

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 29, Revelation 21: Bride, New Jerusalem continued

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Buckle up, everyone, because we are diving into one of the most visually stunning parts of the Bible. Oh, yeah. John's vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

It's a really wild ride. And we're going to unpack it all using Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture notes from his Revelation course. That's some seriously good stuff.

So get ready for some mind-blowing imagery and insights into what this city tells us about the people of God at the end of time. Yeah, it's a vision that's fascinated people for centuries. You know what I find really interesting? Dr. Mathewson emphasizes that John isn't actually describing a literal city.

Right. Instead, he's using symbols to represent something much deeper. Totally.

The New Jerusalem isn't about, you know, bricks and mortar or anything. It's about the people of God, you know, transformed and glorified. And how cool is it that John blends the imagery of the bride, the city, and the temple to create this, like, really stunning picture of redeemed community? I know, right? It's like, whoa! And then there's that whole connection to the Garden of Eden, too.

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

And we'll definitely come back to that later because it's so important for understanding the New Jerusalem as paradise restored. Okay. So before we get there, let's talk about those absolutely mind-boggling measurements John gives for the city.

Okay. He says it's 12,000 stadia squared with a wall 144 cubits thick. Those are some serious numbers.

And they're not just random numbers, are they? Oh, no. Not at all. Dr. Mathewson points out that they're all multiples of 12, which pops up all over the Bible in connection with God's people.

Right. Like the 12 tribes of Israel. Yes.

And the 12 apostles. Exactly. So John isn't really giving us, like, a blueprint or anything.

He's emphasizing how vast and complete God's people will be in their ultimate glory. And to really grasp the scale, think about this. One stadia is, like, 200 yards.

Wow. So we're talking about a city that's roughly 1,500 miles wide. That's just massive.

You can't miss it. Definitely not. And then there's the detail that the whole city is made of pure gold.

Ah, yes. The gold. Dr. Matthewson connects that back to the gold used in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple.

Right. So that ties into this idea that the New Jerusalem is, like, this holy sanctuary. Yes.

It's the dwelling place of God. But hold on. There's a twist.

Okay. A twist. Dr. Matthewson brings up this really cool detail about gold being found in the Garden of Eden.

Wait, really? In Genesis 2? Yep. So is he saying that the New Jerusalem is, like, this kind of paradise regained? Precisely. Like a return to that original harmony between God and humanity.

Wow. Okay. So we need to keep that Eden connection in mind.

Oh, yeah. It'll come up again and again. This is already so rich.

Yeah. And then there are those foundations of the city. Oh, yeah.

Those are amazing. Each one decorated with a different precious stone representing one of the 12 apostles. Yeah.

That's crucial because it emphasizes the idea that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles' teaching and ministry. Like their message has authority across time. Exactly.

It shows how important their message is for the Church throughout history. But Dr. Matthewson doesn't stop there, does he? He gives, like, five different interpretations of the meaning of those precious stones. He does.

He dives deep. So let's unpack those. Okay.

So first off, the stones are just beautiful. Oh, yeah. They're dazzling.

They reflect God's glory and show how valuable the city is. I mean, a city made of gold and jewels. Right.

Talk about making a statement. It's like blinged out on a cosmic scale. But it's not just about appearances, right? There's way more to it than that.

So what else is going on with these stones? Well, Dr. Matthewson contrasts these precious stones with the ones that adorn the corrupt Babylon in Revelation 17. Oh, yeah. And the super-materialistic Rome in Chapter 18.

He's making this stark contrast between God's kingdom and worldly empires. Yeah. And remember how some of the churches in Revelation were commended for being poor? Yeah.

They resisted compromising with Rome's economic system. Right. Churches like Smyrna and Philadelphia.

They struggled, but they remained faithful. And Dr. Matthewson suggests that the extravagance of the New Jerusalem might be seen as, like, a divine compensation for their sacrifices. Oh, wow.

It's a really powerful thought. Like, God sees their faithfulness and rewards them in this incredible way. Okay.

So we've got the beauty and the contrast with worldly empires. Right. And there's more.

Where? Well, he connects the stones to that Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 54 about the renewed Jerusalem. Where God makes a city glorious. Yes.

So for John, it's like a picture of eschatological restoration. Eschatological. It's a fancy word that just means related to the end times.

Oh, okay. Got it. So it's the fulfillment of God's promises from way back.

Like a cosmic do-over. Exactly. I like that.

Okay. So what else does he say about the stones? Well, he also brings up this fascinating parallel between the stones and the high priest's breastplate from Exodus 28. Oh, right.

That breastplate had 12 stones, each representing one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Hmm. I see where you're going with this.

It makes you wonder what John might be getting at here, right? Yeah. Like, if the high priest represented the people before God in the Old Testament, maybe John's suggesting that in the New Jerusalem, all believers become priests. Right.

Everyone has direct access to God. So the New Jerusalem becomes like this grand heavenly temple. Yes.

Yeah. Where everyone serves and worships God directly. Wow.

No wonder Dr. Mathewson finds this imagery so fascinating. You know, right? It's packed with meaning. Okay.

So we've covered the beauty, the contrast with worldly empires, the connection to Isaiah, and the idea of all believers as priests. Yeah. We've really dug in there.

And there's one more. Oh, yeah. He links the stones to that passage in Ezekiel 28.12, where Adam is described as wearing precious stones in the Garden of Eden.

That's right. It adds another layer to this whole idea of the New Jerusalem as a restored Eden. Wait, hold on.

I don't remember Adam wearing priestly stones. Yeah. Ezekiel portrays him that way.

It's wild. So this isn't just a return to Eden? No. It's like an even more glorious version of the original paradise.

John is like a master weaver, taking threads from all over Scripture and creating this incredible tapestry of meaning. It's amazing how much he packs into just a few verses. Okay.

So let's move on to another fascinating detail. That street of gold. Oh, yeah.

That one. Verse 21. What do you make of it? Well, it kind of sounds like something out of a fairy tale, right? A little bit.

Yeah. But knowing John, there's got to be more to it. Oh, yeah.

There always is. What does Dr. Mathewson say about it? Well, he explains that in most Greco-Roman cities. Which is important, because remember, John is writing to churches under Roman rule.

Exactly. Those folks would get this. So he says they had a central street or plaza.

It was used for commerce and public life. Like the heart of the city. So John's using something familiar to his audience to describe the New Jerusalem.

Right. But is he just trying to make it relatable? It's more than that. Dr. Mathewson suggests that John is subtly showing how the New Jerusalem is better than any earthly city. Oh, I see.

It's not just about the gold. It's about how human aspirations find their true fulfillment in God's kingdom. It's like John is saying, "Hey, you know those ideas you have about what makes a perfect city? Yeah.

Well, the New Jerusalem blows them all away. Totally. And there are other hints that he's drawing on Greco-Roman ideals.

Oh, like what? Well, the square shape of the city. Okay. And the emphasis on symmetry.

Yeah. Even the mention of a river later on. It's like he's saying, "Forget Rome, forget Athens.

This is the pinnacle of civilization. Exactly. Okay.

So this is blowing my mind. But then there's this detail about the nations in verses 24 and 26. Okay.

The nation. The ones walking by the city's light and bringing their splendor into it. Right.

But wait, at the end of chapter 20, it seems like all those who oppose God have been judged. So who are these new arrivals? That is a good question. Are they survivors? Or is there something else going on here? Well, that's the mystery.

The mystery will be unraveling in the next part of our deep dive. Oh, man. I can't wait.

Yeah. It's a question that's puzzled people for centuries. Hmm.

I know. It seems like a contradiction. Right.

We have this final judgment, and then we have these nations entering the new Jerusalem. It's like, how does that even work? Exactly. Well, Dr. Mathewson offers a few explanations.

Okay. He starts by reminding us that John is drawing a lot from Isaiah's vision of restoration. Ah.

In Isaiah, the nations are super important. Oh, yeah. They come to Jerusalem to learn from God and worship him.

Right. It's this beautiful picture of unity and peace. So John naturally includes this element in his picture of the new Jerusalem.

Exactly. Especially since this idea of a multi-ethnic people of God is like woven throughout Revelation. It pops up everywhere.

Everywhere. Okay. That makes sense.

But does Dr. Mathewson address the judgment thing? He does. He cautions against taking the language of entering the new Jerusalem, too, literally. So it's not like they're physically outside the city and then get permission to come in? No, not really.

Are they not like lining up at the pearly gates? Not quite. Okay. It's more like a symbolic way of saying they're included in God's kingdom.

So they're swept up in the arrival of the new Jerusalem itself? Yeah. Like they're part of the grand unveiling. So they didn't escape judgment or anything like that? No.

They're part of the redeemed from the start. Okay. So they're not just symbolic representations of something? No.

They're actual people. But we don't know their backstory. Right.

Hmm. That's serious. Totally.

Dr. Mathewson leaves their identity open? He's like, yeah, we don't know for sure. The text doesn't really tell us. It's an unsolved puzzle.

I love that. Me too. It reminds me of that other detail that Dr. Mathewson points out.

What's that? About John saying he saw no temple in the city. Oh, yeah. That's in Revelation 21.22. Right.

It seems strange because you'd expect a huge temple in the new Jerusalem. Yeah. You'd think so, right? Especially given how important the temple was to Jewish tradition.

And in other apocalyptic literature. Exactly. But remember how John keeps weaving together the bride, the city, and the temple throughout Revelation? Oh, yeah.

He's building up to something big. It's like those images are converging. Totally.

And Dr. Mathewson suggests that John's moving inward. Okay. Like he's standing at the heart of the city.

Mm-hmm. And he's declaring that there's no separate physical temple because God and the Lamb are the temple. Exactly.

They dwell directly among their people. The city itself becomes the sanctuary. It's like the ultimate fulfillment of that Exodus motif.

Where God wanted to dwell among his people. Right. No more separation.

No more barriers. And that's possible because sin and evil are totally gone. Yeah.

They've been wiped out. Which is why we needed a temple in the first place. Right.

Because of sin. Dr. Mathewson really emphasizes that point. Oh, yeah.

The removal of sin in chapters 19 and 20 makes way for God's total presence. Imagine a world where you don't need a special building to connect with God. Because His presence is everywhere.

And in everyone. It makes you think about how we approach worship today. Yeah, for real.

What does it mean to have God dwelling in us? It's a deep question. It really is. And this divine presence is so bright that John says there's no need for the sun or moon.

That's right. God and the Lamb provide all the light. It reminds me of that verse in Isaiah 60.19. Which one? The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you.

For the Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory. I love that verse. Me too.

John's clearly drawing from Isaiah here. Oh, yeah. There are a ton of parallels between Revelation 21 and Isaiah 60.

Especially with the light attracting the nations. Right. Remember how Isaiah says nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn? And then John echoes that in Revelation 21.24. Yeah.

He says the nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. It's like this grand procession. Drawn to the irresistible beauty of God.

And then there are those open gates in verse 25. Ah, yes. The open gates.

What do you make of those? Well, they symbolize the security of God's people. Okay. But also their openness to welcome the nations.

It's like a visual representation of God's love. A city without walls. Accessible to all.

Exactly. This is incredible. It's starting to click for me.

I'm glad. But those open gates raise another question. Okay.

What is it? If there's no night, because God's glory is the light, why have gates at all? Hmm. That's a good point. It's not like they need to close them for protection or anything.

Well, I think it highlights the symbolic nature of the vision. So we shouldn't focus too much on the literal details. Right.

The gates are more about evoking a sense of grandeur. They're part of the visual language. Exactly.

Like those massive measurements. Yeah. It's not about being literal.

It's about evoking a sense of awe. John wants us to feel the vastness and wonder of God's redeemed people. Okay.

That makes sense. Yeah. And speaking of wonder, there's that part about the nations bringing their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem.

Oh, yeah. That's in Revelation 21.26. It seems to say that the nations have something to offer to God's kingdom. Right.

They're not just receiving. They're bringing something unique to the table. It's like an affirmation of diversity.

Exactly. It's not about everyone being the same. Right.

Each culture brings something special. It's like they're each adding their own song to the chorus of praise. What a beautiful way to put it.

It captures John's vision perfectly. A vision of unity and diversity. Where everyone belongs.

And is valued for who they are. It's not about erasing differences. It's about harmonizing them.

In a symphony of praise. Wow, that's amazing. But it makes me think about all the division in the world today.

Yeah, I hear you. Can we even imagine a future of peace and harmony? It's a challenge, but John's vision gives us a glimpse of what's possible. It reminds us that God's plan is for unity.

Even amidst all the darkness. So where do we go from here? Well, I think the main takeaway is that the New Jerusalem isn't just a place. It's a symbol of God's purpose for humanity.

A world transformed by His love. It's a vision that challenges us to think bigger. To embrace the mystery of God's plan.

And to live in a way that reflects the beauty of the New Jerusalem. Even now. Right now.

And that brings us back to those mysterious nations. Ah, yes, the mystery remains. Their identity is still unknown.

But maybe that's the point. Oh, you mean? John invites us to wrestle with the complexities of God's plan. To realize we don't have all the answers.

Exactly. So what does Dr. Mathewson say about this? Does he offer any final thoughts? Well, instead of like a concrete answer about who these nations are. Okay.

He encourages us to think about what their presence represents. Oh, I see. Remember John's writing to a church that's facing some tough times.

Oh, yeah. Persecution, hardship. The whole nine yards.

Right. So this vision is meant to give them hope. So don't get hung up on figuring out exactly who these nations are.

Uh-huh. Focus on the bigger picture. Of God's victory.

And his all-encompassing grace. Yeah, exactly. It's a reminder that God's kingdom includes people from every corner of the world.

It's like no matter who you are or where you come from. You have a place in God's kingdom. That's a powerful message, especially today.

I know, right? When the world feels so divided. It's easy to build walls and exclude people. Yeah, to separate ourselves from those who are different.

But John's vision challenges us to break down those walls. To see the value in every person. To embrace the radical inclusivity of God's kingdom.

It's like that image we talked about before. The one with the nations bringing their glory and honor into the city. Yes.

It's not about everyone being the same. Right. It's about each culture, each people group.

Bringing their unique gifts. To enrich the tapestry of God's kingdom. It's a vision of unity and diversity.

A symphony of praise where every voice matters. Exactly. That's a beautiful thought, but it raises a question for me.

Okay. Cute. If everyone is included in this final vision, what about those who reject God's grace? Ooh, that's a tough one.

Where do they fit in? Yeah. Theologians have debated that for centuries. No easy answers there.

Nope. Dr. Mathewson doesn't give us a definite answer either. But he reminds us that God's justice and mercy go hand in hand.

So while there are consequences for rejecting God. There's always hope for redemption. It's like the whole point of the Bible.

Right. God desires reconciliation and restoration. And that brings us back to the New Jerusalem as a restored Eden.

It's not just about going back to the past. It's about moving forward. To a future where God's power heals and unites all creation.

John's vision reminds us that even in the midst of all the brokenness. God is working. Drawing everything towards himself.

It's a vision that gives me so much hope. Me too. It fills me with wonder.

It reminds us that we're part of something so much bigger than ourselves. A story that ends in redemption and joy. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Revelation 21.

Yeah. What's your final takeaway for our listeners? Well, I'd say spend some time reflecting on John's vision. Okay.

Ask yourself what hopes and longings it stirs in your heart. And how you can live out the values of God's kingdom today. The beauty, the justice, the inclusivity.

Even in a world that often falls short. That's a great challenge. Thanks for walking us through all of this.

It's been a pleasure. And listeners, we want to hear your thoughts. Yeah.

What resonates with you about the new Jerusalem? Share your reflections on social media. And until next time. Keep diving deep.