

## A Permanent Reservation in Paradise

6<sup>th</sup> Sun. of Easter – 05/25/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27 Pastor Keith Besel

vv.9-10, [The angel says to John,] **“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”**  
[Then John tells us,] **“He carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,”**

### **Introduction**

✧ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✧ What if I were to offer you a free, all-expense-paid trip to paradise? Where would you imagine that destination to be?

➔ Some of you might think of paradise as being a trip to Tahiti. Others might be thinking of Australia or New Zealand. And yet others might consider paradise to be the Fiji Islands.

➔ But, what if I were to tell you that this trip starts today; that your plane is scheduled to leave in just one hour and that everything you'd need would be provided? Would you trust me? Would you get on that plane without first confirming the reservations; without first making sure that you actually have a place to stay?

✧ I seriously doubt that you would. I have learned my lesson about this in the past. Even before a short trip it's always wise to confirm your reservations; to make sure your name is actually recorded in the hotel's books. Doing so, helps alleviate any unnecessary stress as you begin your trip. It gives you peace so that you can truly enjoy your trip.

➔ Another thing you'd probably want to do is find out a little bit about where you're going. Popular vacation spots often print brochures and have websites that give you a glimpse into what this “paradise” will be like. It tells you some history; describes many of the sights you can see; provides instructions on how to get there and informs travelers of the unique characteristics and nature of the spot. What these resources provide, in essence, is a “mini tour” of “paradise” before you go.

✧ Well today, our text in Revelation 21 provides us, as believers in Christ, the Holy Spirit's “travelogue” of heaven. Through John, He grants us a “mini tour” of our future trip to paradise. A major difference though is that this will actually be a permanent move; a relocation of our residence when we go. But rest assured friends, your reservation is easy to confirm even now!

➔ And just so you know, this final destination is not just one of many possible paradises. No, this is guaranteed to be the ultimate; the one and only true “Paradise.” So, what do you say? Would you like to go on a quick tour? Let's do it! Our guide's name today is John, the apostle of Jesus. He will be the one talking from here on out.

### **I. The Origin of the Holy City**

✧ Welcome, my name is John. Our destination, ladies and gentlemen, is the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

➔ And before you ask, this is not the same as that geographic location by the same name in the middle east. That city was merely a forerunner in Bible times; a precursor intended to point us forward to this true and eternal Paradise. As we approach the City, allow me to provide a little bit of background information for you. You can't get the true flavor of this Paradise unless you understand where this City comes from. It is “coming down out of heaven from God” (v. 10). This is the same city that Abraham was looking forward to when Hebrews 11:10 says, “He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

✘ Yes, it's crucial that we recognize that this city comes down to mankind from God. After all, man can never ascend to God on our own. Actually God has been descending to man throughout all of history, hasn't He? He's the one who takes the initiative and comes out of love to dwell with His people. That's what He did in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament. That's what He did in His Son, Jesus who came to earth in human flesh to be with us; to serve us and die for us.

➔ And I, John – I personally witnessed all that He did at that time. But don't feel left out, because that's what He still does for you as you live on earth when He comes to be with you physically in His body and His blood in Holy Communion.

✘ Now, open wide your spiritual eyes of faith, because in this little "tour" you will see the final fulfillment of God's sacramental presence as He brings you and all believers into His eternal dwelling; making you His city; His dwelling; His re-creation of eternal paradise where He and you reside together in eternal Paradise!

## **II. The Appearance of the City**

✘ Notice also folks the unique appearance of the City. Even while we are still some distance away, it shines with the very glory of God Himself. "...it's radiance (is) like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal" (v. 11). Do you see though that it is not just God who is shining within the city, but the entire city itself shines with the glory that it has received from God.

➔ There's great significance to all of that, because the people living there, although they once were the opposite of purity – being filled with sin, they now have been wrapped in the very righteousness of God's Son. That is their new, eternal nature as saints. So, look at how they shine like a clear crystal; like jasper. They truly are God's most precious jewel. And just think, all of you travelers who believe in God's Son, you have that same righteousness already as God's gift. So, even now, you are His precious jewel as well!

## **III. The entry into the Holy City.**

✘ Alright, we've finally arrived and we are ready to enter into the city and see it up close and personal. As we go through the entrance, don't overlook the massive walls surrounding this place. With their awesome size and height it's obvious there is no possible way to enter this city except through the gates. We'll talk more about that in a moment. But there's a second reason for these massive walls, a reason that provides great comfort and peace to those already inside. These walls emphasize how God protects His people with His almighty, impenetrable power. For once a person enters into this city, never again will there be any worries or concerns as you still have back on earth right now.

➔ These saints are eternally protected from God's enemies of Satan, sin and death. No temptation; no suffering; no grief can ever creep in to trouble God's people again. The inhabitants here in Paradise never have to worry about falling into sin as our first parents did in Eden.

✘ God has said, "Nothing unclean will ever enter" this city (vs. 27). Now you see how crucial the love and forgiveness is that comes only in Jesus. Because all of us, in our nature, are sinful and impure to the core aren't we? We are "detestable"; we are "false"; and we deserve to be kept forever away from this great Paradise.

➔ It's so sad that so many will experience that eternal loneliness apart from God because they selfishly deny Jesus. But look, it's not because God doesn't want them to come in, but only because they reject the righteousness of Christ in unbelief; the righteousness that alone makes a person pure and holy. God cannot be contaminated by sin or He would no longer be God.

So, it's out of His love that He offers to make us clean by His grace through faith in Jesus' saving work.

- ✧ Now turn your attention to these marvelous gates to the Holy City. Take a moment to assess their splendor. There are twelve total gates; each one having the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel (v. 12-13). This is what I promised we'd come back to earlier on. The number twelve – and specifically the twelve tribes of Israel are God's symbols for His Holy Church.

➔ Long ago, He determined that His gifts of Word and Sacrament, which are the means by which a person comes into His presence both on earth and especially in heaven, would be administered through His church. Any other religions that do not purely preach His word or administer His gifts of baptism and the Lord's Supper according to His command are fraudulent scams from Satan. They may promise it, but they provide no entry into heaven.

➔ The angels that you see stationed here at each gate are God's agents to enforce this truth. Only God, in His infinite wisdom, knows what is in the heart of each and every soul. He knows who the true believers in Christ are and who the imposters are. And He has provided each angel with access to His "book of life." Those whose names are recorded there have free access. Their entrance has already been paid by Jesus. Their purity and salvation is guaranteed for eternity (v. 27).

- ✧ Now, I know, every time we give one these tours someone asks, "What about my name? Is my name written in the 'Lamb's book of Life?'" The best answer I can give is to use an illustration from one of your popular vacation spots back on earth; a place I know your pastor has visited before. In Missouri's Ozark region there's a place called Elephant Rock State Park. In that park there are massive granite rocks stacked on top of one another. Over 120 years ago, it was a quarry that employed many master stone cutters. There's one spot in the park where the stone cutters chiseled their names with dates on the side of these massive boulders. Now, more than a hundred years later, their names are as legible as they were the day they were first chiseled.

➔ Well my friends, it is by faith in Jesus, as it comes purely by His grace through baptism and by His Word of truth, that a person's name is chiseled into Jesus' book of life. And once you have that faith, your reservation in the Holy City, is more permanent than those names chiseled in granite. The only way a name is removed is when a person removes him/herself through unbelief. So, is your reservation confirmed; is your name in the Lamb's book of Life? As long as you trust wholly in Jesus and His work instead of your work for salvation, than you know with certainty that your name is in the book.

- ✧ Now I turn your attention ladies and gentlemen to the placement of these twelve gates. There are three on each side of the City. This is because people from all four corners of the earth; from every tribe, nation and language are welcomed into this Paradise. These gates are never closed because as long as there are people on earth who receive Christ's gift of faith, there is always, always room for them in God's Holy City.

#### **IV. The Foundation of the City**

- ✧ As with every city, the infrastructure is extremely important. What are the foundational philosophies and beliefs of the people within? What is their culture? Look closely and you'll see that this city has twelve foundations, each with a name of the Lamb's twelve apostles. Why? because the Lamb's own teaching is the cornerstone of this city; the teaching He disseminated to the world through the writings of His Apostles in the Bible. This is the foundation because these teachings and beliefs don't change back and forth. They are no different today from what they were at the beginning, because that which is absolute truth, by necessity, cannot change. If it were to change, then it was never the truth to begin with.

➔ Now if you were to question these residents that you see around you in this City, you would find that they all have one thing in common with the earliest Christian church on earth. Like those in Acts 2:42, they have “Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Many of these here were pastors and leaders in Christ's earthly church who were told by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:16, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Yes, God's true teaching in the Bible will always be the foundational belief for all who enter His Holy City.

## **V. The essence of the Holy City.**

- ✧ Finally, before we leave and you return for a while to your life on earth, I want to point out one more thing. Notice what it is that makes this City so grand and glorious. Beyond everything else you've already seen, this is what truly makes this place Paradise. Notice, there is no temple here; no sun or moon that serves as the source of light. And, there is no night or darkness. Why? because the temple on earth served as a physical connection to God's presence there. But here God and His Son, Jesus, are present in their fullest glory. Darkness was a reminder of evil and sin. But here, in the light of Jesus there is no evil; no sin; no corruption. Here there is only light, forgiveness, peace, and an ever-radiating joy from being with God in all of His glory!

## **Conclusion**

- ✧ My friends, I know you'd all love to stay here in Paradise. That's how I felt when I was first “carried away in the Spirit” (v.10) to this place. But remember this is only intended to be a mini-tour; a foretaste; a travelogue that will whet your appetite for the future.
  - ➔ Just as it was for me, this vision is God's gift to give you hope and confidence; to comfort you about where your loved ones are at who have left earth in this one, holy Christian faith.
- ✧ My hope though, is that after this tour, your earthly life will now be changed; that your excitement for sharing your faith might be heightened 10-fold; that your joy in serving Christ in His church is increased; and that your anticipation of living here in eternal glory will now permeate every aspect of your life.
  - ➔ For this tour that you have taken, my fellow Christians, is a tour of your future, because, through faith in Jesus, you have a permanent reservation, here in Paradise.
- ✧ So, good-bye for now. We all look forward to your return! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*