's the goal of our pilgrimage.

Are you living for it? Are you living like Abraham and the patriarchs lived? That's described for us in Hebrews 11. We're told that Abraham journeyed through this world as a pilgrim, living in tents, never building a house, never building a city. Didn't put down his roots. He had the means to do it, it would seem. He was a wealthy man. But he chose to live in tents because it signified that he was passing through this world which is passing away, and he was looking for something else. He was looking for a city which has foundations, eternal foundations.

Are you looking for that city? Or, are you happy with this one? It's a nice city. I like Dallas. I'd prefer to live here to anywhere in the world, actually. But the fact is, there's nothing permanent here. And the reality is, all of its glory, which probably isn't all that great in the first place, but what glory it has is the glory of that painted harlot. It's not worth it. It's not worth trading for anything that we have in Christ. The best is yet to come.

Great and glorious changes are coming. A new heavens, and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. But, the changes are already beginning in every believer in Jesus Christ. We have a new heart. We have a new life. We have a new relationship with Christ. At the moment of faith, we are new creatures in Him.

William Wilberforce, the evangelical Christian who, through many years of effort in parliament, put an end to slavery in England, described his conversion as "the great change." It's a good description of it. It is a great change. But that change doesn't stop the moment it happens. It's a change that never stops, actually. Through faith in Christ, you are forgiven forever. You are accepted by God as righteous. You become His child, and you are being transformed from glory to glory, and that will go on for all eternity. So, may God give us the perspective that should give to us.

There's something far greater to live for than this life. And if we live for that city to come, we'll live properly in this life. So, may God help us to do that.

And if you've not believed in Him, if you've not put your faith in Christ, look to Him. The moment you do, the moment you trust, you become a child of God with a glorious future. May God help you to do that. Help all of us to rejoice in what He's done for us and what we have. Let's do that with a word of prayer. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for this glorious future that's ours. How easy it is to get caught up in this world. To think that the things of this world are what we're really about. Well, the things of this world have their place, and they're important, and we must be diligent. We must be good stewards. We must be honest and hardworking, and we should enjoy the good things of this world. Enjoy them to Your glory. But they should never become the end for us. These things are passing away. Help us to live for that which is eternal, and that which is permanent. Help us to live to Your glory every day. We give You the thanks that we can do that in Christ, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.