

I am going to introduce our passage in Revelation 21 today... by reading an article that was written for Christianity Today Magazine by Kay Warren... back in May of 2009. ... I would like to read the entire article because it is so good... and it serves as a wonderful introduction to today's study.

Heading home to California ... a friend and I passed through the Dallas–Fort Worth airport. On the way to the connecting gate, we heard loud patriotic music playing and saw a group, mostly women, wearing colorful hats, cheering, and waving American flags. The troops were coming home, and here was their welcoming committee.

Two women encouraged us to grab flags and join in. We were early for our next flight, so we took places in the makeshift greeting line. At first, a few soldiers just dribbled by. We whooped and waved our flags furiously. Then the pace picked up as dozens of men and women in uniform came barreling through. We kept repeating: "Welcome home! We're glad you're back! We appreciate you!" Some soldiers wiped away tears, while others displayed huge, self-conscious smiles. ...

After 45 minutes, it was time to catch our flight. We hugged the organizers and thanked the vets who had come to honor this generation of soldiers. As we sank into our seats for the flight, we felt humbled by participating in this sweet moment of coming home. It was impossible not to draw the obvious spiritual parallels. These men and women had taken oaths of faithfulness and service. They had fought courageously, lived with deprivation, danger, and disease, and took unbelievable risks, all for the good of our nation.

But as great as America is, it is a temporary place. No nation lives forever. As believers in Christ, we are all soldiers in the Lord's army. We, too, take oaths of fidelity, sacrifice, and service. Our oaths of allegiance are to a kingdom that shall never end—a country where there is never a mistake in leadership, where justice flows down like a river, where poverty, disease, terror, hunger, and greed hold no power.

Scripture teaches us about the welcome and rewards we will receive when our battle on earth is over. Artists, writers, and theologians have all taken stabs at imagining what those moments of heavenly welcome will look like. ... That afternoon ... we were visualizing the very moment when we would step into eternity.

As my friend Elizabeth and I looked at each other, the same thought crossed our minds. Through misty eyes, she said, "If I get there first, I'll be on your welcoming committee. I'll be jumping up and down, screaming, 'You made it! I'm so proud of you!'"

I laughed and said, "Oh, you're not going to beat me. I'll be there before you. I'm older. I'll be at the head of the line to greet you!" In that moment, heaven was more real than the smell of the stale coffee in our foam cups.

What I'm really wondering about is this: Will we be surprised at who gets the biggest welcome? I'm not coveting more high-fives, but I am dimly aware of something so profound and holy that I can barely put it into words.

All of us fight unseen battles every day, each believer a secret soldier locked in battle with forces no one else can see. The bravest among us are not necessarily those who fight with guns or tanks. The bravest person you know might be your husband or wife or neighbor or coworker who goes on living one more day when every bone in his or her body says it's no use. ...

How much could we lighten the load for another just by telling him how brave we think he is? Oh, to be so merciful with fellow soldiers fighting their personal, hidden wars.

Best of all, how much better when we bring undisclosed struggles into community, where victories can be celebrated together, great losses mourned together, and where whoops of encouragement can provide even the most weary soldier the courage it takes to keep on keeping on, one more day.

That is my hope... for what Revelation 21 will do in your life... this morning. Even though we are currently at the height of the Christmas season... a time when everyone is supposed to be filled with joy... I know that there are many... who are locked into a battle with forces that no one else can see.

Finally... we have come in our study of revelation... to the time when all the ages of probation... and testing... and judgment - are over! ... These dispensations have run their course... and the grand climax of the Book of Revelation... indeed... the climax of God's entire revelation... and of all His purposes in creation... is about to be unfolded. ... The most glorious chapters of the Bible are these last two chapters... opening up the wonders of the endless ages of eternity... and the fruition of all the great plans of a loving God.

Now for those of you who are not going through a personal rough spot in your life right now... let me try an hook your engagement to our passage through a quote by C.S. Lewis:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither.

—C. S. Lewis, Irish professor, author, and apologist (1898–1963)

Revelation 21 is an attempt to have us think most of heaven. ... The Apostle Paul also wrote:

Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your

minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Verse one of Revelation 21... immediately places our minds on things that are above...

Revelation 21:1

Most writers on the Book of Revelation have... to one degree or another... tried to spiritualize this great vision of the new Jerusalem. There is no reason at all... however... why we should not accept it literally... as a real place prepared by Christ in the distant heavens and now finally brought with Him to the new earth.

John 14:2-3 (ESV)

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

It is the city for which Abraham had looked...

Hebrews 11:10 (ESV)

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

It is the city that is being prepared for everyone who has the faith to believe His Word... and follow His will...

Hebrews 11:16 (ESV)

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

The earth as we know it will not last forever... but after God's great judgment... He will create a new earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13 (ESV)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The Scripture clearly teaches that this present order of creation is to pass away... in order to make room for a new heaven and a new earth. ... The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said,

Matthew 24:35 (ESV)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

God had also promised Isaiah that he would create a new and eternal earth...

Isaiah 65:17 (ESV)

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

Isaiah 66:22 (ESV)

"For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain.

In addition, the "**new heaven and new earth**" will have no need for the vast amounts of "**sea**" water that the present earth has, as the primary function of the sea is to serve this planet as a filtering system.

Ray Stedman explains:

Over 70 percent of the surface of our world is covered with salt water. The average depth of the ocean is 2.3 miles. Why does our planet need such a massive covering of salt water? Answer: To cleanse the earth and make life possible. The earth is bathed in God's great antiseptic solution composed of about 96 percent water, 3.5 percent salt, and about .5 percent trace constituents—chlorine, magnesium, calcium, and the like. The salty brine of the ocean purges, cleanses, and preserves our planet, making it fit to live in. Many of the pollutants and wastes we produce get washed out of the soil and into our streams and rivers; others we deliberately dump into the rivers. The rivers wash these materials to the sea. The antiseptic salinity of the sea absorbs, scrubs, and breaks down these pollutants and wastes. The sun heats the sea, causing only pure, clean water vapor to float up into the sky, forming clouds which bring refreshing rain back to the land—a continuous cycle of cleansing and renewal. But in the new heaven and new earth there will be no more pollution, no more decay, no more need for cleansing, and thus no more need for a salty sea.

A primary characteristic of the new earth... as verse 1 reveals... is the absence of the sea. ... This would automatically change the climate... the atmosphere... and the lighting conditions. ... It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend the great transformations which will take place in a new creation. ... The sea in the past has been a barrier and also a border for mankind... which in some cases has been good and in others bad. ... However... by the disappearance of the sea... the population on the earth can be increased many times over... because of the now-expanded

land surface. (About **71 percent** of the Earth's surface is water-covered... and the oceans hold about 96.5 percent of all Earth's water.)

Revelation 21:2

Here it is! This is the part which should interest us. ... I believe that the New Jerusalem is where those of us who are children of God are going to live. ... This is what Jesus returned to Heaven and started preparing for us. ... The “New Jerusalem” is that place.

The good news is that God is now taking reservations for that city. If you have never committed your life to Christ by faith... you can do so now... and that commitment will constitute your passport to heaven.

I want to quote J.Vernon McGee again... but before I do... I think that I should say something. My wife asked me the other day... why it is that I quote him so often. ... You see... she remembers my younger days... when I would tell her that I did not like his radio program very much. ... Before I went to seminary... I listened to a lot of radio broadcasters (and I still do... when I am in my truck travelling somewhere.) But when McGee drove his Bible Bus into New Testament books such as 1 and 2 Timothy... he would often add comments that I thought were his own ideas being injected onto Scripture. To me... as I was much younger... it seemed as though he pandered to an older generation... and was like those Paul warned Timothy about saying “don’t let anyone despise your youth...” I did not like him... at all... as a younger listener. And today... when I read his commentaries (which are transcripts of his radio programs)... he often seems to get off track... and start discussing things that I don’t think the human author of Scripture meant when he first penned it on parchment.

But I still refer to McGee's writings. (You probably didn't know this... but he is not my favorite commentator.) He is not heretical... but I read him like I'll eat a white fish from the Deschutes River. There are a lot of bones that get set on the side of the plate... and then get discarded. ... And yet... as you can tell... I also find some nourishing thought when I read McGee. ... And here is one of those thoughts about Revelation 21:2...

I cannot think of a lovelier description than this: "...made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." It has been my privilege in my many years in the pastorate to have married several hundred couples. I have never seen an ugly bride -- they are always lovely. At the wedding ceremony, after the solos have been sung, the preacher walks in followed by the bridegroom and the best man. Nobody pays any attention to the bridegroom except his mama. She smiles at him and thinks he's wonderful, but nobody else looks at him. In a minute here comes the bride-to-be and, I tell you, everybody stands up and looks at her. I have never yet seen an ugly bride.

On occasion when I would return from a wedding which my wife did not attend, she would always ask me, "Was the bride beautiful?" And I would always answer, "Yes. I've never seen an ugly one." Don't think that I am just a doting old man when I say that. I have seen some brides before they got married or after the wedding, and I have wondered if she were the same girl who had come down the aisle.

God gives to them at that time a radiance and a beauty. That is a thrilling moment for the bridegroom to look down the aisle and see the one whom he is going to make his own -- she will belong to him. It seems that for that moment God transforms every girl into a lovely bride. I think the reason He does it is that the New Jerusalem where we are going to live is like the bride adorned for her husband. What a picture we have here!

Revelation 21:3

The "**new Jerusalem**" will be "the dwelling place of God. ... God wants all to be aware that He is going to be a resident of that city! ... This truth is

stated three times... either plainly or by implication... then for a fourth time He assures us of His abiding presence. ... Of all the things God mentions and promises... His presence is the absolute ultimate in importance. ... Why? ... Because wherever God reigns... there is peace... security... and love...

Think about the last argument you had with another person. For some... it may have taken place just before you walked through the doors of the church this morning. (Hopefully not AFTER you walked through them...) I am willing to bet... that every argument you have ever engaged yourself in... all boils down to a threat you felt over your personal peace... sense of security... or sense of being loved. Another way of saying it is... you argued because you felt you were losing some sense of security or significance. Wherever God reigns there is peace... security... and love... There will be no loss of what we all strive for in this life – security and significance.

Revelation 21:4-5

Forevermore, there will be no death, sorrow, crying, or pain. What a wonderful truth! No matter what you are going through, it's not the last word—God has written the final chapter, and it is about true fulfillment and eternal joy for those who love him. We do not know as much as we would like, but it is enough to know that eternity with God will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine.

One of the best ways that John found to describe all that was so positive about heaven was to approach it from the negative! No more tears, no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, and no more pain!

“Behold, I am making all things new”... Presumably this means not only that everything will be made new... but also that everything will then stay new. ... The entropy law will be "repealed." I learned in college that the second law of thermodynamics states that there is a natural tendency of any isolated system to degenerate into a more disordered state. Things will always move from order toward chaos... and never the other way around. (Chaos never moves toward orderliness.) I think science proved this law through personal observation of my college apartment. Patti and I went back to it after we were married. One of my old roommates still lived there. He had shampooed the shag carpet that covered the floor. I had lived there for 3-4 years and never knew that it was a gold-colored carpet. I thought greenish-brown was its original color. ... Things break down... and decay... everything in the universe moves from order to chaos. ... But in the new heavens and earth this law of our universe... no longer exists. ... Nothing will wear out or decay, and no one will age or atrophy anymore. My flooring will stay – golden! (My garage will be as neat and tidy as Jeff Adam’s ... and Dave Rieker’s...! ...which are the only two places I am aware of... that the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics somehow doesn’t exist... at this present time.)

Then... just in case there is difficulty in imagining a world without these things that are so common in the world today... things that have brought so

much grief... he adds a postscript: **"these words are trustworthy and true."**

Revelation 21:6a,b

The announcement... "It is done!" reminds me of Jesus' announcement as He hung on the cross – "It is finished!" (John 19:30.) This declares that God's purposes in history have come to their conclusion... by creating a people with whom He will live.

Then... once again Christ calls attention to His deity... *"I am the Alpha and Omega..."* ... He wants us to understand that He and He alone is all that's necessary to make all of this a reality.

In verse 5... God told John to write this down... God wanted John to extend an invitation to all the readers of the Book of Revelation... before it is eternally too late.

Revelation 21:6c - 8

At this present time, it is still not too late to receive Jesus as Savior. Any person can call upon the name of Jesus now and receive Him as Lord and Savior. Anyone who receives Him as Lord and Savior will be numbered among those referred to as **"the one who conquers"** in verse seven. However, the unrepentant sinner will have his part in the lake of fire. In verse six there is the promise of **"life," "to the one who conquers"** but in verse eight there remains only a promise of **"death"** for those who reject Christ.

The catalog of sinners in verse 8... of those who will be inhabiting hell... is vivid and most instructive. ... At the head of the list are the “cowardly.” ... Some versions read “fearful.”

This is primarily a reference to the lack of trusting faith in the Lord.

Christ used it in Mark 4:40. “Why are you so *fearful*? How is it that you have no faith?” ... Closely related is the word used in John 14:27: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be *afraid*.” ... Similarly in 2 Timothy 1:7- 8:

2 Timothy 1:7-8 (ESV)

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

Those who are more fearful of the disapproval of men than of Christ are dangerously close to this kind of sin. ... This kind of fearfulness is very similar to the sin of unbelief itself... the next in the list. ... It is only the sin of unbelief, with its outward manifestation of fearfulness, which actually sends people to hell.

The seemingly more repugnant sins which are catalogued after “the lack of courage”... are actually *less serious*. ... (You see.. even *murder* can be forgiven if there is genuine repentance and faith... but there is *no* salvation for unbelievers... and no degree of moral righteousness... short of absolute perfection... can ever offset this. ... The greatest sin of all... is rejecting the infinite love and suffering of Christ for us... in atonement for our sins.

Revelation 21:9-10

Let us now consider the description of the Holy City... the New Jerusalem... the Lamb's wife. ... Theologians have been confused by this expression "the holy Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife." ... How can the New Jerusalem be a city and at the same time be the wife of the Lamb... the bride of Christ?

If we study the passage carefully... there need be no difficulty. ... The city and its occupants are one. ... This chapter of Revelation concerns a literal city of inexpressible beauty. ... It is the New Jerusalem. ... The redeemed church of Christ... the bride of the Lamb... is to dwell in that New Jerusalem. ... The city and its inhabitants are one.

Today we speak the same concerning cities. ... When I mention a certain city... for example... Portland Oregon... I may mean either (or both) the material city and its buildings... or the inhabitants of Portland. ... From one point of view... Portland is a city. ... However... Portland is also a company of people who... like myself... (at one time) lived there... and many still do. ... For instance... if I say that Portland is a beautiful city... you know that I refer to its beautiful location near Mt. Hood and on the Columbia and Willamette Rivers... and its fine buildings and gardens and parks. ... But if I say that Portland is weird (as in keep Portland weird)... or Portland is a wicked city... you know immediately that I am referring to the people of Portland... and not to its buildings... streets and trees.

The term "Portland" may refer either to the city itself or to the people who live there - in the same way God speaks of the New Jerusalem. ... The term indicates both a literal city... and also the occupants of that city. ... It is both the city and the bride... the building and its occupants. ... So I

really don't have a problem with God calling it both "the holy city" and "the wife of the Lamb."

The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven... but we are not told if it comes all the way to the earth. ... The city... as far as we know... might be hanging in mid-air somewhere in outer space. ... But these verses (and those which follow) indicate that the city will be the center of all things. ... All activity and glory will revolve about this city. ... God will be there... it will be His headquarters... and His universe is theocentric (God-centered). ... So the New Jerusalem... is therefore worthy to merit great beauty and preeminence - for eternity.

Revelation 21:11-14

The 12 tribes of Israel probably represent all the faithful in the Old Testament... the 12 apostles represent the church. Thus, both believing Gentiles and Jews who have been faithful to God will live together in New Jerusalem. The names of the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed visually and prominently so no one will ever forget that the heritage of the saints of all ages is rooted in them.

Revelation 21:15-17

He first measures the "**city**" proper and finds that its "**length**," and "**width**," and "**height**," are "equal." This city has all the appearance of being a cube! The angel announces that it measures 12,000 stadia (about 1400 miles) in each direction. It is hard to imagine anything like it. To help the imagination, the "**Holy City**" will be 8 1/2 times larger than the State of Texas... or as one commentator put it... *"If it were to be superimposed*

upon the United States, its area would cover all the way from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Atlantic Ocean to Colorado.” - and that is only on one level! With a city measuring 1,400 miles long... 1,400 miles wide... and then 1,400 miles high - there will most certainly be multiple levels.

Certainly God as Creator can never be accused of skimping... withholding... economizing... or doing things that reveal littleness. ... When you go down to the beach... you notice that He has put plenty of sand there and plenty of water in the ocean. ... He has made many mountains... and He has put rocks everywhere. ... With a lavish hand... He has garnished the heavens with stellar bodies. ... When God does something... He certainly does it in abundance. ... And this city bears the trademark of its Maker. ... The Lord Jesus... the Carpenter of Nazareth... is the One who built this city.

Revelation 21:18-20

Now it is time for me to quote Warren Wiersbe. He writes:

Building foundations are usually underground, but these foundations will not only be visible but beautifully garnished with precious stones. Each separate foundation will have its own jewel, and the blending of the colors will be magnificent as God's light shines through. No one can be dogmatic about the color of these gems, and it really doesn't matter. Jasper, as we have seen, is a clear crystal. Sapphire is a blue stone, and chalcedony is probably greenish-blue. The emerald, of course, is green...

Now Warren Wiersbe is not from the Pacific Northwest. He is from Derek's former residence – the Chicago area. ... But I can't help but notice that Wiersbe seems to be telling us that Heaven is colored for Seattle Seahawk

fans. ... There must be a lot of us going there. ... If you are a 49er fan... you are out of luck – because the other place will have a lot of red... and goldish-tan. ... Well... perhaps I should read the rest of the Wiersbe quote (and confess that this isn't about American football at all... because 49er colors will also be there.)

...and the sardonyx is like our onyx, a white stone streaked with brown, though some scholars describe it as red and white.

See! ... God can even forgive 49er fans!

Sardius is a red stone (sometimes described as "blood red") and chrysolite a yellow quartz like our modern topaz. Beryl is green and topaz a yellow-green. We are not sure about the chrysoprasus; some think it is a golden-tinted stone, others, an apple-green color. The jacinth is probably blue, though some claim it was yellow; and the amethyst is a rich purple, or blue-red.

The foundations of the New Jerusalem are constructed of the flashing brilliance of rich and costly gems. On the inside is Jesus who... when He was here... was the Light of the World. There... He will be the Light of the Universe.

Astronauts tell us that in space the colors almost entirely are gray and black -- but wait until you see the New Jerusalem. It is going to light up God's new heavens and new earth as they have never been lighted before. I think it is going to be the most breathtaking sight that you have ever seen. This New Jerusalem is a planet which comes down right out of heaven. Everything is going to revolve around it, and the light will come from there. The light will shine out in all these brilliant and beautiful colors.

Revelation 21:21-26

Each gate is a great pearl... indicating that entrance to the city is made possible only through the death of Christ... because pearls are a product of physical suffering. ... Oysters make pearls by coating a grain of sand... or some other irritant that gets inside their shell.

Gates were usually shut at night. ... But new Jerusalem welcomes all and has no enemies to fear. ... Now there is no fear of open gates – or darkness at all! I think what we are seeing is memorial after memorial ... to keep our hearts in worshipful focus.

John mentions “kings of the earth”... and “nations” in these verses. ... I read a lot several author’s commentaries and differing understandings about this. ... As far as I am concerned... this may simply be another reminder that John is making... about - from where we all came. ... Heaven will be comprised of those from every nation. Some will come from positions of great authority. (If we all retain some of these distinctions – I am not sure.)

Revelation 21:27

Thank God for this verse! God will see to it that in NO WISE... under no circumstances... nor by any means... will anything enter into the Pearly White City to mar... scar... and defile. ... Nothing abominable shall enter there.

Revelation 21:8 tells us that all evil ones are in the lake of fire... eternally imprisoned and sealed... never to be released - and the devil is there, too. Satan had access to God's throne in the beginning when he was Lucifer... the shining one (Isaiah 14). ... In the Book of Job... he is seen as having

entrance to God's presence. ... But in the Pearly White City there will be no devil... nor in the new earth or the heavenlies. ... Satan will be in the lake of fire the eternal prison of the damned.

We need not worry about the sin-tragedy recurring. ... It will not... because God Almighty will have put down evil once... for all... forever. ... Satan's head will be crushed... his kingdom destroyed... and his subjects in the lake of fire with him. ... Only those who have their names in the Lamb's Book of Life will be in the Pearly White City.

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If we see ourselves according to the destiny to which God has called us, we will act accordingly. This is why C.S. Lewis said:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither.

Revelation 21 summons us to see ourselves as heirs of the future. ... Even though Revelation emphasizes the new Jerusalem as a future city... it is being built in the present. ... The time for adorning ourselves with "righteous acts" - is now.

God's perfect dwelling will be with us... (we will enjoy the intimacy of the Most Holy Place with him forever.) If that is truly the future we yearn for... then we should enjoy the intimacy now available with Him in prayer... and ever deeper worship.