Bright Hope For Tomorrow — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 21:9–21 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, November 27, 2022 · *The Returning King*

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Well, thank you to Taylor and the choir for leading us in worship. You did a great job. I love the Christmas hymns. They're so chock full of great theology. The other Christmas music I could probably do without some of the stuff you get on the radio that they play in the stores and don't stop playing until January 1. But the Christmas hymns, those I can run with and thank you so much for singing. Thank you, Mike, for fixing my fan. I know last week I made a big fuss about it.

It is a well-oiled machine, doesn't make any noise. But puts out just enough air, especially with the heater on in here. It's nice. If you have your Bibles, we're going to be in Revelation chapter 21,[1] and as you're turning there— I know you've heard the phrase before that a person is so heavenly minded that they're no earthly good. And I used to hear that a lot growing up. My family— you know, I had a good mom and a good dad. They're very, very godly and some people make that charge at pious people because of their piety because they're so concerned about living a godly life, they'll say things like, well they're just no earthly good.

They're so heavenly minded they're no earthly good. And I have yet to meet a person of whom that's actually true. I don't know about you, but I've never actually met a person in my life who was so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. I met a lot of people who were so earthly minded that they were no good for heaven, you know, not much use to anybody. But typically the people who think a lot about heaven and think a lot about the Lord and spend time cultivating their relationship with the Lord and spend time on this earth full of contentment and peace and joy because of their hope in the Lord.

Those people are actually some of the most earthly good. And so why is that? That's what I want us to look at this morning. We're encouraged throughout Scripture, not just in the book of Revelation, but throughout the New Testament, God's people are encouraged to be heavenly minded. Well, one of my favorite passages is Colossians chapter 3, such a rich, practical text on how to live the Christian life. He starts out all of that advice about marriage and the workplace and parenting before he says any of those things, he says, "Set your minds on things above, where Christ is."

So be heavenly minded, because there's something about doing that creates hope in your heart, and the human heart runs on the fuel of hope. And when hope dies in a person, everything begins to die in a person. In fact, even the medical profession doesn't use things like "They gave up hope." They used terms like he or she expired. I remember the first time I heard a nurse say that in the hospital. I thought, what do you mean he expired? Is he bad milk? I mean, that sounds very, very— you know, you shouldn't say that.

But no, that's the typical terminology. But we say things like they gave up hope, they're a hopeless person. And we just mean by that they've just kind of shriveled up into a shell of nothingness. The human heart runs on hope. Hope is fundamentally future focused. People hope on all sorts of things. Hope I find a girlfriend, hope I find a great job, hope I get into the right college, hope I get married, but hope in heaven is the most powerful hope that there is. And the New Testament when it talks about hope, sometimes when we talk about hope I think we don't think what the New Testament is saying.

We sometimes when we think about hope, we think wishful thinking around a potential outcome like I hope I do find this perfect girl or this perfect job. But we don't really know for sure. We're just kind of wishful thinking around the potential outcome. Certainly the Bible talks about hope in that regard, but not very often. More often, especially in the New Testament, especially related to the kingdom of heaven and the second coming of Christ. Hope is not wishful thinking around a possible outcome. It's a firm expectation around a certain outcome.

Just as Jesus certainly came the first time, so also will he certainly come again. You can take it to the bank. And really Revelation 21, which is where we're going to be this morning is an exploration of what that future certain hope is going to look like. And we looked at the first half last week, we drew out seven truths about heaven, namely that the old will pass away, all things will be made new, our chaos will be brought into order, and God's manifest presence will fill the earth. Death will be vanquished, our sufferings will cease, and God's holy city will descend.

And what we're going to see in our passage today, starting in verse 9 of Revelation 21, is what it looks like when God's holy city descends out of heaven, that New Jerusalem, that bride of Christ when it descends down from heaven, what's that going to look like? And as

compelling of a vision as that is about our future hope, I think what we'll see in seeing that future hope is implications for how we as God's people ought to live in the here and now because the truth is we don't want to be heavenly minded and no earthly good, but we want to be so heavenly minded that we're of tremendous earthly good and there are ways as we think about heaven that Christ will inform us of how we're supposed to live.

So let's pick it up in verse 9 of chapter 21 in the book of Revelation. John says, "Then one of the seven angels, who had held the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues"—that's appealing back to Revelation 15—"came and spoke with me: 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' He then 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, arrayed with God's glory." Now you notice what John's doing. He's talking about the bride, and he's talking about the New Jerusalem, and he's conflating the two things together.

And this is not the first time John has necessarily done this if you go back to chapter 15[2]—which I think there is a structural link here in chapter 21 and chapter 15—because the same angel in chapter 15 that shows John the harlot and the city of Babylon is the same angel that comes to him here and takes him up on a high mountain and shows him the city, the new Jerusalem, not Babylon, and the bride, not the harlot. So there's a link here, I think, and what John's doing is he's creating this contrast between God's city in heaven, which will one day descend down and touch the earth, and the city of man, or the city of Babylon that we see today all around us, but that will one day culminate in a centralization of godlessness and immorality and brutality and that the city of God is superior to this city of man, this Babylon, in every way imaginable.

And I just did a little comparison looking at chapter 21 and chapter 15 or chapter 17 and 18 of Revelation, and you can see the contrast, like for example, the New Jerusalem. He goes up on a very high mountain. If you go to chapter 17 and look at the harlot Babylon, she's located in a desolate wilderness. The harlot Babylon is the city of the beast. The New Jerusalem is the city of the Lamb. New Jerusalem is a beautiful bride. The harlot Babylon is the mother of all harlots. Harlot Babylon is all about wealth and power.

New Jerusalem is all about Christ and God's glory. Harlot Babylon causes her people to drink the wine of sexual immorality. Whereas in the New Jerusalem Christ gives people the water of life from the river of life. Babylon deceives the nations, the New Jerusalem heals the nations. In Babylon there is no light. In New Jerusalem there is no more darkness. The city of God is vastly superior to the city of man in every way imaginable. And it really is fascinating how John is comparing these two cities and he's inviting God's people to live for the city that is to come, not for the city that is.

But it's not just a comparison of the place. I think what also we see is a comparison of the people who live in the place. We said last week that when it comes to heaven, heaven is most

certainly a place. There are people who will read this chapter and say it's all spiritual and metaphorical to talk about a place, that heaven is kind of this idealized state that we can live in and I think you have to deny so much of what the Bible actually teaches to think that. But heaven is a place, but it's not only a place.

It's a place that will descend out of heaven, a place that has been prepared for God's people by God himself, but heaven is also the bride. It is the people. The people who have been prepared for communion with a person. It's a destination to which we'll one day arrive, but it's also a sweet communion in which we will eternally abide. And that's, I think, what we're going to see in our passage today. So much of John's description of this New Jerusalem points to the character and the nature of God's people when God is finished with his project of building his city and his people.

So verse 11, if you saw it, said the thing that was so unique about this bride is that she was arrayed in the glory of God. This idea of God's glory dwelling in a place, dwelling in a people, is consistent throughout Old and New Testaments. We saw last week that the glory of God in the Old Testament when they were walking through the wilderness resided in the ark of the covenant. You remember that? Or before that it was in the burning bush with Moses. After the ark of the covenant in wilderness days they built the temple and then when they built the temple they made a special room for the glory of God to dwell.

That was called the Holy of Holies. We get to the New Testament, you see the glory of God dwelling in the person of Jesus Christ, and Jesus ascends, he sends the Holy Spirit. And the glory of God begins to dwell in the church and the people of God. But now in this New Jerusalem, it's infinitely greater than any of those things that came before it. Because the glory of God is covering the people of God and filling a physical place on the earth in this city. And I think what we can learn from that as it relates to our lives because so much about what we're seeing about heaven as a place deals with our lives as God's people.

Our chief pursuit in this life ought to be the glory of God. We were made for God's glory. We were made to possess it, to display it, to pursue it with all of our hearts. In Babylon, the chief pursuit of Babylon is material wealth and prosperity and sensual indulgence. But God's city is different. God's city is filled with people who their chief pursuit is the glory of God. I want to show you this a couple of different ways in the New Testament. You know, we could spend all day going through this theme in the New Testament.

Again, in Colossians, one of my favorite books of the Bible, because it's so succinct but packs everything in there, Paul is talking about the gospel, and he's saying the gospel is the hope of this mystery. What is the mystery? What's the essence of God's project in the gospel? It's Christ in you, the hope of glory. So at the very centerpiece of what the gospel is all about, in Colossians chapter 1, verse 27: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." He says something similar

in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 14. He says God's chosen you for salvation "through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel"—so that the whole purpose is—"so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." So there's this connection between God's glory that is seen perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ and the project of God in our lives through the gospel. To bring about glory in us that is similar to the same glory that Christ possesses, this glory of God. Through the Holy Spirit, God is developing in us— as we behold the glory of the Lord, we're being transformed by degree after degree after degree into the likeness of Christ so that we might share in his glory.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question, what is the chief end of man? And the answer that they give is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Our chief pursuit in this life should be the glory of God through the enjoyment of Christ. Unlike the city of Babylon, the city of God is all about God's glory. Now, what does that look like practically speaking? I think that's where the imagery comes in. They were arrayed in the glory of God. And then he uses this language about jasper and crystal and clear as glass and all of this language I think points to the purity of God's people.

Verse 11 says that her radiance, the radiance of the bride, which is the New Jerusalem, was like a precious jewel, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. He uses this same language in Revelation chapter 4 when he's talking about the throne room of God and how beautiful and overwhelming the presence of God was in that throne room. And I think the idea of diamonds or jasper, which is basically the same idea, the thing that makes a diamond so beautiful is not the stone itself only, it's how that stone radiates the light that shines on it, correct?

I remember when I was searching for an engagement ring for my wife, Audra. Kumar was his name. I kind of went on the dark market, and I wasn't going to go use the— I wanted to get the best of the best, so I thought I had to do it, you know. But I had a friend who was a diamond broker who put me in touch with a guy, made me feel more important, but it wasn't even better. Just a normal diamond. I don't think it was even that great. But anyway, I start talking to this guy, and he teaches me all there is to know about looking for a diamond.

And you've heard of the four C's, right? You got the cut. You've got like princess cut or round cut. You've got the carat, which is the weight of the diamond. You've got clarity and then you've got the color. Well the clarity of a diamond, this is what I've got up here, is essentially how little or how much impurities are there in that stone that might impede the light from shining through? And so you've got your low clarity here like SI2. If you bought an SI2, man, don't worry. It's all right.

She still loves you. But you notice it has these little blemishes in here, same with SI1, maybe a little bit more blemishes. And down the road you get until there's less and less little spots and you get to flawless clarity. And flawless clarity means that when the light hits that stone, there are no impediments, there are no walls, there are no impurities that kind of diminish the glory of the light that is shining on it. It just goes right through and that's what we want to possess as God's people. And that's what God's people will possess when heaven meets earth.

The project of God is finished with humanity. We will shine like the sun because of the purity of our lives. God will completely finish this process of sanctification. First John chapter 3 verse 2 says that we will be like him, like Christ, because we will see him as he truly is. So the glory of heaven will be seen through the splendor of our Christ-like purity. This is kind of amplified a little bit stronger when he talks about the walls in Revelation chapter 21, verse 12. It says that the city "had a massive high wall, with twelve gates.

Twelve angels were at the gates; the names of the twelve tribes of Israel's sons were inscribed on the gates." This discussion about the high wall is also in Ezekiel chapter 42. If you want to bookmark that in your Bible, you may want to go home and study this a little bit further. There's so many parallels between Revelation 21 and Ezekiel 42. And in Ezekiel 42, Ezekiel sees the vision not of a city, but of a temple. But it's a temple unlike any of the other temples that are in the Old Testament or in the history of Israel.

So many people think this may be pointing to Revelation 21 or maybe even the new temple in the millennium. But it's just like in chapter 21 you have these high walls and in Ezekiel's case, the purpose of the high wall was to separate the holy from the common. The wall was to create purity, to keep unclean things from coming in. And we know the same thing from these walls in chapter 21, verse 27, that nothing unclean or uncommon can enter into the kingdom of heaven. And so if that's true, then we ought to pursue holiness in everything in our lives if our destination is to be so holy that the glory of God shines through us like a light shining through a diamond, then our chief pursuit in this life— if our chief aim in this life is pursuing God's glory, that should entail a pursuit of holiness in all things.

And the way that we speak and the way that we treat our spouses and the music that we listen to and the kinds of movies that we watch. I know that there was a kind of a movement, a purity culture, especially when I was growing up that became very legalistic and very self-righteous and was counterproductive because it said no to everything and you know when you tell a teenager no they do the opposite and go do what you said don't do. But acknowledging all of that, there is still tremendous value in pursuing holiness, in being righteous.

Yes, we're saved by grace through faith. Yes, it's not of our works, but we are like that diamond and God's light is going to shine through us and the question is, to what degree is

that light going to shine? Remember Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, he said, "You're the city set on a hill." You're my city. "So let your light shine before others." Why? "So that they may see your good works and give" what? "Glory to your Father in heaven." That's our aim. Our aim is to pursue the glory of God, and God's glory shines through us when we pursue holiness in our lives.

And I know that for each and every one of us there are seasons, there are besetting sins. There are things in your life that you keep doing or thinking or acting upon that you know grieve the Holy Spirit. And this morning is a clarion call from the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness because your end destination is a diamond that shines bright, the glory of God. And so begin to develop that in your heart today. He continues in Revelation chapter 21, verse 12, about these high walls. He follows that with that they were followed by twelve gates, and those twelve angels were at the gates, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel's sons were inscribed on the gates.

This is the same language we saw in Revelation chapter 7, about the 12 tribes of Israel. There were 144,000. You remember this in Revelation 7? And the 144,000 were sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel, and it lists the twelve tribes, and it says 12,000 from this tribe, 12,000 from that tribe. And right after he talks about those twelve tribes of Israel, he follows that in Revelation 7:9 with this vision of an innumerable multitude from every tribe, tongue, and nation. And I think what he was doing is he's saying you've got the old covenant people of God, Israel, and God chose Israel to be a light to the nations, to rise up from within that lineage of Judah the Lamb of God, Jesus, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, and through Jesus Christ, salvation was made available to all the world.

And as the gospel was preached, a gospel that began all the way back in the Old Testament, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation began to put their faith in Jesus Christ, and they will be gathered around the throne, all because of God's singular promise to Abraham. "I'm going to choose you and I'm going to use you to become a blessing to all nations." And I think Revelation is showing us the fulfillment of that promise, both in the vision of heaven in chapter 7, and now in the vision of heaven in chapter 21.

God's promise to Abraham in Genesis chapter 22, verse 17, says, "I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the city gates of their enemies. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed my command." I think that's what we see here in chapter 21, this universal offer. You notice the gates are three on the west, three on the north, three on the south, three on the east.

Universal offer of salvation to any and all who would come. But they have to come through the gates, and the gates represent God's people and God's gospel, namely the person of Jesus Christ. You enter in through him. You enter in through the preached word of the gospel,

repenting and believing in that preached word, and people came from all over the earth to enter into this kingdom. You see this also in the Gospels when Jesus talks in the parables about the kingdom of God, and he says that in the kingdom of God they are going to come from the east and the west and the north and the south and they're going to dine at my banquet.

And you see a fulfillment of that in Revelation 21. When heaven meets earth, there will be people from every tribe, tongue, and nation gathered around the throne. He follows the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve gates, with the twelve foundations in verse 14:[3] "The city wall had twelve foundations, and the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb were on the foundations." And so you have the Old Testament people of God, the 12 tribes, followed by the New Testament people of God, which are the apostles. And both of them make up this New Jerusalem, this holy city.

The twelve tribes are a way of talking about the entirety of God's old covenant people. And the twelve apostles, I believe, are a way of talking about the entirety of the new covenant people of God. And so by bringing both together, he's conveying the entirety of the new covenant— or the entirety of God's covenant people. And the thing that's holding old covenant and new covenant together, of course, is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament it pointed to the Messiah. He's coming. He's going to deliver Israel.

He's going to redeem us. And then in the New Testament it presents him. And the epistles are looking back to him and saying, this is the Messiah, this is the one on whom you must believe in order to be saved. Now does that mean that the Jews are no longer God's covenant people? I don't believe that. There are theologies out there that say that the church replaces Israel and God's promises to Israel are no longer bound or they're no longer intact. I don't believe that. But neither do I believe that the church has to be completely absent from this time period that God can have one special people operating at the same time and that the covenants that he made to his people are held together in the person of Jesus Christ and what we'll see in heaven is that God's promises are completely fulfilled in both covenants through him.

And so what is the point of application? I believe the point of application isn't just that we should pursue purity in all of our dealings, but that we should also make God's covenant promises known. There will be a day that comes, a great revival in the nation of Israel. The Jewish people will come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and it will be fascinating, I believe, and unbelievable. And that 144,000 from every tribe of Israel and in that season of tribulation, I think, makes up a great deal of that revival.

So we should make the gospel known, not just to the Jews, but also to the Gentile. It is the power of God unto salvation for anyone who would believe. Anyone and everyone can come and feast at the table if they would repent and believe. He continues in verse 15 with the

city's measurements. He says, "The one who spoke with me had a golden measuring rod to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out in a square; its length and width are the same. He measured the city with the rod at 12,000 stadia.

Its length, width, and height are equal." Sorry, I took a decongestant and it's got me all dried up, so pardon me. This city's in the shape of a cube, right? We saw the measuring rod in chapter 11, if you remember that. He was measuring out the temple during the tribulation time. But now he's not measuring the temple, he's measuring the city. And the city is in the shape of a cube. 12,000 stadia wide, 12,000 stadia long, and then 12,000 stadia high. You see the same kind of measurements in Ezekiel 40 like I mentioned earlier, but in Ezekiel 40 it's not a cube.

And the only time you see a cube mentioned in the Old Testament related to the temple is when it talks about the measurements of the Holy of Holies. The most holy place was in the shape of a cube. I think I put a reference on there if you want to go and look it up. He follows the measurements of the city in verse 17 and 18 with the measurements of the wall. "Then he measured its wall, 144 cubits according to human measurement, which the angel used. The building material of its wall was jasper, and the city was pure gold clear as glass."

So not only is God's holy city in the shape of a cube, it's also covered in gold. Do you know what else was covered in gold in the Old Testament? Anyone take a wild guess? It was the Holy of Holies. It was the most holy place; everything was overlaid with gold in that place. But the only person who could see that place and witness the glory of that gold was the high priest. And he could only go in once a year on the Day of Atonement. And so the glory of God and the presence of God that was most greatly localized in that one area of that one temple for that one person, that one time of year is now being made manifest throughout the whole city.

It is filling the earth. And so the idea is that God's presence is no longer localized to these particular places or things or people, but that it's filling the city, that the whole city is filled with God, and so God's presence, his manifest presence is being made known throughout the entirety of this space, this new Jerusalem. The high priest would have smoke that would come up from the mercy seat to kind of shroud the glory of God in the Holy of Holies. Now there is no smoke. There is just gold, clear as crystal, no impurities shining bright as the sun.

If you take these measurements literally, because he uses specific measurements, right? He's not being too metaphorical because he uses specific measurements, but he uses the number 12 over and over and over again. Some say that he's using 12 to connect to the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, and that could certainly be the case. It could also be that heaven as a place is literally 12,000 stadia long by 12,000 stadia wide by 12,000 stadia tall. If you go and you turn to the very, very end of your Bibles, you'll see a little section called weights and measurements.

Nobody ever looks at them, just like the maps. Nobody ever looks at the maps. But you study the book of Revelation, you're going to study the maps and you're going to study the weights and measurements. And with stadia there's actually no agreement. There's different measurements for stadia. It's in Greek feet, but a Greek foot was all, you know, up to interpretation. But most people think somewhere around 600 feet, 630, 638 feet, somewhere in that range. And so if you take 12,000 stadia, it would be anywhere from 1,416 to 1,566 miles in each direction.

Okay, so you're talking the height basically of the United States of America and pretty much its width. If you start at the east end of California and go to maybe Georgia. It's huge, but it's not just that long and that wide, it's that tall. So the square footage is somewhere in the neighborhood of 3.375 billion miles. Now is the real heaven, when it meets this real earth, going to be a literal 3.65 billion miles? I certainly think that's possible. But that may not be what John's trying to communicate. It may be what John's trying to say is, this city will be enormous.

Because it is going to house the entirety of God's covenant people, old and new, will live in this splendorous, amazing place, the holy city, and it is infinitely beyond what you can even begin to imagine. And the fullness of God's presence and the fullness of God's people are going to live in this city that's large enough to facilitate their needs. And what it reveals about heaven for us, I think what we should take away from this as it relates to our personal lives is that we were not just made to reflect God's glory.

We were also made to enjoy God's presence. As the Westminster Catechism says, the chief end of man is to glorify God, but also to enjoy him. And that's our destination. That's where heaven is taking us. It's taking us to a place where we will shine bright, the glory of God, like an unblemished clear diamond, and we will inhabit the presence of God and enjoy him and commune with him forever and ever and ever. That's what heaven is about. Now, the 144 cubits of the wall, again he's using the number 12.

12 times 12 is 144. Some say that's to just tie it into this theme of God's covenant people, so it's God's covenant place. Others say no, it's a literal 144 feet, so that would be somewhere along the lines of four Great Walls of China stacked on top of each other. Even at that, it's still nothing compared to the height of the city. So some say it's not the height of the wall, it's the width of the wall. They're— you know, it's four Great Walls of China wide. And so you can just have all these chariots riding on these walls.

You know, I don't know. I think the point John's making is it's an amazingly large place to inhabit for the amazingly large family of God's covenant people. He goes on to talk about the materials of the foundations in verses 19 and 20, whether these are layers of foundations kind of like level one, level two, all the way up to level twelve, like an apartment complex or

whether it's just sections of the walls. I don't know. But the foundations of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first foundation is jasper, like a diamond.

The second was sapphire, a dark blue color. The third was chalcedony, which is gray. The fourth was emerald, which is green. The fifth is sardonyx, a brownish white color. The sixth is carnelian, a deep red. The seventh is chrysolite, which is gold. The eighth is beryl, which is yellow and green. The ninth is topaz, which is yellow and gold. The tenth is chrysoprase, apple green. And the eleventh, jacinth, yellow or red, or a brown red, and the twelfth was amethyst, which is blue or violet. I read people this week that went into all kinds of details about these stones.

I don't think we have time to do all of that. I think the point is, or one of the points that he's making is these are the foundations when you poured the foundation of your house— if you built your house, did anyone put precious stones in your foundation? No, of course not. You don't put precious stones in your foundation because no one ever sees the foundations and yet in heaven even the foundational stones are precious. And remember, these foundational stones are the foundations which are the twelve names of the twelve apostles.

And so he's talking about the new covenant people. And so I just see this idea of communicating the value that God has placed on his people, the value of his covenant promises to them. It's just like what God promised Israel in Isaiah chapter 54, verse 11 and 12. He said, You're battered, you're beat down. I know things are going rough, but I'm going to establish you. I'm going to restore you. "I will lay your foundations in lapis lazuli. I will make your fortifications out of rubies, your gates out of sparkling stones"—talking about the pearls—"and all your walls out of precious stones."

And so he's picturing what God has promised to his people in the Old Testament being fulfilled in this New Jerusalem. He continues in verse 21 talking about the twelve gates, which are the twelve pearls. Each individual gate was made up of a single pearl. The main street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. Now pearls were the most precious of all the ancient stones. You remember Jesus in the Gospels talking about the pearl of great price, that some guy finds a pearl and he sells everything that he has just to possess that pearl.

Pearls were precious in the ancient world. They're also precious today. I did a little research on this. There's actually a debate about what's the largest pearl, and there's two stories floating around. One about a Filipino fisherman that found a pearl that's massive, but I can't get actual evidence that's actually true. So the one verifiable largest pearl found was about three foot, or I'm sorry, not three foot. That would be massive. It was about 15 inches by 8 inches. And it's valued at somewhere around $200 million. So you're talking about a foot by a little bit over a foot. $200 million.

If you compare that with most doorways, which are three by seven, 21 square feet, that same value of that same pearl amplified would be well over $1 billion. If you take the gates of heaven, which if you take it in a literal sense, it's like four Great Walls of China, if not more, you're talking trillions and trillions and trillions of dollars. So it's a way, I believe, of conveying the immense value of God's covenant people. They are precious to him and you need to know that you are precious to the Lord and he paid a price for you.

We are not our own. We're bought with a price. That price was the life of his one and only Son, whom he sent into the world to die on our behalf as an atoning sacrifice. You are precious to God. It points to the precious nature of God's people, but it also, I believe, points to God's purpose in our pain. If you know anything about how jewels are made, and how precious stones are made, they go through a process that's not pleasant. For example, with these pearls, does anybody know how pearls are made?

There's an irritant that gets placed in the clam or the oyster, and that irritant bothers the clam, and so it secretes this liquid, this milk of the mother or whatever they call it. And that over time hardens and creates a pearl. So it's suffering. It's pain in the life of that pearl that creates the beauty of this precious stone. The same thing if you go a little bit further to the little graphic of the gems. I don't have time to get into all the science of this, but gems go through a process where they're underneath the earth and the sediment combines with these different minerals and the combination of those two things over time with enough pressure and enough heat from the magma of the rock creating the heat.

And the pressure pressing down on them, those minerals combined together, time plus pressure plus heat forges these precious stones. And what a perfect picture of what God's doing in our suffering. That yes, we live in a world stricken by sin. Yes, we go through the valley low. But even in that pain, God never wastes an ounce of it. He uses it to create something good, something precious. And that precious thing, that purpose of God will be revealed when Christ comes again. As Paul said in Romans 8, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed"—when Jesus Christ comes again.

And so as we think about heaven, we think about what it means for us today, it's a reminder that even in the valley low the glory of heaven shows that we matter to God. We are precious to him, and he has a purpose in our pain. And so, as the old hymn says, "Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow," those things are found in the hope of heaven. And the reality of heaven is the presence of God being enjoyed forever. And the glory of God being possessed by us to the degree that we were originally intended to possess.

We will shine like stars in the sun and we will commune with our great God forever and ever and ever. And it is hope of that day that gives us strength to pursue those things in our day, namely God's glory and the way that we live our lives in the advancement of God's gospel to

the ends of the earth, no matter what it takes, and through the pursuit of God's presence in our daily lives, through your personal quiet time and your time alone with him and your connecting with him in these times of worship and praise and entering into seasons of studying him in the Word.

Strength for today is found in our bright hope for tomorrow. And our bright hope for tomorrow is the glory of God and the presence of God. And so as we bring our time to a close this morning, if you're here and you've never made it a point to enter into the gates, if you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Maybe this morning God is calling you to himself and you would say, I repent of my sins. I believe that Jesus is God, that he came to save me from my sin.

And I want to put my trust in him. You can make that decision this morning. If you're watching online, you can make that decision and let us know about it and we'll follow up with you. For most of us in the room, you've probably been a Christian for a very long time, and my question to you is how often do you think about heaven? Are you letting your hope for tomorrow give you strength for today? And if not, why not? Because there is great power and motivation in doing those things.

And so as we spend some time connecting with the Lord as Mary leads us through the playing of the piano, I encourage you to ask the Lord to give you clear eyes so that you might see the hope that is laid up for you, your inheritance in heaven, and to motivate you and encourage you to get through the trials of today. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for your word and that he who promised is faithful, that we can read these things and not just assume that they're blind, wishful thinking, but that they are promises from a faithful God who will bring them about.

And so would you help us to persevere and endure through the challenging days that we live in so that we might bring you glory. And we might be ready for that day when Christ comes again to take us home. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Heavenly Father, as we bring our time to a close this morning, I pray for our church family as we enter into this season of December and Christmas. We think about our world missions and our commitment to make the gospel known, both through the way that we live our lives and through the generous giving of our resources to get the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We pray that we would do that motivated not by duty or obligation, but by joy and gratitude for what's already ours in the Lord Jesus. That these things are our inheritance because our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. And so help us to be people who are heavenly minded and who would do a great deal of earthly good, advancing your kingdom to the ends of the earth, and showing to everyone who would see that the grace of Jesus is sufficient for any trial, any tribulation, and that faith in him really can heal our lives and our nation and the world.

And we pray these things in his name. Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "Revelation chapter twenty-two"; the sermon text is Revelation 21:9–21, which he goes on to read. Source: Revelation 21:9 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: the angel who shows John the harlot Babylon is introduced in Revelation 17:1 ("one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls"); the bowls themselves are given in chapter 15. Wes later refers to "chapter 17 and 18." Left as spoken. Source: Revelation 15:7; 17:1; 21:9 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "in chapter fourteen"; the twelve foundations are in Revelation 21:14. Source: Revelation 21:14 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩