

You Are The Perfect Church!

A sermon based on Revelation 21:10-14, 22-24 – ***“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.***

²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ 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. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What makes a perfect church? You’ve had a bit of a chance to at least think about that over the last couple of months, with our Every Member Bible Study, haven’t you? What makes the perfect church? Well, for starters, there are no financial challenges, right? The money just keeps pouring in. Then the grounds are well groomed, right? There’s no internal fighting among the members. Everyone is welcome with a friendly atmosphere and of course, lots of potlucks and other activities. It has sound doctrine, of course. What else? How would *you* describe the perfect church?

Do you think you’ll ever be a part of a perfect church? The truth is you *are* a part of a perfect church right now. No, I don’t mean Light of the World (although you might think sometimes we do come pretty close!). What I mean is you’re a part of *God’s* church. And already now you have a place in heaven. There is the perfect gathering of believers; the perfect church.

John gets a glimpse of that truly perfect church in Revelation 21. And today, we’re focusing on three aspects of that perfect church: the walls, the foundation, and the lighting.

I once heard a comedian ask, “What kind of neighborhood is heaven that it has to have a gated community?!” Doesn’t it seem odd heaven has ***“a great, high wall with twelve gates,”*** as John sees, ***“with twelve angels at the gates”*** in order to keep the riff-raff out? Because there won’t be any riff-raff. They’ll all be banished to hell. Heaven won’t need any security. But remember the book of Revelation is filled with picture language. And that’s exactly what this picture is meant to represent—complete safety and security.

And what a luxurious place it will be! Shining ***“with the glory of God, and its brilliance... like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”*** How wonderful! How beautiful! Everyone will want to be in. No one will want to be left out.

But what about those walls? Who gets past the guards? Who gets through the gate? It’s sort of reminiscent of the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were banished from that paradise. Remember

what happened? An angel guarded the entrance with a flashing sword. Can you imagine anything more disheartening than standing at those gates and hearing (not St. Peter—as all the jokes go, but) the angel standing guard look up and down his list and say, "Nope. You're not on the list. Entrance denied."?

That's what we deserve, for the times we've been unfaithful to our bridegroom. That's what we deserve for the times we've griped and complained about our earthly churches while being unwilling to do anything to fix the problem. That's what we deserve for any and for every selfish rebellion we've launched against heaven's gates. And make no mistake. That's what any and every sin really is.

And we can't sneak into the club past the guard. God sees everything. We can't scale the walls. Perfection is demanded which makes those walls too high to ever climb. We can't know the right people who can get us in as their plus one. Or can we?

You see, the gates *are* open to us. ***"On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel."*** That is, the names of those who represent the Christian church; those gates are open to us...those gates are open to everyone, everywhere. ***"There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west"*** is the way John saw it. But how? How can the gates of heaven be open to everyone? Because of the foundation on which the Church is built...

One of our churches down in Anchorage remodeled several years ago. They needed to add a sprinkler system in order to add a preschool. But as they examined their building, they found several other problems like asbestos in the walls, meaning it was going to cost them many thousands of dollars to fix. But thankfully, no structural damage was found. When you have a problem with the foundation, you have a very real problem.

But the perfect church is built on a very stable foundation. It's built on the prophets and apostles. What does that mean? Well, it doesn't rely on those men, but on the message they proclaimed. And what's that message? You know. On Christ. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:19-20: ***"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."***

Christ's death and resurrection pay for your sins and assure you that you are justified. He entered heaven victorious. And he offers to take you as his "plus one." And you, and you, and you, and everyone who trusts in him. He's the only one who can get in, but he can take everyone with him.

This is the solid foundation of that church. And it is the solid foundation of your faith. Trust in your popularity or your church attendance or your kind deeds for others and all these foundations of sand will be washed away when you stand before the gatekeeper. But the sure foundation of Christ crucified will catch you. And stand you will.

Nothing can erode this foundation. Nothing can cause it to crack. The attacks of Satan and those in league with him cannot harm that gospel truth. It's done. It's finished. They can never undo what Christ has done. You are a member of God's household. You know the truth of the apostles and prophets. You will be let in.

And this offers true stability in an unstable world. When the economy is up in the air, when you keep your job by a thread, when your relationships are crumbling, when all earthly help gives way, Jesus is

still the sure and certain foundation that will always be there, even if the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Trust in him and in his promises: "***I am with you always.***" (Matthew 28:20) "***Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.***" (Hebrews 13:?) "***He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.***" (John 11:25) "***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.***" (1 Peter 5:6) These promises will never fail. They are a sure foundation that offer true security.

And keep building on this foundation as you grow in your faith, and you'll be welcomed in his heaven by the angels.

Friends, finally, let's look at the lighting in the perfect church...

What's your vision of the perfect lighting in church? I've always been a fan of natural light—lots of windows letting in the sunshine as we worship God—a concept that's not always very practical in Alaska. So we use artificial lights.

But did you ever catch this detail about heaven before: In heaven there will be no artificial lights, no lamps, no sun even! Are you thinking, "Uh-oh. I thought *Alaska* was dark at times. No sun?! That doesn't sound like a place for me." Well, there's no need to fear. It will be plenty bright and warm all the time. "***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.***"

In heaven there will be perpetual sunny days every day all the time. It will be far better than some tropical island because of who will be there: Jesus, our risen Redeemer. Talk about bright sunshiny days! What a wonderful place it will be!

One of the challenges many churches face – and to an extent, we have here at times - is the finances. We seem to never have quite enough money to do all the things we want to do...to fulfill all the dreams we have. Did you know that we spend about \$15,000 each year on utilities. That's what it costs for the heat and the light. In heaven, that won't be necessary. Jesus himself will give us both for free all the time. We spend over \$20,000 each year in insurance. But in heaven, with the perfect security and stability that those walls and foundations provide, we'll need no insurance. No accidents can happen. Our health will never fail.

For now, as long as we're here on earth, these costs are all necessary if we're going to take care of our called worker and have a nice building like this one. But finally, the perfect church won't even have a church. John said, "***I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.***" All this time we've been talking about the perfect church, it may have seemed like we were just talking about heaven. But our risen Redeemer himself is revealed as the church itself—the very temple at which we will worship. And what a perfect gathering—what a perfect church—it will be!

There will be no financial problems with no insurance or utilities, no need to purchase food at the eternal banquet. No need for money! The grounds will be glorious—like Eden restored, but with streets of gold! There will be no internal fighting among anyone because there will be no sin. Everyone is welcome from all corners of the earth with a friendly atmosphere and of course, lots of potlucks. In short, it will really be in every way the perfect church.

Light of the World isn't the perfect church. The Wisconsin Synod isn't a perfect church either. But what makes the Church perfect is here in this place: Christ and him crucified. Christ, the Risen Redeemer is

revealed here. And so, even now, you are a part of the perfect Church. And you will be welcomed in to the Holy City one day soon to rejoice in the eternal security, stability, and light of the perfect heavenly church. Amen!

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