

## Sermon – 20/07/2008 pm

### City of Pure Gold

Study Text: Revelation 21:15-21

Have you done any building work lately? If so, you will understand the importance of getting the measurements correct. Measure twice and cut once is the old rule, which I forgot when cutting a length of timber the other day. I also slipped up while fixing a mirror – I forgot to check the levels. I now have a mirror that is crooked.

I got some consolation seeing the work of a friend of mine. He tried his hand at laying tiles. He started along one wall with the tiles in a straight line but by the time he got to the other wall nothing was straight. You will find some imperfection in any house if you look closely enough – except the house of the Lord.

### Measurement

The angel that came to John in this vision had a *gold reed to measure the city* (21:15). If we look back at the temple Ezekiel saw we find a man of bronze, probably an angel, measuring the temple (Ezekiel 40:3). He went all around the temple measuring everything in intricate detail – so much detail that we find reading it all somewhat tedious. Why all this detail about the measurement of every part of the temple?

The earthly tabernacle built by Moses is described in similar detail in the book of Exodus. He built it according to the pattern the Lord God gave him on the mountain. The Lord told him the precise measurements to use in making each and every chamber and article of furniture (Exodus 25:8, 9). If the earthly temple was built with such precision the heavenly one must be made with absolute precision. It is after all the perfect place built by the perfect God. It is the place of God's presence, it is the throne room of God, and it is the place where he dwells with his chosen ones.

When a city is measured it often symbolizes judgment or preservation in apocalyptic writings (*cf.* ch 11). An enemy city is measured in preparation for an assault and destruction; or a city measured when it is to be rebuilt and preserved. But here the measuring is somewhat different. It symbolizes the perfection and beauty of the city-temple.

The Taj Mahal was built with great precision – so much so that the writing on the pillars is actually larger at the top because being further from the eye it would naturally appear smaller. But even the Taj has its imperfections and will one day become just rubble.

The holy city John saw is a place of perfect symmetry and infinite beauty. The measurements reveal it to be in the shape of a cube; an object of three dimensional equality and perfection. The Most Holy place in the earthly temple was similarly built in the shape of a cube. It was 20 cubits in width, length and height and was overlaid with pure gold (1 Kings 6:20).

The city-temple coming down out of heaven was the same shape but vastly greater in size. It was not a 10m cube but a 2200km cube – the distance from Melbourne to Brisbane! In John's

day this distance of over 2000km was probably the size of the known world. The heavenly city will engulf the whole world. It is the new heaven and new earth.

These measurements, however, are to be understood symbolically not literally. The number twelve in 1200 stadia gives a sense of perfection and completion. Jesus had twelve disciples. There were twelve gates and twelve foundations as we have seen.

*Then he measured the wall (21:17).* The wall was 144 cubits – most probably in thickness although some take it to be in height. But again note the symbolism in the number. We have come across 144 before. It is the product of twelve and twelve, the totality of the redeemed people of God. The wall was measured according to human measurement, which the angel was using (21:17). John gives a hint that this measure is not to be taken literally. Here is an angel measuring the heavenly city and seeking to put things in human terms. It is human measurement by angel reckoning.

We must not limit our understanding of this glorious New Jerusalem by taking these measurements literally and getting caught up in such an interpretation. Rather we should be filled with awe and wonder as we contemplate the dazzling glory of God in this holy city coming down out of heaven from God.

## Materials

John goes on to describe this dazzling beauty of this city-temple by referring to the material with which it is made. Its walls were of jasper/diamonds and *the city was of pure gold like clear glass (21:18)*. A sparkling diamond set in pure gold is regarded by most as the most precious and beautiful object in this world. You may have such an object on your finger.

Some kings in India built their palaces with gold plated doors studded with diamonds and precious stones. We saw them after the colonialists had been and stripped them bare. But no earthly palace or temple has ever had a whole wall of diamond or city streets of pure gold.

*The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones (21:18).* The twelve foundations were clearly visible to John since he could see twelve different stones adorning them. What is the significance of these stones? Actually some are unknown to us today. We are probably not meant to find meaning in each individual stone but rather to understand this vision from an Old Testament background.

Most of these stones match those found on the breastplate worn by the High Priest when he entered the earthly temple (Exodus 28:15-21). Each was engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel. He was entering on their behalf. 'It is doubtful if any symbolic significance is intended by the description of these foundations beyond the beauty and majesty of the whole'.

There is a further Old Testament reference to a place with foundations of precious stones in Isaiah 54. In telling about the unfailing covenant love of God the prophet refers to the future glory of Zion. He refers to God as their maker and their husband – in John's vision Christ is seen as the husband of the church. Isaiah describes a future city with foundations of sapphires battlements of rubies, gates of sparkling jewels and walls of precious stones. It is city of peace and permanence for the children of God.

The complete interior of the Most Holy place in Solomon's temple was overlaid with pure gold. This heavenly city-temple is similarly covered with pure gold like transparent glass. This is gold even more pure and beautiful than the gold that Solomon used and the gold we use today. The very streets of the city were of pure gold (21:21).

Finally, each of the twelve gates was an individual pearl. What an enormous pearl it must have been. Again this is a picture which stretches our imagination to the limits – and this is what it is meant to do. Many who speak about the pearly gates of heaven have little idea of this glorious scene or of the truth which underlies the whole scene. This city, remember, is the bride of Christ; it is the church which Christ himself is building to the glory of Almighty God.

## Meaning

Looking at the measurements of this city-temple and the materials with which it is built there is no escaping the truth that it is a city 'out of this world'. Heaven is a beautiful place, full of glory and grace. We stand in awe and amazement at the glorious sight of dazzling diamonds and other gemstones set against a background of gold more pure than the purest gold in this world.

Such stones and gold are precious not only because of their beauty but their enduring quality. They never rust or decay but reflect the dazzling light of God's glory for ever and ever. We saw earlier (21:11) that the glory of God shone from this city. God is the source of light but these precious stones reflect the divine glory.

In conclusion this description 'symbolizes the pure, holy, gracious and radiant character of the fellowship between God and his people. In principal we enjoy it here and now; in perfection we will enjoy it by and by'. Do you enjoy something of this radiant glory of God now? Draw nearer to God and you surely will. Do you look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ in all his glory? One day soon Jesus will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30). This is what Jesus promised. Every eye shall see him, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11).

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