

A God's Eye View of You, Pt. 11
Walls of Salvation
Isaiah 60: 18-20; Rev. 21: 22-27

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This summer, Grandson Grayson and I got to build castles made of blocks. This was our best one. Of course you can see that our fort is mainly walls. That would be my doing. At the beach, I've always loved making the walls and gates more than the sand castle itself. Same with Lego's and blocks. The walls give definition to your fort. Walls give safety. Inside them is freedom to build whatever you want. Gates allow entry to those of good intent, your guys, but can be closed to keep out the bad guys and the monsters—or, in this case, the evil superhero named Venom.

This morning we conclude our series on A God's Eye View of You. We're taking up the vision God gave Isaiah of a future City of God. As we heard in our second reading, the book of Revelation picks up this same image of the City of God to describe the renewed world our God will create. The LORD I AM himself will dwell with people. The glory of God will replace the need for a sun. God himself will be the light that illuminates his City. And people around the world will stream towards it. This is how God sees us in the future: gathered in his City, bathed in his presence, creating, praising, serving, growing, cultivating.

The City is described in both Isaiah and Revelation as having magnificent walls and glorious gates that stand open day and night. These walls will be named. The LORD promises, "Your walls will be called Salvation and your gates Praise." Inside these walls is safety. Being saved from enemies. Revelation says inside these walls we are saved from death and sorrow and tears. These walls are the border between the wilderness of our wanderings, the lostness of a rebellious world, and the harmony of the community of God's restored people. Inside these walls, peace will rule the day. Right-ness will oversee everyone.

Passing through the gates of this City will evoke shouts of praise from those entering. Sort of like the way you shout "Hallelujah!" when you finally reach your destination after ten hours in the car with children and animals. Sort of like the way you get hushed with awe when you enter a Redwood forest. Or the way you

want to say “Glory!” when you enter round the turn and see the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. Sort of like the moment you fell in love with your beloved. The beauty and power and majesty just make you want to dance and shout or whisper praise. The Biblical vision of the City of God is deep love and sheer beauty. He promises to remake the world to be a place teeming with life, bursting with creativity, connective in human harmony, joyful and peaceful, thrilling and calming all at once.

Isaiah and Revelation envision the kings of the world, and by extension all their people, flowing to this City. They are bringing their wealth in tribute to the one true King. They strip themselves of their personal pride and pomp in order to appear before the Ruler of all. They realize that glorifying the LORD of this City will bring them more fulfillment than ruling their petty kingdoms. And our God is happy to have them. Day and night the gates stand open. People on the ramparts shout, “Come in! Come in! There is room for all who will come. Come in!” This vision makes me think of the ancient words, “The glory of God is man fully alive!”

There are a few key things to notice about this vision. The first is how inclusive it is. This is a worldwide gathering. People of every tribe, ethnicity, nation or people group. People of every status from low to high. The gates are open. But the second thing to consider is that a response to the City’s welcome is required. The nations are bringing their tribute. Kings are releasing their wealth in honor of the King. To go into this City of salvation requires acknowledging the Lordship of God. So that leads to a third observation. Depending on how much stuff you have, those open gates can look very wide or very narrow. If I arrive at the City full of my pride, clinging to my accomplishments, demanding recognition of my glory, full of wealth I have accumulated, those gates will look very narrow indeed. I can’t get through those gates with all my stuff. My swollen head won’t fit through. My tiny thumb drive with my stock portfolio will suddenly be too big for the gates if I’m thinking I’ll hold onto that in case things don’t work out. My resume won’t fit through the gates if I’m counting on it to get me status in the King’s city. My ideas of how God ought to be and how the world ought to work, if I insist on keeping those, will keep me from ever getting in to see Reality. They won’t fit through the gates. And the gates will appear spiked against me.

But for prodigal children and those caught in a circle of shame, for lepers who repel people and tax collectors that cheat people, for the compromised and soiled, those gates look incredibly wide once we start for them. When you’ve lost everything, and turn towards the King for mercy, his gates swing wide open and

fairly pull you inside. For shattered pride, broken dreams, humbled egos, lost souls and confused searchers, those gates roll out a green carpet of welcome.

We have a vision. We have a message of highest hope. We have a gospel. Good news. Good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people. For unto us a savior has been born. A savior has lived the life of true flourishing love and faithfulness. A savior has died to cleanse away our stains. A savior has risen to break death. A savior reigns who beckons the world to come to him and be part of the building of his great City. Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became the Son of Man, is the Lord of this City, and there is room for all who come. Could there be any better vision for our world than the City of God whose walls are salvation and whose gates are praise?

And yet, we know there are competing visions. In every age there are always other ways to conceive of what life is meant to be. In our age and culture, the most compelling competitors reject Jesus as Creator and Lord of the City and install instead a vision of a city made by humans, where every human being remains sovereign over personal identity and everyone receives the same outcomes for their efforts, all overseen by a benevolent but all powerful group of humans. These days, the most intoxicating form of this human centered vision comes under the names of some very good things: Equality, Justice and Freedom. But in reality, we unmask these empty promises as the vision of what is scholastically called Critical Theory, what is popularly known as Cultural Marxism, and what is deceptively known as the Social Justice movement.

I'd like to begin a conversation with you about the crucial contrasts between the Christian and Marxist vision. Necessarily this will be in simple terms, but the notes will give you access to more resources and we can revisit this in a class.

Let's look at the stages of history in a **Christian Worldview**:

Creation: The Triune God created human beings for loving fellowship with himself and others as they exercise benevolent, creative dominion over the earth for the glory of God.

Fall: Humanity chose against God's vision, desiring to be sovereign over ourselves, plunging the world into chaos, violence and death.

Redemption: The Triune God has been at work to redeem his lost world, revealing himself through his prophets until in the fullness of time he came himself as Jesus Christ to atone for the sins of the world and break the power of death.

Mission: Now God sends his people as part of his massive reclamation project to share the gospel and demonstrate his love in ever creative, liberating and expanding ways.

Restoration: Jesus Christ will return to establish the City of God, restore creation and gather all who will come. Only those who refuse will remain outside the walls. The driving force through these stages is the *love of God*. Sacrificial, self-giving and creating love which flows from God through his people.

Cultural Marxism:

Survival/Struggle: Human beings evolved through the process of natural selection, random mutation and survival of the fittest. There is no God to whom we are accountable.

Domination/Oppression: The fittest inevitably dominated the less fit, benefitting from their labor but making their lives miserable.

Liberation/Revolution/Justice: Redemption comes through throwing off the dominators

Enactment: The mission of the revolution becomes enactment of identity groups through enforcement and suppression of any former dominators while creating justice and equality of outcomes for the liberated.

Utopia/ Equality of Outcomes for the Faithful, ostracizing of the resistant. The driving force: *power*. Everything is seen through the lens of a power struggle. The power to enact identity and resist any who thwart expression is paramount.

Another way to look at the contrast is by asking the standard world view questions. Every system of coherent thought has a particular view of the world. We can uncover a worldview by asking a set of questions. For the Christian:

What's the Point? To love God and others, to glorify God in work and relationships.

What's the Problem? Sin. Wanting to be God. Wanting my life my way.

What's the solution?

God's redemption in Christ which recreates me with a new heart to love and serve.

How are mistakes and transgressions handled? An appeal to Christ's forgiveness is made vertically while reconciliation is humbly sought horizontally.

What's the ultimate goal?

The City of God! The remaking of humanity in harmony with God, one another and a restored creation, diversity in the parts of one interconnected body.

For Cultural Marxism,

What's the point? to enact an identity you embrace, that identity being a mixture of what you cannot choose: race, gender, sexuality, and what you do choose as your preferences and expression.

What's the problem? Restriction and injustice created by others with power. *Others* are the problem, preventing me and my group, or other identity groups I support, from being who we determine to be.

What's the Solution? Reconstruct power dynamics. Remove power from unjust dominators (those who prevent me and those I support). Give power to those who will enforce equality defined as the establishment of acceptable identity groups.

How are mistakes and transgressions handled? Abject apology to those offended, handing over of power and wealth.

What's the Ultimate Goal? An earthly utopia. Equality of outcomes for the faithful. A harmonious earth overseen by centralized human power that believes and enacts the right views, while removing any resistance.

In today's conversations, we've experienced a divergence in the idea of what equality and justice actually mean. Increasingly, *justice* no longer means equality of opportunity, or fair treatment under uniform rule of just laws, but enforced equality of outcomes for the "faithful", marginalization and ostracizing of the "unfaithful", that is, those who question or formerly had power. The language of liberation and equality may appeal to us; a utopian view always entices us. But the reality of cultural Marxism casts a dark shadow. It comes with religious fervor and a severely Puritanical and moralistic spirit. In fact, the Spanish Inquisition had nothing on today's cancel culture. It means:

The end of freedom: centralized control.

The end of forgiveness: you cannot apologize enough.

The end of diversity: dreary sameness.

The end of humor: arrogant cynicism.

The end of opportunity: elite more equal than others.

The end of prosperity: wealth erodes.

The end of tolerance: free expression ends.

The end of transcendence: no God but humanity enthroned.

Cultural Marxism entices us with its promise of letting me establish my own identity. It offers to protect me from any who stand in my way. It will sweep away economic barriers, or moral strictures, or any boundaries on my choices. In the end, however, it is incredibly fragmenting: only my group matters. It is incredibly constricting: I cannot leave my group. It is incredibly exhausting. Tim Keller notes how identity creation is always performance-demanding: I have to choose, create, and enact my identity, and conform to the collective identity of my group. I cannot tolerate resistance or questioning. I can't disappoint the group. It's angry and exhausting.

By contrast, Keller notes, in Christianity identity is *received*. It's a gift that comes from placing my life in Christ's hands. In terms of our passages today, I shed my baggage, my pride and my stubborn will in order to enter the gate of the City whose walls are salvation. Before I make the decision those gates look very narrow. We hear rumors that life in the city is constricting and dull, oppressive and confining. But the people on the ramparts are shouting a different message. "Come in! The streets are wide and paved with gold! There is a tree of life that is ever blossoming and its fruit heals the nations. There is music and dancing and feasting. And everyone is more than they ever thought they could be. Come in! I know it feels like death. And it is. You have to drop your pride, your personal identity markers, your goals of what makes for security and well-being. You have to take up the song of praise to the Lord of the City. It's a narrow pass. But inside, you get reclothed. You get gifted with a new identity that is actually the one most like you all along. You get identity as a beloved, redeemed child of the High King. You become part of his massive re-blessing plan in the world. Come in!"

We can't collapse the walls of our City to assuage the enemies of this gospel. We have a gospel to proclaim. We have to know our story. And we have to know the lie that the serpent has ever told. A human centered utopia cannot be built. It leads only to slavery and drab misery. This one comes wrapped in some stolen words: equality, freedom and identity. But it's a counterfeit. Those words belong to the Lord of the City. He gives us what we can never demand, achieve or earn. A place in his family. A role in his mission. A song of glory and a vision of beauty. The gate is open. The way in is to look away from myself to praise the King!

Resources to Get You Started:

- 1-Timothy Keller "A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory," <https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/a-biblical-critique-of-secular-justice-and-critical-theory> Spring 2020.
- 2-Tim Keller on How to Bring the Gospel to Post Christian America: <https://youtu.be/zNve3Hexh28>
- 3-Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019)
- 4-Voddie Baucham, "Cultural Marxism," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRMFBdDDTkI&t=5s>.