

Amazing Features of the Holy City, New Jerusalem

A family service talk by Rev. Michael Gladish

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PART 1.

Today we're talking about the holy city, New Jerusalem as seen in a vision by the apostle, John, nearly 2,000 years ago. You've all heard about this vision before, and most of you have seen pictures of it. But most of the pictures of this city don't really give you a good idea of how BIG or how FANTASTIC it really was.

For example, we read that it was square and that it was 12,000 furlongs from one side to the other, AND the same distance high. But what does that mean? Well, a furlong... is about an eighth of a mile, or a little over 200 yards. But if you turn that into miles it is still 1,500 miles, which is more than half way across this country, and so far out into space that it would be at least 6 times higher than the International Space Station. Now THAT is BIG.

Hard to imagine, isn't it! But wait, there's more! The city was made of PURE GOLD, and the gold was so shiny and bright it was like clear glass. So we have put up a wall of gold FABRIC here just to give you an idea.... But remember, this is TINY compared to what John saw.

And there was a protecting wall around the city made entirely of JASPER, which is a kind of Quartz crystal that is usually sort of reddish brown. And this wall alone was 144 cubits high, which is more than 200 feet, or TWICE as tall as almost any tree around here. Now that's a big wall, and a LOT of beautiful crystal. Think of it when you go outside today. We haven't even tried to show that wall here, but if we did, compared to the height of the city itself it would be about THIS big.

Think of it this way: if we compared this white wall (behind the pulpit) to the wall surrounding the holy city, that's about how big it would look to you if you were a MOUSE standing in front of it. Still, the wall had 12 gates, three on each side, and each gate was made of a single pearl. But the gates were never closed, so anybody who wanted to go in could do so. [Here's a small illustration of just one of those pearly gates.] I'll explain what this means in a minute.

Meanwhile, one of the important things the Word says about the wall is that its foundations – down at the bottom – were made of all sorts of precious stones, like rubies and sapphires and emeralds and topaz. The names of some of these precious stones may sound a little strange – like sardius and chalcedony and chrysoprase, but they are all very strong and beautiful semi-precious gem stones of all different colors, like red, yellow, green, blue and purple – in fact, all the colors of the rain-

bow! There were 12 of these foundations, too, all running along the base of the wall between the 12 gates. We're going to illustrate this today with blocks of colored cellophane that we can line up and stack just to give an idea of how this might look. So – kids – if you look under some of the seats here in the church, you will find 12 of these blocks and you can bring them up here. Let's see if we can build just a tiny portion of this incredibly long and beautiful foundation!

Oh! And look! Just as it says in the Word, the names of the 12 apostles are on the stones! Of course we're just building one tiny section today, but you get the idea. So here's a question for you grown-ups: do you think the stones were all about this size, or were they, maybe, HUGE, like everything else in this vision? Were the different stones with the names of the apostles repeated over and over as the foundations extended all those hundreds of miles, or do you think maybe there was one great, long stone with one name for each section of 100 or so miles between each gate? It's probably not important which way you think of it, or the Lord would have explained it to us, but it IS important that you know WHY the foundations had these names, and, in fact, why this whole fantastic vision appeared as it did.

The truth is that the gold and the gem stones and the walls and the pearly gates were NOT made of natural things at all but of spiritual things that looked like natural things. This is because of what we call *correspondence*, the law of creation that causes spiritual things to take natural forms that we can see and use in this world.

To give an example, your happiness, which is spiritual, might take the form of a big smile or even a "happy dance." The smile or the happy dance doesn't come from nowhere; it comes from the happiness you feel inside.

So the beautiful qualities of the natural things in this vision are signs and reminders of the spiritual things they represent. Gold, for example, because it is soft and lovely and rare, and because it does not rust or decay, reminds us of the pure, soft, wonderful, enduring LOVE that we can feel for one another and for the Lord. Of course you can't really build a HUGE natural city all of gold, especially not one that goes half-way across the country and extends way out into space. There isn't enough gold anywhere in the world to do this, and it wouldn't be strong enough to hold itself up, anyway. *But when we think of a city made of pure gold we are reminded of a way of life built on pure love, especially a way of thinking* because a city with all its businesses and activities reminds us of all the ideas we can have in our minds, and all the many ways our ideas help us to do useful things. In fact, because of the way a city works, with all its roads and buildings and laws and customs, it can remind us of our whole system of thinking, or what we sometimes call our doctrine of life.

So now if you think of the holy city, New Jerusalem, all made of pure gold you can

understand that it is simply a way of *picturing* all our thoughts coming from love – love for the Lord and love for one another, so that there is no one in this environment with any selfish or ugly thoughts.

And do you remember the pearl of great price that the Lord talked about in one of His parables? – the one that was so precious a man went and sold everything he had in order to get it (Matt. 13:45-46)? That pearl was a symbol, a reminder of the most precious belief in the Lord Himself, the most important thing in our lives if we want to enter into the holy city. And remember, that gate is open to everyone! We can all believe in the Lord if we want to. It's just that people who don't want to just don't go there and so they don't enter into the city.

As for the foundation, the precious stones remind us of all the basic truths in the stories of the Word, and the apostles were the men who taught those truths to people all over the world, so they remind us of our own faith in these truths, and the strength of the foundation for our lives that we can build with this faith.

Finally, for this section, let's keep in mind how gigantic this whole thing was in the vision. Why would the Lord want us to think of anything so beautiful being so big? Well, it's simple: the golden city represents HEAVEN and a heavenly way of life, that is, *a life full of love for the Lord and other people*, a life of well-organized thoughts and feelings all based on the truths of the Word, a life that we can all enter through the gates of belief in the Lord if we want to. And the point is that its enormous size shows us that there's room for everybody, in fact the Lord wants to include everyone and has provided many different ways to enter into this heavenly way of life – even here, now, in the church of the New Jerusalem.

We'll have a hymn now, #922, and then finish up explaining about this vision....

PART 2

Now we're going to continue just a little longer about what we find in the last parts of the vision of the holy city. Remember, we're talking about a way of life filled with the LIGHT of truth and understanding from the Lord, where the gates are never shut, but where nothing ugly or selfish ever comes in. But is this even possible for us? Can we really live this way? The Lord has given us this vision because He knows we can – if we want to and if we put our minds to it.

So now we read about a pure river of the water of life: not just a well or a fountain but a *river* “proceeding from the throne of God.” We're going to represent this with a piece of bright blue cloth that will help us think about it. We also have an image of a tree that we can place beside the river. This will help us think about the tree of life in the vision. Of course, we read that the tree was “on either side of the

river,” which means there must have been more than one, but still one KIND of tree, and again, today we have just one to give you an idea. Now notice, the tree had 12 fruits on it, or 12 kinds of fruit. And the leaves of the tree were for medicine, for the healing of the nations. What does all THIS mean?

Well, thinking about the water of life is a way of thinking about the wonderful truth of the Lord’s Word that can flow through our minds, cleansing and refreshing our understanding and helping us digest and use the good things the Lord also provides for us. Whatever water does for the human body, the Lord’s truth can do for the human mind – if we take it in and use it! Remember the Lord said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” And “whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple will by no means lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42).

As for that wonderful tree with its VARIETY of fruits and its healing leaves, this is a sign and a reminder of the life the Lord offers us when we turn to Him and do as He teaches. The fruits of this life are the good works that we can do – all sorts of good works, done by each of us according to our interests and abilities, that is, according to the talents that the Lord gives us – and the leaves are the bits of knowledge that we can get from His Word to inform what we do and to heal us when we make mistakes. These things are not only FOR us but they can also be FROM us for others if we take them and share them as the Lord intends. So in a way, we can BE LIKE that tree, giving good and true things to others, just as the Lord has given them to us.

So, as our final activity, if there are 12 children who would like to come up here you could pick the 12 fruits off this tree and give them to people in the church. This will be a way of showing how you can do good things for others – each of you in your own special way – because of the special abilities the Lord gives you.

Of course these are just paper images of fruit, but think of them as signs of the good deeds you can do, and then try hard to do those good deeds every day.

There is a great deal more you can learn about this vision of the holy city in the wonderful teachings of the New Church, but this is enough for one day. Just remember, this is why we are having special events today: it is to show our thanks and appreciation for all the blessings of knowledge and understanding the Lord has given us through those teachings which the disciples first shared throughout the spiritual world 246 years ago on June 19th, 1770.

Amen.

Lessons: Rev. 21:1-21, Apocalypse Revealed #875: sel., & Rev. 22:22 – 23:7