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Sermon Notes

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Some Glorious Gifts of Heaven Cataloged

Revelation 22:1-5

The human mind can scarcely take in a massive treasure trove... we cannot with a single glance absorb the vastness of supreme wealth; it has to come to our simple minds line upon line, item upon item. We have to open the treasure box and lift up each jewel one at a time and inspect it to get a sense of how rich the whole treasure is

Alexander Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*:

A vast treasure hidden on the remote island of Monte Cristo near Elba off the western coast of Italy... Edmund Dantes had escaped from the prison on Chateau D'If and had followed a treasure map to a hidden grotto where this vast treasure had been hidden in the 1490s.

When he discovered the huge treasure box and broke it open, he could scarcely believe his eyes:

“Three compartments divided the coffer. In the first, blazed piles of golden coin; in the second, were ranged bars of unpolished gold, which possessed nothing attractive save their value; in the third, Edmond grasped handfuls of diamonds, pearls, and rubies, which, as they fell on one another, sounded like hail against glass. After having touched, felt, examined these treasures, Edmond rushed through the caverns like a man seized with frenzy; he leaped on a rock, from whence he could behold the sea. He was alone -- alone with these countless, these unheard-of treasures! was he awake, or was it but a dream?

He raced around screaming like a madman at his lavish fortune...

Then he fell on his knees, and, clasping his hands convulsively, uttered a prayer intelligible to God alone. He soon became calmer and more happy, for only now did he begin to realize his felicity. He then set himself to work to count his fortune. There were a thousand ingots of gold, each weighing from two to three pounds; then he piled up twenty-five thousand crowns, each worth about eighty francs...; and he saw that the complement was not half empty. And he measured ten double handfuls of pearls,

diamonds, and other gems, many of which, mounted by the most famous workmen, were valuable beyond calculation.”

Dantes had to take in his new fortune in categories!! So it is with our heavenly treasure. We cannot begin to comprehend how rich we will be in heaven; so the Apostle John has to describe it for us line upon line... in these five verses of Revelation 22, he states many things of indescribable worth simply, one at a time

Revelation 22:1-5 is the completion of the Apostle John’s description of the New Jerusalem, which he began in Revelation 21:9...

The angel took John on a visionary journey to show him this radiantly glorious city, the capital city of the New Heaven and New Earth that God will make as our eternal home... the visionary journey began in Revelation 21:9:

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." ¹⁰ 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. 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.

John then proceeds to describe this massive, brilliant city, the New Jerusalem... its great high wall with twelve gates, each named for one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and each with an angel standing at the gates... not to guard it but to welcome all who come; its twelve-fold foundations, with each of the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb... the gates each made of spectacular single pearl, the streets of the city being made of transparent gold; the foundations of the city wall decorated with twelve different colored gems, giving off every color of the spectrum – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet...

The New Jerusalem is massive in size, effectively the distance from Orlando to Abilene Texas, and up to the border of Canada... and as tall as it is long and wide... incomprehensible size for a city

The city is continually radiant with the glory of God... everything is about translucence – the streets and walls and structures are all amazingly set up to glow with the glory of God and of Christ

The city gates stand open continually – and the wealth of the nations will come continually streaming in to beautify the city and make it even more glorious... John mentions the Kings of the nations will come into it and

bring their glory into it... so this city will be the focus of the New Heavens and New Earth, but not all there will be

In some sense the New Jerusalem represents the PEOPLE OF GOD... the BRIDE OF CHRIST... the redeemed from every tribe and language and people and nation... all of them diverse from each other and gloriously holy

But it cannot be only a symbolic and spiritual image, for we will have actual physical resurrection bodies that take up space and will need to be somewhere

Made like Christ, like Christ we will rise in glory...

Christ's mysterious resurrection body is our pattern:

Luke 24:39-40 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

So, we must have a PLACE to walk, a PLACE to gather, a PLACE to dwell, a PLACE to eat and drink... and that PLACE will be the New Jerusalem

And it will be a perfectly pure place, free from all threats, all enemies, all wickedness:

Revelation 21:27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The first five verses of Revelation 22 complete the line by line description of the New Jerusalem... and I can do nothing better than walk through it with you all this morning, line by line

Like Edmund Dantes, I want to pick up each gem from the treasure box of infinite riches in the scripture and hold up each phrase to the light of the Holy Spirit's illumination, to make them glow in your minds... so you can understand HOW RICH IS YOUR INHERITANCE in Christ Jesus

Let's start with...

I. The River of the Water of Life

Revelation 22:1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city.

A. The Angel Showed Me

1. John is seeing all this in a supernatural vision of the Spirit led by an angelic guide
2. John could not have concocted this complex image in his mind... he saw it and wrote it down

B. The River of the Water of Life

1. A powerful image... a sparkling, bubbling, rushing river of water, endlessly flowing, ready to refresh the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem forever
2. It is flowing CLEAR AS CRYSTAL... brilliant, radiant, shining with the glory of God like everything else in the city
3. It FLOWS DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THE GREAT STREET of the city...
 - a. That street is depicted as made of transparent gold (Rev. 21:21)
 - b. The whole plan of the city centers around this street and this river
4. The image is similar to the one seen by Ezekiel the prophet in his vision of a glorified temple

Ezekiel 47:1-5 The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east)...³ As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep.⁴ He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist.⁵ He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in-- a river that no one could cross.

It gets deeper and deeper as it flows further and further away... an infinite supply of water

In Ezekiel's image, the river produces vast and diverse life:

Ezekiel 47:6-9 Then he led me back to the bank of the river.⁷ When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river.⁸ He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh.⁹ Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.

Ezekiel 47:12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the

water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."

5. It also connects with so many marvelous images in the scriptures, images of pure refreshment in GOD ALONE

Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

Psalm 46:4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

6. The original Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

7. The living water that Jesus promised

John 4:14 whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

There will be an endless sense of spiritual REFRESHMENT by our relationship with God and with Christ... also this teaches that the SOURCE of our eternal life will forever be God and Christ—no independent life in heaven; as water is essential to our biological life here on earth, so the water of life flowing from the throne will be forever essential to our spiritual existence in heaven. WE ARE ETERNAL DEPENDENT ON HIM!!

C. The Source of the Water: The Throne of God

1. The never-ending water supply comes directly from the throne of God
2. This is a marvelous lesson... the water is created right from the sovereign power of the King of the Universe... he is opening his limitless heart and pouring life out to us; the water itself is created *ex nihilo*, from nothing, and will never end
3. It represents God as the source of all life, happiness, joy, refreshment forever and ever
4. God RULES to bless us... God RULES to give us what we need for life and joy and fruitfulness
5. Human rulers use their power to feed themselves... to surround themselves with comfort and luxury and prideful feelings of power; God uses his throne to give life and blessing to all his subjects

6. NOTE: this reminds me of a different river that also flowed from the throne of God

Daniel 7:9-10 Almighty God took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him.

7. BOTH eternal life and eternal death flow from the sovereign throne of God; and no one can overturn his will

II. The Tree of Life

Revelation 22:2-3 On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse.

A. We Have Returned to the Garden of Eden... only Perfected

1. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
2. The tragic river of history that flowed from that horrible decision and action has been incalculable... a flood of miseries—of sin, sickness, suffering, tears, and death
3. After Adam sinned, God put a sentinel angel, a warrior cherub with a flaming sword flashing back and forth to keep man from going to the Tree of Life and eating of it and living forever
4. Jesus Christ paid the death penalty to open for us the way to this tree of life, and by his blood he gave us the right to eat from the tree of life

B. Position of the Tree: On Each Side of the River of Life

1. The tree of life derives its life and fruit from the water flowing from the throne of God
2. They are two different ways of representing that eternal life comes from God and from Christ alone
3. Like Psalm 1, the limitless supply of water means a limitless harvest of fruit

Psalm 1:3 like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

4. The position of the tree being on EACH SIDE of a river is hard to picture...
 - a. One commentator saw it as a grove of trees, all stemming from the same root system

- b. Another saw a massively huge single tree that spanned the stream just as it flowed from the throne where it was not as wide as further down
- c. Others make no effort to make sense of it physically, because for them it is simply a spiritual image that can barely be put into words

C. The Leaves of the Tree are for the Healing of the Nations

1. MYSTERY! For we have already learned this:

Revelation 21:4 There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

2. So why would there be any need for healing for the nations?
 - a. You might think it's like saying the hospitals in the New Jerusalem will be the best quality... or the funeral homes will be top notch
 - b. BUT ACTUALLY it's not
 - c. Another way to look at it is that the diet of food from the tree of life will produce perfect health continually... that it is BY eating from the tree of life that the redeemed will be continually supernaturally healthy and strong and vibrant
 - d. Like speaking of a "healthy" diet or the "therapeutic" or "life-giving" value of a balanced diet or taking vitamins... it's not that you do it to heal illness but more to be healthy continually and maximally energetic
 - e. That's there will be no pain... because the immediate curative powers of the resurrection body and this supernaturally living diet will remove any need for pain... the resurrection bodies will be perpetually nourished by the water of life and the tree of life

D. No More Curse

Revelation 22:3 No longer will there be any curse.

1. The curse came from eating of the forbidden fruit... the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
2. The main curse of course is DEATH... and that death is gone forever!
3. Beyond that is the curse on labor and on the earth; God cursed the ground because of Adam, saying it would produce thorns and thistles; and that is removed as well, for the earth will flourish perfectly under human cultivation
4. The curse on the woman, pain in childbearing, will be obsolete for marriage and birth will be no more, but we will be like the angels in heaven

5. When the Jews entered the Promised Land, God promised them blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience... now, in the New Heaven and New Earth, there will be no more curses, only blessings

Deuteronomy 28:3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

Deuteronomy 28:6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

Deuteronomy 28:8 The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to.

III. The Throne of God and of the Lamb

Revelation 22:3 The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city

A. The Throne of God is the place of the greatest power in the universe

1. The most glorious aspect of the New Jerusalem will be the immediate proximity of God Almighty
2. This is the place where all wisdom and power reside

B. In the Present Universe, God's Throne is in Heaven... the Highest Heaven

Isaiah 66:1 This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?"

Psalm 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

C. But God Will Establish His Throne RIGHT IN THE MIDST of the City!!

1. Our access will be perfect
2. Christ has opened for us all a "new and living way" into the throneroom of grace
3. In the New Jerusalem, we will be able to walk right up to the throne of God and talk with the King

D. Notice Also the Deity of Christ

1. There is ONE THRONE and BOTH the Father and the Son sit on it
2. It is called the throne of God and of the Lamb

John 10:30 I and the Father are one.

Revelation 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne

The supreme honor of Christ is here established in that he shares equal glory with the Father on his heavenly throne

IV. The Rich Blessings of the Servants of God

A. The Blessings of Perfected Slavery

Revelation 22:3 The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

1. The throne of God and of Christ will be immediately accessible... but the primary role we will have is as his SLAVES ready to do his every bidding and as his PRIESTS ready to serve him in priestly ministry for the praise of his glory... in addition to his CHILDREN able to bask in his fatherly love
2. God is a mighty King, worthy of our full obedience... in Adam, we became rebels when we disobeyed his commandments
3. The Greek word here translated in most of the English versions as “servants” really means “slaves”... the word used throughout the Greco-Roman world to refer to the lowest level of human society
4. Years ago, I preached on slavery from Ephesians and Colossians, in which Christian masters are not commanded to set their slaves free but treat them with respect and remember that you also have a Master in heaven... I raised the question, “Why doesn’t the New Testament clearly abolish slavery?” I referred to this very text in which, in the FINAL CHAPTER OF THE BIBLE, in heavenly glory, we have SLAVES continually serving God and Christ!
5. Slavery is in some sense ETERNAL!!
6. But our Master is the PERFECT MASTER, and every command God gives is glorious and not harmful...
7. Furthermore, Jesus:

Philippians 2:6-8 being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant (SLAVE), being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Jesus was every bit as much SLAVE as he was GOD...

He served us by washing our dirty, nasty feet...

He served us by taking on himself our dirty, nasty sins and dying under the wrath of God

And amazingly, he will serve us up in heaven!!

Luke 12:37 I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.

So, there's nothing degrading about servitude in heaven!

8. That's why Paul and Peter and James were glad to call themselves slaves of Christ
9. What's the biggest difference between a SLAVE and an EMPLOYEE? Two things... WAGES and FREEDOM... but the slaves in the fields were not signing and yearning for wages; they wanted their FREEDOM... The freedom to leave! The freedom to end the relationship with the Master
10. We will have nowhere else to go if we wanted to GET AWAY from the King... the Master... everyone who refuses to serve God will be in hell
11. So in heaven, it will be our HONOR to serve God and Christ... to do whatever He commands us to do

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

12. What work will there be for us to do? No idea... but his commands will be carried out immediately and we will be HONORED to do them
13. The word "serve" here also is religious... as in the work done by a priest in a temple
 - a. So his servants will serve him spiritually in heavenly WORSHIP
 - b. Old Testament priests worked very hard carrying out the ANIMAL SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM... physically lugging animals onto the altar, keeping the fire burning, pouring out the blood of the sacrifice, etc.
 - c. That whole system is over forever... but in heaven, we will be doing the WORK OF WORSHIP, however God defines it

B. The Blessings of Seeing God's Face

Revelation 22:4 They will see his face

1. This was forbidden in the present age

Exodus 33:18-23 *Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." 21 Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."*

2. John 1:18 No one has ever seen God's face AT ANY TIME

3. God's glorious nature

1 Timothy 6:16 *who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.*

4. Perhaps the reason we cannot see his face is our status as sinners, effectively criminals in the presence of the King... if the King will punish you, you will not see his face... like the wicked Haman, whose plots against the Jews became known and King Xerxes was enraged at him and decreed to put him to death:

Esther 7:8 *As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.*

But in heaven, we will be completely free from that status... we will be perfectly reconciled, in the presence of the king; and we will be in glorious resurrection bodies, freed from the infirmities of flesh and blood, and able to see him face to face

1 Corinthians 15:50 *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*

In glory, both our resurrected bodies and our glorified souls will be prepared to see God's radiant face:

Matthew 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

This vision of God's perfectly beautiful face goes far beyond anything we can reason out from scripture or perceive by faith...

1 Corinthians 13:12 *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

5. Therefore this is the greatest honor that God could ever bestow on a human being... it will be our singular greatest reward and treasure in heaven... for God is the perfection of beauty and radiant glory

6. The mystics of the Middle Ages called it “the Beatific Vision”...

a. Thomas Aquinas

“The most perfect union with God is the most perfect human happiness and the goal of the whole of the human life. But we cannot attain to this happiness by our own natural powers; it is a gift that must be given to us by God, who strengthens us by the ‘light of glory’ so that we can see him as he is, without any intermediary.” Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas spent so much of his last moments on earth seeking foretastes of this vision, many think he had some powerful experiences, and said “All my written works are like so much straw.”

The Beatific Vision is PERFECT HAPPINESS... like swimming in a sea of light, forgetting yourself and lost in wonder and praise

7. C.S. Lewis spoke of getting to the source of all the beauty

“It was when I was happiest that I longed most...The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing – to reach the Mountain, **to find the place where all the beauty came from** – my country, the place where I ought to have been born. Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home? For indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back.”

— C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

All the beauty you have ever seen in this world came from the mind of God... to see his face is to get to the source of all pure beauty and truth there is

8. The seeing of the face of God will transform us in ways we cannot possibly fully comprehend in this world

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Just as in the Old Covenant, Moses was transformed by talking with God on Mt. Sinai so that his face was shining when he came down off the mountain, in the New Covenant, that glory will extend to ALL OF US who will see his face and it will make us perfectly like him, radiantly glorious

C. The Blessings of His Name on our Foreheads

Revelation 22:4 his name will be on their foreheads.

1. This is a sign of total identity... his name summarizes his perfections, his qualities, who he is

Our Father in heaven HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME...

May God's name be held in ultimate reverence and honor!

2. God's name is incomprehensible

Judges 13:18 He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding."

3. For God to put his NAME on us means he OWNS US as his slaves and as his CHILDREN... we are his legal heirs; and we are characterized by all that he is... it is the consummation of being created and then recreated IN HIS IMAGE

D. The Blessings of Perpetual Daylight

Revelation 22:5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.

1. Night is a beautiful thing in this present world only if there is no danger: no wild animals, no predators stalking us, no criminals approaching by stealth to do us harm... and if there are the lesser lights of the gentle moon and the sparkling stars
2. It was by the starry night sky that God made the promise to Abraham: "So shall your offspring be"

Nighttime can be beautiful... if the harvest moon is rising over a field, big and orange and full at the edge of the horizon

Nighttime can be beautiful... if the stars are vivid in the cool mountain air and you can see the Milky Way in clarity and intensity like a cloudy streak across the darkness of the night sky

Nighttime can be beautiful... if it's summer and you can see a moonshadow and hear the chirping of the crickets in a peaceful energetic chorus

Nighttime can be beautiful... if you're on a boat in a placid sea and the moonlight glistens on the quiet waters

Nighttime can be beautiful... if you see the dark silhouettes of trees in the winter and the radiant cool blue whiteness of a snow-covered valley illuminated by the distant moon

But God has plans for the beauty of the lesser lights of the moon and the stars, to replace them with his own varied glories

And to crush all the terrors that stalk at night, unseen, malicious... the terror of demons and assassins and burglars and wicked people... the terror of nighttime predators like lions and bats

3. The night will be obsolete and the heavens will declare the glories of God in far superior ways
4. The sun's glorious career as the LIGHT OF THE WORLD will give way to the superior light of the glory of God in the face of Christ
5. ALSO artificial light by human engineering will no longer be needed... Thomas Edison's light bulb, and Nikola Tesla's AC power grid will be obsolete... God's glory will permeate everything in the city and on the New Earth

E. The Blessings of Our Eternal Reign

Revelation 22:5 And they will reign for ever and ever.

1. Saints will fulfill their role as kings under Christ's kingship
2. This is in direct fulfillment of Daniel 7

Daniel 7:27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'

3. They will reign under Christ over the New Earth, and will consummate what God intended

Psalm 8:5-6 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet

4. Also we will understand that some saints will have authority over other saints, just as the Archangels rule over other angels

Mark 10:37 "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Mark 10:40 to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

Those in authority will have no arrogance; and those being ruled will have no jealousy, for everyone will be perfect in love

V. Applications

- A. Now is the Day of Salvation!! Come to Christ while you can!! DRINK FROM THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE NOW!!
- B. Ask the Spirit to work in you a powerful sense of the glories of heaven
- C. Seek to purify your heart more and more to get ready to see God face to face
- D. Realize that all the beauty you see in this world comes from God and you will see it at its source someday
- E. Share the gospel!
- F. Store up treasure in heaven!!