

Revelation

Part Fifty-Nine
The Perfect Church
(Revelation 21:22-27)

With Study Questions

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But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. ²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:22-27).

Introduction

I recall when I started attending church as a teenager, feeling out of place. I borrowed my dad's tie, in a bizarre effort to fit in. I didn't know the liturgy, when to stand, sit or pray. The entire event seemed awkward. Yet the Holy Spirit had a hold of me, and I continued.

A few years came and went, and I found myself on a mission trip. The director of the mission was (I was told) ex-military and ran the event with a tight fist. The rules, meetings, and structure were very demanding. It felt oppressive. I voiced my concerns and other participants (there were about eighty in total) sought me out to share their own similar feelings and difficulties. I recall one girl telling me she was having trouble sharing the joy of Christ with others when she wasn't experiencing it herself.

I am not remotely artistic, but I found myself drawing a picture on one of the pages in one of my many binders. On one side of the drawing, I wrote the word, *God*. In the middle I drew pictures of all the teams, meetings, rules, requirements and overall structure of the trip. On the other side of the page, I drew a picture of myself.

The point of my little, private project was that the entire ministerial enterprise seemed to build a wedge between me and God. I did not feel like a child in God's household, seeking to grasp, enjoy and take some responsibility for how the household should run. I felt like I was outside the

household, looking in through a thick, foggy, impenetrable window. Yet the Holy Spirit had a hold of me, and I continued.

As I found myself in positions of ministerial leadership, I recalled that experience and made a self-conscious effort to avoid creating that type of environment. I am not suggesting that I have always succeeded. But the value of a minister, ministry or church is to herald God in such a way as to not be an impediment. We are not to stand between God and the ones He seeks to love and redeem.

The more invisible we are (in a certain sense), the more valuable we. With John the Baptist, we ought to say,

He must increase, but I *must* decrease (John 3:30).

And let us avoid the error of Moses who, when God said to merely speak, he thought it best to strike (Numbers 20:10-12).

The environment of worship should be as such that the purity of God's word is so presented that an unbeliever or an uninformed person, can be directly touched by God Himself,

And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you (1 Corinthians 14:25).

We can endure almost any pain with the knowledge that God is on our side, our Father. If God is our dwelling place, our refuge,

...he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways (Psalm 91:11).

Notwithstanding the church's call to herald the gospel, to administer word and sacrament, to loving tend to its congregants (truly, this is the commission given), sometimes the best thing we can do is get out of the way.

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (Revelation 21:22).

The True Temple

My own early ministerial difficulty was not unique to me. Many people have been wounded by church, and church wounds run deep. I would like to say our church has never been such a perpetrator, but I'm sure there are those who would testify otherwise.

But what we are presented in the new heavens and new earth-this heavenly Jerusalem-is a bride absent the clumsy attempts of the militant church seeking to conduct herself in a holy manner (something she ought to do, by the way). Sometimes, in our efforts to enter His gates with praise and thanksgiving in a manner pleasing to God, I feel like an amateur diamond cutter, trying to slice up the Hope Diamond with blindfold and a sledgehammer.

There is no need for a temple because the purpose of the temple was to teach us of Christ Himself.

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body (John 2:19-21).

Even though John is writing of the full consummation of the new heavens and the new earth, we should not view this as entirely anticipatory. The resurrected body of Christ is the true temple. And when we are joined to Christ, we ourselves become living stones in that temple being built up as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Let us pray that the church not get in the way of Christ in her desire to minister. Let us rather with Paul say:

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light (Revelation 21:23).

Expendable Light

I recall a ministerial candidate who took exception to the world being created in six days. His argument was that since light was created on day one and the sun on day four, it just didn't make sense to view the days as sequential. He said he could not comprehend of a day with light but without

the sun. But the sun is not the sole source of light. Nor is it necessary for the existence of light.

At the same time, God has created a universe with solar systems. And, to the best of our scientific knowledge, life without a sun would cease to exist. This is why there is a list of solar deities longer than your proverbial arm. It's as if every culture realized their need for the sun.

Since I don't think John is writing in a literal fashion (do the giant pearls require giant oysters? And who will shuck them?), I don't think this necessarily means there will be no sun or moon in the new heavens and earth (it doesn't actually say there is no sun. Just no need of the sun). The greater point here is not the restructuring of the celestial, but the recognition that those things we view as necessary to our very existence are actually expendable in light of the glory of God.

Let this help us appreciate the magnitude of the words of Christ, when He said...

...I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (John 8:12).

Light is a magnificent theme in Scripture.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it (Revelation 21:24).

Glory of the Nations

This portion of Revelation closely mirrors Isaiah 60, though with slight modifications. Isaiah writes of "**wealth of the nations**" (Isaiah 60:5) coming to the light of God. Here we read of their "**glory and honor**" coming into it.

This ought to be the direction of the nations. That which we are called to individually, to give glory to God, we are called to collectively. The call to all human potentates (governors, kings, presidents, etc.) is to bring honor to God in the way they govern societies.

I don't think this verse is teaching that there will be individual nations or kings in heaven. There will be no need for such things. It more appears to say that whatever true glory was achieved in earthly kingdoms will find its ultimate fulfillment in eternity, which appears to be the points of verse twenty-six.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there) (Revelation 21:25).

Open, Yet Narrow, Gate

People enjoy talking about times and places where and when things were so good that they never need to lock their doors. People are neighborly and trustworthy. There is no fear of invasion. This is part of the picture painted in this verse.

But it also displays access. The gates of God's kingdom are always open. These are gates in God's wall of salvation (Isaiah 60:18). Just so we're clear, there is no climbing the wall. We enter through the gate. And, as Jesus taught, the gate is "**narrow**" (Matthew 7:13). There is not, as is so popular today, your truth or my truth. There is only the truth. It is a noun Jesus uses to describe Himself (John 14:6).

We all conduct our lives as if something is true. It might be wise to investigate what that is.

And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. ²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:26, 27).

The Book of Life

This portion of the text ends with a comparison. Glory and honor are in God's heavenly kingdom, but nothing that can defile it. Heaven with the potential of defilement would not be heaven at all. An eternal dwelling containing lies and abominations would be closer to hell than heaven. We would do well to, therefore, ask, 'how can I, as a sinful creature occupy such a holy place?

The answer in the passage is to have our name "**written in the Lamb's Book of Life.**" This book seems to be a poetic way to indicate those who are true believers. How do you know if this is you?

What is the means by which we are declared righteous before a holy God? Can there be anything in the whole domain of human existence that is a more pressing or critical question to ask than "**What must I do to be saved**" (Acts 16:30)?

Briefly repeating something I said in an earlier sermon, it might do us well to take a moment to express what it is not! It is not your good works, religious or otherwise (Galatians 2:16). We are not declared righteous by virtue of our membership in a religious community. Should we be in a religious community, that is, a church? Yes. But mere inclusion is wholly insufficient. The New Covenant is replete with baptized members in good standing who were later declared shipwrecked in faith (1 Timothy 1:19, 20; 1 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 10-13; 1 John 2:19).

Participation in the sacraments will not bring a person peace with God. Directly after his baptism Simon was warned that his heart revealed his soul may perish (Acts 8:13-24). Paul was not unclear that it is very possible to take the Lord's Supper in such a way as to **"drink[s] judgment" on oneself" (1 Corinthians 11:29).**

And it is not your faithfulness. No, not even faithfulness in the true religion. Should we seek to be faithful? Most certainly. But on this great and terrible day of judgment, my faithfulness is not in any of those books. The Christian faith is tailor-made for the sick and sinful. It was in the height of his maturity that Paul declared himself to be a wretched sinner (Romans 7:24). Faithfulness may be the necessary fruit of saving faith. But it is by the singular instrumentality of faith that gives us the right to be called children of God.

Sola Fide (salvation by faith alone) is a central critical doctrine of the Christian faith. As Martin Luther taught:

Justification by faith alone is the foundation upon which the church stands or falls.

Questions for Study

1. Have you experienced ministries that have made you feel severed from Christ? Explain (pages 2, 3).
2. In what respect should the church get out of the way (page 4)?
3. Why is there no need for a temple in heaven (page 4)?
4. Explain why there is no need for the sun or moon? What is this teaching us (pages 4, 5)?
5. Is there a direction the nations should be taking (page 5)?
6. How is one assured of being in the Book of Life (pages 6, 7)?