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Sermon Notes

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## **The Spiritual Architecture of the New Jerusalem**

### **Revelation 21:9-21**

All my adult life, I have enjoyed excellent architecture

The beauty of buildings crafted with a combination of engineering skill (so it doesn't fall down and kill its residents!) and artistic beauty so the eye is not assaulted by its ugliness, but rather the soul is set free by its lines and shapes and colors

Function and Form...

The science of a materials, and strength of structural members... making sure it stands through all weathers, in all conditions

The artistry of different schools of architecture... classical, baroque, colonial, Victorian, Gothic, Renaissance, Romanesque, Greek Revival, Oriental...

I've seen some amazing buildings in my life... I love the St. Louis arch, its height and shimmer and lines; the Capitol building in Washington DC, the Eiffel Tower; Osaka Castle in Japan, the Forbidden City in Beijing;

I've never seen Frank Lloyd Wright's modern miracle called "Fallingwater" in rural Pennsylvania, built over a cascading waterfall... I hope to see it someday

Many of you have seen the Biltmore Mansion, built like a French Chateau in the Black Mountains of North Carolina... elegance, ostentation, expanse

On the other hand, when I was in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania, former Soviet Block nations behind the Iron Curtain, the communist buildings I saw there were cinderblock monstrosities, all function, zero form... it sucked the life from your soul as you looked at it, never mind having to live there every day of your life

As we come to these magnificent verses in Revelation, we come to a description of the heavenly architecture of the New Jerusalem

These verses stretch human language and imagination beyond the breaking point so that we can merely say that we can hardly imagine what that radiant city will be like... perfect in form and in function!

The city whose ARCHITECT and BUILDER is GOD!!

## I. The Radiant Glory of the Holy City (vs. 9-11)

***Revelation 21:9-11 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup> It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.***

### A. The Angelic Guide

1. He is identified as one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of the final plagues
  - a. Human rebellion... human wickedness... human sinfulness is the backdrop by which this magnificent New Jerusalem was constructed

***Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.***

- b. So also the angel's words are almost identical to the earlier angelic vision of the Great Whore of Babylon

***Revelation 17:1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.***

***Revelation 21:9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."***

- c. The parallel is INTENTIONAL...
  - d. The Bride of Christ is the direct opposite of the Whore of Babylon
  - e. The Great Whore of Babylon is dressed in gaudy jewelry, luxurious clothing, and has an outward seductive allure, she is drunk with the wine of immorality and the blood of the saints—she is a creature of pleasure and of vicious violence
  - f. But the Bride of Christ is radiant with a different kind of sparkle... the light of the glory of God; it is the difference between a rhinestone and a perfect diamond
  - g. YET every member of the Body of Christ was RESCUED out of the Satanic world system... there but for the grace of God go I
2. The “Bride” language is one of the powerful metaphors for the church
- a. In the Old Testament, Israel was sometimes portrayed as the wife of Yahweh...
  - b. In the New Testament, this analogy is perfected in the eternal love relationship between Christ and the Church
  - c. The New Jerusalem is DESCENDING from God, prepared for the wedding celebration and the eternal marriage... Christ has been preparing her throughout millennia of redemption
- B. Location: John Carried Away to a Great and High Mountain
- 1. Whereas the angel showing John the Great Whore of Babylon carried him to a desert, the view here is from a majestic mountain
  - 2. The New Jerusalem is not built on the mountain, but viewed from the mountain... a lofty, visionary perspective... John can see clearly by the Spirit what the final outcome will be
- C. Jerusalem called “The Holy City”
- 1. Throughout history, cities have been seats of wickedness

2. The Tower of Babel shows why
  - a. Men were motivated by pride and a desire to MAKE A NAME for themselves
  - b. They wanted to build a tower that ascended from the surface of the earth to the heavens to challenge the power of God
  - c. Human cities have been cesspools of wickedness ever since Babel
    - i) The “city that never sleeps”... and nothing good happens after midnight
    - ii) The red-light district, the back alley drug deals, the lurking, stalking, sleepless menace, the smell of human filth and the danger of human violence
  - d. This is what Augustine called the “City of Man”... a direct challenge to God and to his glory
3. The Holy City means it is SEPARATE from all evil

D. Glory = Radiant Display of God’s Perfections

***Revelation 21:11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.***

1. The city SHONE WITH THE GLORY OF GOD... a radiant perfect spiritual light giving all glory of its origin to God
2. Light was the first physical feature detailed in Genesis 1: God said LET THERE BE LIGHT
3. Light is a complex phenomenon that physicists have been studying throughout the history of science... including great men like Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein
4. God created light before he created anything that emanates light...
  - a. The sun, moon, stars not created until the fourth day of Creation
  - b. God is fully capable of emitting physical light, not needing the sun or moon or lamps to do the job

- c. New Jerusalem, the entire city glows with the glory of God
  - d. Christ himself is the radiance of God's glory... every light beam of the New Heavens and New Earth and New Jerusalem will be the glory of God the Father shining through God the Son
  - e. We should not imagine the brilliance of this light to be BLINDING... actually it will display the perfection of sight... seeing Christ as he really is will be the clearest we have ever seen anything
  - f. In this world, brilliant light can be painful... but in that world, there will be no more pain; rather the radiant beauty of the New Universe and New Jerusalem will be perfect pleasure... the most pleasing sight we have ever seen or ever could see
5. This radiant glory illuminates everything in the New Jerusalem
- a. The precious stones and the transparent glass are all set up to glow and shine and radiate with the glory of God...
    - i) All the precious stones in the foundation of the wall would be totally dark without the light of the glory of God
    - ii) The streets of gold which will be like nothing we have ever experienced on earth because it will be transparent...it would be black & dead without the light of the glory of God
    - iii) we will be able to see it in every flower that blooms in the new earth's soil, and every stone that makes up the city's foundations and walls
  - b. The light all around will flow into our perfected souls by our resurrected eyes

***Matthew 6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light."***

- c. This will be the nature of our own radiant glory as well

***Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.***

### E. Like a Clear Jasper Stone

1. The glory of the New Jerusalem is said to be PRECIOUS... meaning valuable, like a precious gem
2. The New Jerusalem is likened to a JASPER, clear as crystal

Jasper is a form of quartz, usually appearing in a reddish color and often with streaks or spots that made it appealing, fascinating to the eye; it is formed by mineral-rich volcanic sediments coagulating in unpredictable patterns

However, like many of the physical aspects of John's description in this chapter, this jasper breaks all normal rules... it is perfectly CLEAR... no spots, no impurities... just perfect transparency: CLEAR AS CRYSTAL

Thus we can liken it to a perfect diamond, with no impurities at all... no inclusions

Despite the fact that the New Jerusalem is made of redeemed sinners, the purification of the bride by the blood of Christ is so total and complete, her radiance of the glory of God is undimmed by any spot or blemish

## II. The Wall and Gates and the Holy City (vs. 12-14)

***Revelation 21:12-14 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. <sup>14</sup> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.***

### A. The Wall

1. All ancient cities had walls... more than anything, for PROTECTION
2. Walls kept dangers out... wild animals at night, and especially invading armies

3. Before gunpowder made such fortresses obsolete, behind a mighty wall was the safest place you could face a massive army
4. This wall is a very surprising feature of the New Jerusalem, because it seems unnecessary
  - a. All the enemies of the city will have been thrown in the Lake of Fire, from which there can be no escape
  - b. We are later told that the gates of the city will NEVER CLOSE

***Revelation 21:25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.***

Just as Isaiah predicted of the future glory of Zion:

***Isaiah 60:11 Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations--their kings led in triumphal procession.***

- c. But this wall will be GREAT and HIGH... a massive barrier, impenetrable
  - d. Meditating on the wall of the New Jerusalem has led many commentators to believe the entire layout and description of the city is SYMBOLIC and SPIRITUAL, and NOT LITERAL...
  - e. They point out that the wall is impossibly short compared to the height of the city itself...
  - f. The city will ascend 12,000 stadia (over 1400 miles) upward... but the wall is only measured as 144 cubits (216 feet)... most commentators think of that as the THICKNESS of the wall... but even that would be woefully inadequate for a wall high enough to match the city itself
5. The Wall gives a sense of might and power and protection and safety and salvation

## B. The Gates

***Revelation 21:12-13 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of***

***the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.***

1. The gate of a city was the place where people could enter or leave...
2. It was also the place where the elders of the city would convene and do business
3. Here it especially connects with the need to ENTER through the finished work of Christ
  - a. After the sin of Adam and Eve, they were evicted from the Garden of Eden
  - b. The way to the Tree of Life was BLOCKED by an angel with a flaming sword

***Genesis 3:24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.***

- c. Jesus' death on the cross has paid the death penalty... he removed the flaming sword so that we would have the right to enter and eat from the Tree of Life
- d. The "right to enter" the City is much in view

***Revelation 22:14-15 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.***

- e. Jesus is the true gate for the sheep

***Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

4. Basic lesson: only by FAITH IN CHRIST can anyone enter this Holy City



5. BUT in John's vision... there are twelve gates... a different lesson being taught

- a. Each of the gates is labelled with one of the twelve tribes of Israel

***Revelation 21:12 On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.***

- i) I believe this shows the CONTINUITY of the work of God across the covenants
- ii) In Abraham all people on earth are blessed (Gen. 12:3)... our salvation is in Abraham and in his son, Jesus Christ
- iii) Abraham is called the Father of many nations...
- iv) We are all considered children of Abraham

***Galatians 3:7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.***

- v) The twelve gates with the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel remind inhabitants of the New Jerusalem of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... every time a redeemed person goes in or out of the city, they will do so under the name of one of the Twelve Tribes

When I was a student at MIT, there was a large courtyard, Killian Court, in which were inscribed way up high the greatest names in the history of human science... single names, last names... and the most prominent of those names were inscribed in the largest letters, and the less influential with smaller letters... but just to have your name inscribed in the stone was a massive honor

In 1915, the faculty in the various departments at MIT was polled to see what names should be inscribed... the largest letters were reserved for Aristotle, Newton, Lavoisier, Franklin, Pasteur, Faraday, Archimedes, Darwin, Copernicus, and Leonardo da Vinci. These are MIT's great heroes of science circa 1915... and

you walk under these names to get to class... it's a reminder of history and this world's vision of greatness

In the New Jerusalem, the honored names are a reminder of God's faithfulness to his promises and his grace in covering the sins of Israel and all Abraham's children

- b. Each of these twelve gates is guarded by an angel... but he has no sword in his hand; the way to the Tree of Life is free
- c. The gates are arranged by the points of the compass:

***Revelation 21:13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.***

- i) But there is no order at all... it starts with the east, then goes up to the north, down to the south, and then to the west...
- ii) No Zodiac, no mysticism

#### C. The Foundation of the Wall

***Revelation 21:14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.***

1. The idea here is of permanence, stability
2. It also links the Old Covenant with the New Covenant... the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb
3. Obviously, Judas Iscariot's name would be left off... we don't know if Paul was included or Matthias
4. Paul himself wrote that the household of God is

***Ephesians 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.***

5. The testimony that they had as eyewitnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection was essential to the millions who later followed

### III. The Dimensions of the Holy City (vs. 15-17)

***Revelation 21:15-17 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. <sup>16</sup> The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. <sup>17</sup> He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using.***

#### A. The Angel Did the Measuring

1. This is similar to the elaborate measurements in Ezekiel 40-41 in which an angel takes a rod and measures everything to do with the visionary temple there... the walls, the gates, the porticoes, alcoves, and courtyards
2. This angel has a rod of gold to do the measurements
3. He measures the entire city, including its gates and walls
4. The act of measurement gives a sense of reality and boundary to the New Jerusalem
5. We are finite, and always will be finite creatures... even in resurrection glory, we will be limited in space... so the city we will live in will have a limit to it
6. The limit is fixed by the purposes of God

#### B. The Layout of the City

1. Urban planning is a major science... when the leaders of a city have the opportunity to plan it out ahead of time, there can be an intentionality to where every street goes
2. My hometown of Boston is POORLY planned... some say the roads are paved cowpaths... they seem to follow no particular arrangement... they meander in all angles
3. The city of Washington D.C. was intricately planned and laid out in 1791 by a Frenchman named Pierre Charles L'Enfant contracted by President Washington... the Mall was to be the center of the

city, with the most important buildings designed around it as a symbol of equal access for all people

4. The eternal city, the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the New Heaven and New Earth, has been being planned and prepared for millennia by the perfect wisdom of God
5. Very little of the city plan is given here... but we do learn its overall dimensions... and they are MIND-BOGGLING!!
6. The city is laid out as a square in its footprint... a sense of perfection... but also it is massive in scope... no city in human history comes close to it in sheer size... 12,000 stadia on a side!
  - a. A stadion is about 607 English feet... so 12,000 would be almost 1400 miles...
  - b. A city laid out that big on a side would extend from Orlando, Florida to El Paso, Texas, and up to the Canadian border with Montana, and eastward to a tiny place called Val d'Or Quebec north of Ottawa...
  - c. It would look to be about half the size of continental United States
  - d. Even more amazing is that it goes as HIGH as it is long and wide
  - e. The city is presented as a CUBE... a perfect cube... some have linked it to the cubic shape of the holy of holies in Solomon's Temple
  - f. The almost incomprehensible height of this city boggles the mind... it would extend well into outer space in our present world; the International Space Station orbits the earth 150 miles from the earth's surface... the New Jerusalem would extend TEN TIMES further into space

***1 Kings 6:20 The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar.***

- g. At the standard 10 feet per floor, a skyscraper going that high would have over 700,000 floors!! That would be a staggeringly high skyscraper!!
- h. An elevator reaching the 700,000<sup>th</sup> floor would have to be shockingly fast

The fastest elevator in the world services the Shanghai Tower in China... a top speed of 40 mph... any faster would be physically uncomfortable for the passengers

At 40 mph, it would take 35 HOURS in an elevator to reach the top floor

[Calvin: they better have some good entertainment... in-flight movies; more like in-elevator movies!!]

Henry Morris suggests something more exciting however:

“The new bodies of the resurrected saints will be like those of angels, no longer limited by gravitational or electro-magnetic forces as at present. Thus it will be as easy for the inhabitants to travel vertically as horizontally in the New Jerusalem. Consequently the streets of the city may well include vertical passageways as well as horizontal avenues, and the city blocks might well be more like city cubes instead of flat square areas between streets as in present-day earthly cities.” [*The Revelation Record*, 451]

- 7. John MacArthur strongly advocates taking these numbers literally, and I respect that:

“Human language is inadequate to fully describe the unimaginable magnificence of the believers’ indescribable eternal home. Unwilling to take the language of Scripture at face value, many seek for some hidden meaning behind John’s descriptions. But if the words do not mean what they say, who has the authority to say what they do mean? Abandoning the literal meaning of the text only leads to groundless, futile speculation. The truth about the heavenly city is more than is described, but it is not less and not different from what is described.” [Commentary on Revelation 12-22, p. 280]

8. However, because these numbers seem so symbolic—12,000 is the number 12 times ten cubed—the 144 that the wall measures is 12 squared—many commentators feel like it begs for a spiritual and symbolic interpretation... the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 apostles of the Lamb representing the totality of the people of God in heavenly order and filled with glory

### C. The Measurement of the Wall

***Revelation 21:17 He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits, by man's measurement, which the angel was using.***

1. As I mentioned earlier, the wall was measured as well at approximately 216 feet, which almost everyone takes as a THICKNESS of the wall...
2. Even so, it is dimensionally different than the height of the city... the wall seems to be just a symbol, even if these are the literal measurements

### IV. The Building Materials of the Holy City (vs. 18-21)

***Revelation 21:18-21 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.***

#### A. Everything in the City is Designed to be Translucent

1. Everything in the city is illuminated with the radiant light of God's glory
2. The wall itself was made of jasper, diamond-like as stated earlier
3. The city as a whole was made of a new substance that we cannot conceive of: transparent gold

4. Obviously with glass everywhere, there is no possibility of PRIVACY, but privacy will not be needed at all in heaven... no bodily functions, no marital relations, no secret acts of wickedness... nothing to hide... everything out in the open... also no introversion in which people “need to get away”

#### B. The Preciousness of the Building Materials

1. The foundations of the city wall are adorned with every kind of precious stone
2. These stones represent the diversity and radiant beauty of the people of God... 1 Peter 2 calls us “living stones”

***Revelation 7:9 a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.***

3. The actual stones:

Jasper (clear), sapphire (red), chalcedony (greenish-blue), emerald (green), sardonyx (reddish-white), carnelian (red), chrysolite (gold), beryl (blue-green), topaz (yellow), chrysoprase (greenish-yellow), jacinth (purple), amethyst (violet)

The visible spectrum is represented here: ROY G BIV are the colors of the rainbow

**Red:** sapphire    **Orange:** chrysolite    **Yellow:** topaz    **Green:** emerald  
**Blue:** beryl    **Indigo:** jacinth    **Violet:** amethyst

Every color will be seen... as the brilliance of the glory of God passes through them and takes the breath away with their beauty

I want to celebrate the amoral diversity of the people of God!!

I once preached a sermon entitled “**The Cross a Prism for the Glory of God**”... a prism takes white light and bends it into the colors of the spectrum

In the cross of Christ we see the love of God, the justice of God, the patience of God, the wisdom of God, the wrath of God, the power of God... every attribute of God can be seen in the cross of Christ

So also the radiant New Jerusalem is a display of the varied aspects of the glory of God!!

### C. The Pearly Gates

***Revelation 21:21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.***

1. In the ancient world, the pearl was one of the most precious items anyone could own
2. They were incredibly rare, as pearl divers would dive down to the bottom of the bays along the Mediterranean coastline and bring up the oysters that might contain a pearl
3. Pearls have a radiant translucence to them that is visually appealing... a glistening white luster
4. They are made by a grain of sand which irritates the oyster and causes it to protect itself by covering the particulate little by little in layers with a mineral called aragonite, and a protein called conchiolin.
5. Therefore they are a symbol of the pain and suffering that sin has caused, especially to the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, and how much radiant beauty came from that suffering in the end... also the suffering of MARTYRS and MISSIONARIES
6. The pearls are MASSIVE... a single pearl is used for a single gate!
7. They will stand as a continual display of the beauty and glory that has come from the suffering of Christ and his servants
8. The STREETS OF GOLD we've already mentioned...



## V. Applications

### A. Meditate on Heaven!

1. This has been an extended meditation on the glories of the New Jerusalem
2. Whether you take these words as being symbolic or literal, all Bible-believing Christians must stand in awe of whatever will be the reality of that glorious city
3. We should yearn for heaven! We should think about it daily!
4. We should allow our heavenly meditations to drive away earthly depression... or pain... or disappointments... or pride... or worldly ambition... or selfish desires
5. We should allow this meditation to make us yearn for personal holiness NOW by putting sin to death by the Spirit
6. We should allow this meditation to make us zealous for the external journey of evangelism here in Durham... to want to speak to co-workers or dormmates or neighbors or boutique and restaurant owners, or waiters, or people we meet on the streets of Durham or Raleigh or Chapel Hill
7. We should yearn for the success of the gospel to the ends of the earth!!
8. We should give financially to support missionaries
9. We should pray for the world they're doing in China or Syria or Cameroon or Kazakhstan, that God may be glorified in the diversity of his church

### B. COME TO CHRIST!!

1. The gospel is here, now, and God is calling all you who hear to find forgiveness in Christ
2. That city is a HOLY CITY, and no one can enter it except those who have been made holy by faith in Christ