

Saint Paul Lutheran Sunday Morning Bible Class
Book of Revelation Chapters 21 & 22 Notes

Revelation chapter 21 & 22 are the most beautiful chapters in the Bible, describing where and under what conditions the resurrected saints shall spend eternity in perfect fellowship with God. Here we see elements of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Garden of Eden.

21:1 makes only a brief reference to the destruction of the old creation which has already taken place at this point in John's vision of the future. This is very much in keeping with the theme of peace, beauty, and perfect fellowship with God which is the theme here.

What happened to the old heavens and the old earth -- quite literally, the entire old creation? **2 Peter 3:10-13** describes the details of what will happen to the earth -- the whole creation -- which we now know. The old creation (ours) will be destroyed with a great noise and heat at the Lord's return. This is no ordinary fire, for, according to Peter, the "**elements will melt with fervent heat (v.10).**" The Greek word here, used only two other places in the New Testament, indicates about the same thing we mean when we talk about the elements in a scientific sense: the most basic building blocks of matter. This is no ordinary fire! Peter adds in verse **12, "the heavens will dissolve, being on fire, and the elements will melt with a fervent heat..."** indicating that the very forces holding the heavens together shall cease to exist. What an incredible description! As matter itself is being consumed, the heavenly bodies shall, in consuming heat, be cut loose from all of the forces which hold them together and in their places. (*We might add that this description rules out those millennialistic descriptions which depict only the believers as knowing that Christ has returned. It seems that the events described here would be hard to miss!*) To conclude Peter's point: with this end of the creation in mind, "**What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness . . . ?"** (verse **11b**).

So in verse 1 we are clearly dealing with a brand new creation in a much more literal sense than Noah could say that the world in which the Ark landed after the Flood was a new world. The most striking thing about this new creation where the believers will spend eternity is that it is a material place, and yet it is perfect. That will be a new experience for every human being except Adam and Eve, both of whom knew a perfect material creation.

In a very real sense, then, believers will finally know the perfect life in a material world and live in perfect fellowship with God just as we were originally created to live.

21:2-3 indicate to us that the spiritual will be an essential part of life in this new creation, for God will live with His people.

21:4 gives us but a cloudy idea of life in perfection by listing but a few of the things which we know now because of sin and assuring us that in this new creation these will be gone. One important point worth noting is that man today talks about doing away with death and with the causes of human suffering, and he even pretends that he will be able to do it. It is very clear that these things will never be done away with until God Himself does away with them for the saved.

21:5-8 are a message from God for people living before the new heavens and the new earth come to pass. This is a message intended directly for us today!

Verses **5** through **6a** introduces this message by identifying the Speaker: Jesus Christ (compare with Rev. 1:8 and 22:13). The Bridegroom now gives John a message for the whole Church -- **a message with our name on it!** That message further confirms Who the Speaker is, for Christ is the One Who is the Source of living water. That the source is not ourselves, our own faith, good works, or good intentions (which, despite our ability to even realize our good intentions, are also as filthy rags compared to God's will), but Christ Himself and His work for us, is especially important for us to realize as we look at verse 7.

Verse 7 speaks of our overcoming. It would be easy for us to imagine, then, that our overcoming makes

salvation our work. But this is not the case. Our failure to overcome is on our own heads. If we overcome, it is because of what God has given us for living, through the faith He gave us, by means of His baptism and His word and sacrament. As Paul says, there is no room for boasting; we are but beggars, to add Luther's last words to Paul's.

Verse 8 offers the other side of the coin, since those of us receiving this message are still in the world and still must live with the sinful flesh. Even in the believer the sinful flesh must be placed under subjection by means of the law. Notice, too, that unbelief is only one of the fruits of the flesh which rules where Christ does not. The cowardly, too, will be eternally condemned. Also among this list we find "**sorcerers**" (NKJV and NASB) or "**those who practice magic arts**" (NIV). The Greek here is *pharmakois*, which is a direct reference, not to witches or sorcerers, but has a connection with those who take the life of the unborn. Notice also that "**all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**" (On the **second death** see the comments on **Revelation 20:6**). This language also confirms the imagery used elsewhere in Scripture, including our Lord's own words, which describe hell in these same terrible terms.

21:9-27 describe the New Jerusalem in the new creation of God in which the believers shall live! Some of this language is clearly figurative, but we must be careful to stay with the point of comparison so that we do not get lost or mislead ourselves.

The **twelve gates** in **verse 12** are clearly indicating the basis of the Church in believing Old Testament Israel, since they have the names of the twelve tribes written on them. The **twelve foundations** in **verse 14** clearly indicate the foundation of the Church's faith in the Apostles' teaching of Christ. This is made clear by the fact that they actually have the names of the 12 Apostles written on them. Incidentally, this should make clear that those who claim to be Apostles today are false teachers.

The measurements of the city can be taken as literal, lacking any indication of symbolism. The dimensions indicate that **the New Jerusalem is 1,400 miles long, 1,400 miles wide and 1,400 miles high!** It is described as a perfect cube. 144 cubits width of the walls in **verse 17**, if taken as literal, translate into 216 feet. Because of the significance of 144 (12 times 12), this may be figurative, but the point is "the new Jerusalem will stand forever!"

21:18-21 impress us with the incredible beauty of the New Jerusalem. Some of the more obscure minerals named here are difficult to identify with certainty from the Greek.

21:22-27 highlight the Holy perfection of the New Jerusalem. There is no need for a Temple for the One Who is worshiped is among His people. He is their light and their life. The fact that all the faithful of all times are here is indicated in verses **24** and **26**. In **verse 25** we learn, in addition to the fact that the new earth has no sea, that it also has no night. The gates of cities used to be closed at night, when an open gate could provide an enemy easy access to the city under the cover of darkness. That the gates of this New Jerusalem, are never closed tells us not only that there is no more night, there are no more enemies to challenge God or His people.

Verse 27 is reassuring in that it rules out, forever, any further contact for us with sin, either from within ourselves or from temptation. The most difficult and continuous struggle of this life will be forever over!

Revelation 22:1-5 tell us more about life in the New Creation. The material nature of much of this description makes us careful to relegate any of this description as symbolic. When one ties each point of description together and looks for the unifying theme, these verse are clearly describing the basic themes of material life. But notice the point that is made at every opportunity: this life being described here is perfect (expressed in every verse, but explicitly in verse 3), and this perfect life will last forever! This is a perfect life, perfectly lived, without any of the curse of sin, without temptation, all good and joyful in perfect fellowship with God in His very presence, with nothing to ever mar existence! This is a perfect description of heaven for beings who are

both spiritual and material, like ourselves.

22:4 tells us that we will see God's face. In ancient times criminals were banished from the presence of the king so that they could not see his face. And, of course, we learn from Scripture that because we are sinners, we cannot see His face and live. So this information that in this new creation we will be able to see God's face, further emphasizes the physical and spiritual perfection we shall enjoy in our very beings.

22:5 -- The point in verse 5 is especially important: the saved (who are the only ones from this earth in the New Creation), shall "**reign eternally.**" What shall we rule over? There are plans of God which we have no knowledge of. But we shall find out one day. One thing is very clear, we are not going to spend eternity singing in choirs or sitting on clouds playing harps. Whatever we are doing, there will be no way to be happier in any existence we can imagine!

22:6-7 remind us, with a warning from the Lord Himself, that His coming to bring this about shall be sooner than we are ready for it. We may feel ready for His coming now, but when we have full knowledge, which includes knowledge of those issues already revealed in Scripture, then we shall realize more fully than ever the shortcomings of our personal efforts. We will realize that even as believers, all we can do is commend ourselves to God's forgiving grace in Jesus Christ! There is still so much work to do!

Paul thought that the Lord would return in his lifetime. Martin Luther noted this and remarked that the Lord must be coming in his lifetime since he could not see how the world could get any worse. Christians today are also convinced that the Lord will come shortly. Are these opinions in contradiction? No! Each generation of Christians have seen more of the Scripture's prophecies about the conditions at Christ's return fulfilled. So we are right in saying that the signs of Christ's return have never been more completely fulfilled than they are today!

22:8-9 -- John is again overcome by what he has seen and the presence of the angel. But again he is reminded that the angel is a fellow creature and fellow servant of God. It is comforting for us to know that these powerful creatures are incorruptible and that they are, in a real sense, partners with us in God's work.

22:10 -- John finds himself in the same position as Daniel in **Daniel 8:26**. But Daniel was told to seal up the book because the time was not yet at hand. Now John is told not to seal up the book since the time is at hand. This again should add to our sense of urgency about preparing ourselves for Christ's return and for seeing that others hear the Gospel.

22:11-14 -- These verses may be understood as underlining what it means that "**the time is at hand.**" Once the judgment comes at the surprise appearing of the Lord, the time of grace and forgiveness will be ended and there will be no more chance to repent.

Others understand this verse in light of Matthew 13:24-30: the Church on earth may not take up the sword against sin, but let the tares grow together with the wheat until the harvest of the Lord. Both are valid teachings of Scripture, so the issue becomes, which one (if either of these choices) is meant here?

Then, in verses **12** and **13**, the Lord Himself speaks to us. "**To give to everyone according to what he has done**" does not teach that we are saved by our works. God-pleasing works talked about here are inseparable from that thing which alone saves: faith. The "**reward**" which the Lord is talking about here refers only to the faithful. The Bible teaches that there will be differences in rewards for the faithful, according to their faithfulness, although none will be, as a result, less happy than another.

22:15 should make us think very soberly about the conduct of our life on this earth. It is very clear that these things can have no fellowship with God or Jesus Christ. The term "**dogs**" was a Jewish term that referred to

anyone ceremonially unclean. In **Deuteronomy 23:18** the original Hebrew word "dog" is translated as "**male prostitute.**" "**Magic arts**" in the Greek is again the word which includes those who mix poisons to, among other things, induce an abortion. The other terms in this verse are more familiar.

22:16-21, for a final time, identifies Jesus Christ as the one giving this Revelation to John and to the Church, true God and true man. **Verse 16** begins with the words, "**I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you**" It should be noted that the word "**you**" here is plural. The book of Revelation is not just for St. John, but for the entire church.

22:17 repeats the Gospel message that the church has been charged to take into all the world. The Holy Spirit seeks to work faith in this message and invitation from God in all who hear it. With Christ ready to appear in the sky at any time, the urgency to get the message out is all the greater.

22:18-19 -- He then warns against those who would add to or subtract from this Word of God. The consequences of doing so are dire! Compare this language with Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32. After our Lord once again reminds us that He is coming soon, John adds the highest blessing of all: "**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with God's people. Amen.**"