

*The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.*

*<sup>22</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> 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. (Revelation 21:21-27)*

It's good to know where you are going. It's nice to know what to expect when you arrive. Don't get me wrong, I like surprises and spur-of-the-moment type of stuff when taking trips. At the same time, knowing what is there and what you will find helps to build anticipation, excitement, refocuses your mind on the prize as you look forward to it. So, before heading out, you might take one of those virtual tours to look around and almost feel yourself in that place.

Today we are going on a tour. Our tour guide is the apostle John, the disciple of Jesus. As we look through his eyes we see what Jesus has prepared for us after He returns in all his glory at the end of all things.

As our tour begins our first stop is outside of this great city, the New Jerusalem. As we stand outside marveling at what we see, John points out twelve gates along the walls; each gate is made of a single pearl. The largest pearl on record is 26.4 inches long—pretty large, yet not gate size. Quite quickly we realize that what we see is beyond anything we know. This world and all it has to offer, all its riches and treasures will be replaced by a world of incomparable beauty. As we go through those pearly gates we can't help but notice the streets: they are gold so pure and without defect that it is like looking at transparent glass. How does this work? I don't know.

Maybe that's why some feel like heaven is going to be, in some way, a let-down. It might come from this fear of over-hyping something so you can't live up to it. It might just be that you are happy where you are at right now—you like the quiet and outdoors or something else entirely—and a great city isn't too enticing for you. Satan really is a sneaky devil that he works a doubt of whether or not we actually want to be out of this world and with our Lord forever.

But that's what John fights against and Jesus shows us: what waits for you is a greater treasure than we can even imagine that is impossible for it to disappoint. The joy and treasures we have here are great! At the same time, they are simply a little teaser to the perfect treasures that waits us.

So our tour continues through the pearly gates on these streets of gold. As we look around we see all these different mansions that Jesus has prepared for each of his people. No need to bunk up with someone or pile people in; he has your place for you. As we look around trying to take it all in, our tour guide, John, points out: “You may be noticed how you don’t see any church signs, steeples, or church buildings. There isn’t a temple building anywhere to be seen. There’s a reason for that: **“Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”** (v.22).

There isn’t a temple or church because we won’t need it. We will have direct communion with the Lord and the Lamb Jesus. His special, intimate presence turns the whole place into a temple! We won’t have to go somewhere to be with God or near him. We always will. No more assurances and reminders, no more promises we are told to never forget. You won’t need them. No more loneliness or feeling not so sure. He is with us because the Lord and the Lamb are its temple.

As we try and wrap our minds around this, we must keep on our tour. You can always go back later on your own, John assures you. As we walk we start to wonder, “Where’s the light coming from? There isn’t the sun, and for that matter, there isn’t a moon. (Remember, John has no idea about electricity and lightbulbs...)” John explains: you don’t see it because we don’t need it: **“For the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp”** (v.23). The Glory of the Lord Almighty gives us all the light that we will need and there, among his people, his glory will remain. The God-man Jesus whose glory and light frightened his friends on the Mt. of Transfiguration will warm our faces and comfort us. By the light of the God’s glory and the lamp that is the Lamb we will see clearly what we today can only see by faith.

So then, how can you keep time? Remember, John didn’t have a watch to keep time or cell phone he could quickly check. Again, we won’t need it. We either want time to go by quickly when we are in a situation we don’t like or because we can’t wait for something better to come. Or we want time to slow down so we can stay in those precious moments for a moment longer because they are always fading too soon. Here, in the New Jerusalem, with the Lord as our light and the Lamb the lamp, it won’t.

But what is there to do in this place? It’s a fair question to ask. Will we get bored in heaven? There’s the false idea that hell will be this big party place and heaven is just singing all the time. Again, Satan is quite the wily devil. He works so hard to make it seem like heaven isn’t the place you really want to be. There are plenty who seem to think that heaven means you are giving something up to be there. You are missing out in some way.

Maybe it’s because we don’t know what it’s like to be perfectly content. We often are chasing after the next thing. Being busy and doing things are often seen as such great virtues. Even when it’s a moment that we want to cherish, what’s next? You are having a good time

but what's next? Everything in this world is fleeting and temporary; the joys and blessings you have today will give way to something else tomorrow. So it may be hard for you to grasp the perfect contentment and peace of simply walking about in God's presence. Our tour guide explains: **“The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it”** (v.24).

No need to rush from one thing to the next. Say goodbye to the constant strain of what needs to get done today and all the things that didn't get finished yesterday. We will have perfect contentment and peace neither feeling trapped and stuck in a situation you want to get out of nor feeling like you are butter spread too thin on a slice of toast pulled by a thousand different things in a thousand different directions. Instead, we will have perfect contentment walking with all these other peoples from different tribes, cultures and peoples in the light of our God and the Lamb.

As we walk about these streets of pure transparent gold, who is the first person you want to talk to? As you look about that this great multitude that no one can count, who are you most excited to see? Even as happy as we will be to see them, our perfect joy will come from the Lamb whose light shines on us and gives us peace. Finally we will have perfect unity without division or fighting. Finally that pride that so often gets in the way will never be injured again. There will be no competition for who is right or wrong or should have the most praise and acknowledgment—we are bringing it all to the Lord. Good thing this is eternal life, because it will take that long to sing all the praises to our God and to the Lamb for all that they have done for us.

And still we must continue on our tour! John points out: **“<sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it”** (v.25,26). In the first century when John records this the night time was a scary time. You couldn't just flip a switch and have some light. The night was where the terrors lurked and nightmares came to life. That's when enemies attacked and you were the most vulnerable. So the gates to cities would be closed to protect the citizens. But, there will be no need to close the gates; there will be no night. Don't worry about any sneak attacks—the enemies have been defeated.

What are you frightened of today? What sneak attacks from life keep you up at night? Is it the darkness of the future that you don't know what will happen next and you aren't sure how it will work out? Maybe it's the fear and failure and the darkness of disappointment that haunts you. Is it the enemy of sickness and pain that you feel is holding your life hostage? Do you feel the attack of stress at home, at work, with family, friends? Are you getting beat up by the flaming arrows of temptation and the alluring lies and empty promises of the devil? For a while longer we must grieve, Jesus warns. For a little while longer we will endure this, **“Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will**

**take away your joy.”** One day all who rejected Jesus along with Satan and his demons will be locked in hell where they will suffer for eternity never to haunt you again. The tears of sadness will be wiped away with Jesus’ nail-marked hands. Your grieving struggles will be turned to eternal joy. The last enemy death will be defeated and we will remember it no more. **“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.”** (v.27).

Let there be no doubt of who will be welcome into this New Jerusalem. Nothing impure will be allowed in. Anyone who has done something shameful and deceitful will be kept out. And that can be a scary thought because who of us hasn’t done something of which we are ashamed? You know how you have not loved God as you should. You know how you have loved yourself more than your neighbor. You know how even when doing the right things it is often done with impure motivation. Who hasn’t tried to bury secret sins? You know how you have shaded the truth to make yourself look better to others. You know how you lie to yourself to ease your aching conscience. Entrance into this city could not come from us.

No, it is only because the Lamb. It’s not because we chose him—you can’t write your own name into His book of life. He wrote it for you. He paid your debt of sin with his blood and washed you clean in those baptismal waters giving you a clean conscience before God. He has claimed your sin and taken away its shame throwing it into the depths of the sea where it will not back to get you. Only by His perfect life and innocent death do we have entrance into this city. You are on the waiting list because your name is written with Jesus’ nail-marked hands and sealed to you in baptism. One day, you will see this all with your own two eyes.

Until that day, Jesus doesn’t take us out of this world. Instead he shows us the way through it is through him and gives us his Word and Sacraments to keep us in the one true faith until he brings us to him. He doesn’t make all the problems go away or suffering disappear. He shows you your rest is found in him who carried the great burden for you. He shows you that your current struggles and frustrations are light and temporary. One day they will be gone and we will be with him in this great city forever.

So I hope you enjoyed your tour today. It’s already yours through faith but it’s not here yet. We still must wait and still wade through the struggles and grief. But one day what we believe by faith will be our reality. That’s a joy that cannot be taken from you. Amen.