

Come!

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One of the greatest joys in keeping the Feast of Tabernacles, aside from beating the kids at laser tag yesterday (I told them old age and treachery beat youth and skill every time), is the opportunity that we have to spend time clearly defining and focusing on our end state—on our goals, our objectives, in living the way of life that we are all striving to live, and capturing, as I think we have been, a more accurate vision, a more accurate picture of what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what's to come. I know for me at least, it can be very easy to get lost in the tactical execution—the daily grind—and at the end of the day, find myself gassed out. We heard from Rick Railston, on the first day, about the wearing out of the saints, and that that's a mental condition, not just an age-related condition. Mr. Joe Hasenoehrl mentioned humbling days—there certainly seem to be more of those as time goes on.

So we have all this effort, all this energy, this uphill climb in our lives, for—what? Wednesday morning we spent some time together, talking about the outcome of learning to fear God during the Feast and in our lives in general, and ended by introducing the idea that going through the exercise of being a living example of the God-inspired way of life that we are to live, in turn helps us gain perspective; you may remember we ended with the fellow countrymen concept: The king of Israel was to learn the law to practice and to do, that his heart might not be lifted above his fellow countrymen, and as future leaders, it's paramount to our success in our role—to what we're going to be doing.

So I'd like to spend our time together today exploring what I think may be best encapsulated in what we read in Revelation 22; turn with me please to Revelation 22. We're going to read verses 12–14 and then we'll pick up verse 17.

Revelation 22:12 *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.*

13) *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*

14) *Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (NASB)*

I'm going to say this up front, and it'll make more sense, perhaps, as we go along, but at the risk of giving the impression of falling into the other ditch, I want to pause here and acknowledge that there is a reward for faithfulness. There is blessing, there is favor granted to those who have been true. It is granted to those who have been faithful, who have, as we read here in verse 14, washed their robes, and that's important. Let's pick up verse 17 of Revelation 22.

17) *And the Spirit and the bride say ...*

“Woohoo! I did it!” “Hey, check it out—white robes!” “King, priest—right here—a lead squad, first stringer!” “I did all the things, I got the reward, the big prize—look at how much God loves me!”

Oh, hold on—it doesn’t say that, does it?

17 repeated) ... *the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”* (NASB)

For those who like titles, that’s mine for today. Simply put:

Come!

Brethren, we live in a society, we live in a culture, that puts tremendous emphasis on hard work. Compared to our counterparts in other parts of the Western world, Americans work longer hours, take fewer vacations, and in turn have wealth that is nearly unsurpassed in this world, and absolutely we have blessings that we do not deserve. But we also work really, really hard. The question becomes—one of my favorite to ask—why? Why are we working so hard? There’s a solid argument that it’s in large part a function of our culture. We come from a history of independence, exploration, entrepreneurialism—we pride ourselves on our puritanical work ethic and the freedom to work as long and as hard as we want to, to accomplish what we want to accomplish, but the reality is, for many, that hard work, that effort, is an investment in material outcome.

We Americans work long, we work hard, as Mr. Terry Swagerty talked about earlier, to get more stuff. Then we have to work harder to pay people, or buy more stuff, to take care of our stuff. Or we work long and hard to be more important—to get that promotion, to climb to the top of the company ladder. I’m not disparaging hard work—that’s certainly not the intention—nor the material gain that comes with it. My point is to identify motivation. Again, that all important question of why—why? Much of what mankind does, what gets people out of bed in the morning, is rooted in selfishness—in fleeting desires.

Turn with me to Ecclesiastes 4; we’ll just read verse 8. We’ll pick up a nugget of wisdom from Solomon, speaking to this very concept. I’ll read this from the Contemporary English Version, which phrases it in a more colloquial way.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 *For example, some people don’t have friends or family. [Notice this] But they are never satisfied with what they own, and they never stop working to get more. They should ask themselves, “Why [that all important, very simple question] am I always working to have more? Who will get what I leave behind?” What a senseless and miserable life!* (CEV)

I love these words. They fit neatly into a perspective that, as we're striving to overcome, as we're seeking our God in prayer, in fasting, in study, in meditation, we are, at the same time, making tremendous sacrifices to obey. Perhaps, with some of you here, jobs are on the line, income is on the line, but you're here in faithfulness. Something to consider: Are we here today, do we observe the way of life that we are observing, to get ours? Or are we here today, are we daily doing what we are doing so that someday we will have that opportunity to say, come, join us? Are we striving to serve or to be served?

Do we have a solid grasp on the point of the roles we are to play in the future? Our culture, our society, even in the church, is so focused on the reward, on what we get out of the process, at the expense of, frankly, what really matters—giving, sharing, serving, as the reward, in and of itself. Yes, eternal life—it's a tremendous reward and viewing it as such is not an issue, not the problem. But brethren, I challenge us, I challenge myself, to maybe consider it from a God-plane perspective, to consider eternal life, that reward, as a resource—it's a tool as a means to an even greater end for all of mankind. Let's notice Christ's words; please turn with me to Mark 10, verses 42–45.

Mark 10:42 *Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. (NASB)*

Up to this point we've framed the perspective of success in the context of American society, but the reality is this isn't just a problem of modern American society, it's a human-nature problem, it's a Satan-influenced, world problem.

43) But it is not this way among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.

44) And whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. (NASB)

Let's notice something here, and I think this is important: Christ does not condemn the desire to be a leader. As we talked about earlier, having position, authority, wealth—these things in and of themselves are not inherently wrong; being rewarded is not wrong, but again, my favorite question is, why? Why? What's the point? Do we have a complete perspective on why the reward is offered in the first place? Notice, these are not just dictates from on high, because, as we read in verse 45,

45) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (NASB)

Christ lived the ultimate example for us. Consider the Son of God, with His power, authority, and position, exceeded by only one other, and the objective was what? For Him to serve in a manner unparalleled to what anyone else could have possibly done—amazing. We can see, through the record of scripture, that the apostles also lived this instruction. Turn with me to Ephesians 3 and verse 1. We're building a picture of a distinct and unique perspective.

Ephesians 3:1 *For this reason I, Paul [notice how Paul views himself], the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— (NASB)*

Paul calls himself a *prisoner*. The Greek here for prisoner means “bound” and has its root in the words that mean bands or shackles. So we’re talking about Paul, right? This is the Paul? The apostle who is respected, revered, and in many cases worshipped for centuries? How does he view himself? He’s a prisoner. What’s also interesting to note is the why—for the sake of the Gentiles.

Paul endured what he did, assumed the circumstances he found himself in, for others. For others who were not only in our vernacular not called, but in the context of Jews at the time, were Gentiles, who were considered a lower form of life. Brethren, how often in our past—again, I’ll frame this in the context of, we’re growing, we’re maturing—but how often in our past have we looked down on, have we put down, have we judged, the world? How often have we put ourselves on a pedestal—look at me, one of the chosen ones, a firstfruit, I got it figured out and you don’t—and scoffed? When have we ever considered ourselves shackled, bound, enslaved, in service to Jesus Christ for the sake of mankind? Paul did. Reading on in Ephesians 3, we’ll read verses 8–10.

8) *To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,*
9) *and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things;*
10) *so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. (NASB)*

In verse 8 we notice a perspective, don’t we?—no pulling rank, no lofty title, least of all the saints. Then in verses 9 and 10 we see purpose—bringing to light, making God’s wisdom known, serving versus being served. 1 Corinthians 15, verses 9–10, building on this concept of this perspective.

1 Corinthians 15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle [not fit!], because I persecuted the church of God. (NASB)*

Back to this idea of hard work in our culture. We not only have the pressure, but we have the expectation around reward, and around promotion and benefit. Think of it this way, for those who may have worked in a corporate culture or work in a corporate culture now, you have this concept of an annual review. Who ever goes to their boss at their annual review and says, I’m not fit to be an employee? No one. What do we do with an annual review? We sit down and muster every awesome thing that we can think of about ourselves, and take it to our boss and say, see here—here’s why I’m great, here’s why I need more money, here’s why I need that promotion.

What’s Paul’s perspective here?—not fit, because of what he’s done. He pulls his resume out and says, no, I am not fit to be called an apostle. Not deserving of the role and the responsibility that he was given. How about us? You and me—how often do

we fall short? How often in our lives has the blood of Christ had to cover our sins? How worthy are we of the calling and subsequently the role we are to play in the Millennium and beyond? It's not about being worthy, is it? Notice verse 10.

10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them [and that's important], yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (NASB)

Our potential, our role, our efforts and results, produced in this life—and they are important—are all a function of what? God's grace in action. Yes, we are to labor, but the power to do so and the subsequent outcomes belong to God. I want to be very clear; I'm not suggesting that roles, responsibilities, or positions of authority are wrong or unnecessary, nor am I saying that the desire to fill those roles is wrong—we have scripture to prove that, in 1 Timothy 3:1. You don't need to turn there, I'll read it from the Amplified Bible.

1 Timothy 3:1 *This saying is true and irrefutable: if any man [eagerly] seeks the office of overseer (bishop, superintendent), he desires an excellent task. (AMP)*

The latter half of 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the body being made of many different, necessary parts, and that there are distinct roles that God appoints. We see that in verse 28 of 1 Corinthians 12. But how does 1 Corinthians 12 end? I'll read verse 31 from the New Living Translation.

1 Corinthians 12:31 *So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. [Again, nothing wrong with desiring the gifts.] But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all. (NLT)*

What happens next? 1 Corinthians 13 talks about the why—the motivation. It talks about love. One may argue, okay, you're talking about Christ, you're talking about the apostles—cream of the crop material; where do we fit into this picture? What I'd like to do with the balance of our time together here this morning is to explore some characteristics—some attributes—of what this perspective of being able to say, come, might look like for you and for me. For that, let's go back to Revelation 21; we're going to start in verse 9 but we'll read through verse 14.

Revelation 21:9 *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." (NASB)*

Who are we talking about here? Who is this? Hold your finger there and turn a couple pages back to Revelation 19, verses 6–8.

Revelation 19:6 *Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude, and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peels of thunders, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns!"*

7) *Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready.* (NASB)

So we're stenciling this together.

8) *And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* (NASB)

Connecting some dots here—we have, in context, the bride and her fine linen being the activities of the saints in life. I think this is all pretty familiar territory for most of us, but to level set, what we're reading here has several layers of imagery involved, and, as a broad prerequisite disclaimer, before we go any further, my intention today in going through what we're going to go through—not going to map all the symbolism, not going to dogmatically interpret prophecy, because, frankly, I don't know. It's looking at this, it's exploring what we see, and asking, how might this apply? How might this apply in my role as the bride? Back to chapter 21; we'll pick up in verse 10.

Revelation 21:10 *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,*

11) *having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal clear jasper.*

12) *It had [notice this] a great and high wall, with twelve gates [we're going to revisit the walls and gates], and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.*

Skip down to verse 14.

14) *And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones [we'll visit that in detail], and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

18) *The material of the wall was of jasper [we'll spend a little time on that as well]; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.*

22) *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.* (NASB)

Let's put some pieces together. We're going to paint this end-state, ultimate-objective picture at this point. We have the bride, identified as those called, invited, having lived their lives in righteousness, and through the grace of the Father, having been granted the opportunity to participate functionally as the framework of the God family's intimate involvement with the world, in the end, in this image that we have of this picture of the New Jerusalem. Again, the objective here—I'm not going to wrangle prophecy, or all of the symbolism or the imagery, but rather look at this from the perspective of reading the book of Revelation, and saying, wow, there's a lot of stuff here. But what can I take away, what can I learn, what can I apply today, in my life, and how is that going impact my role in the future?

As we dig into some of these details, I want to take a few minutes to step back, and talk about the concept of a city in the context of civilization. Why a city? What can we learn from this image of a city? When we think of cities today, what do you think of? What generally comes to mind? What are some of the defining characteristics of a city? James talked about this earlier and I think he's going to talk more about it tomorrow, but lots of people, in close proximity, is probably towards the top of the list. Cities, in a modern context, are often associated with an abundance of opportunity, with an abundance of resources.

Whether it's for business or vacation, when I'm traveling to a new city, one of the things I look for initially is lodging—hotels, Airbnb's, whatever it happens to be. What accommodations are available, and of what caliber are they? Being the good Pacific Northwesterner that I am, I'm always looking for good coffee. In Portland, Oregon, there's a Starbucks on every corner or two—where's the good coffee? On the other side of the clock, where's the good brew pub? I'm kind of a craft-beer snob; for those behind the camera, you can't see it, but I have a beer tie on. Yeah, where's the good brew pub for after hours? What entertainment options are there for the family? These attributes are not what folks had been looking for in cities in an ancient context, but biblically, we can see the formation of this city conceptually.

Turn with me to Genesis 11 and we'll take a look at this. We'll read verses 1–4, to kind of see where the genesis (pun intended) of this city takes place.

Genesis 11:1 *Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.*

2) *And it came about, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there.*

3) *Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." They used bricks for stone, and they had tar for mortar.*

4) *And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven; let us make for ourselves a name [interesting], otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. (NASB)*

So let's notice a couple of things here. First, *let us make for ourselves a name*. The New Living Translation translates that phrase as, *this will make us famous*. So what do we see here? We see self-focus, self-aggrandizement, self-centeredness. Contrast this to what we read in Revelation 21. What's the focus of that city? Who's at the center of that city?

Secondly, these efforts, of coming together to build this city, were to collect, to protect, to control. To draw on this concept further, we can look at the work done by archaeologists at the site of the city of Jericho. Jericho is considered by archaeologists and anthropologists to be the oldest inhabited city in the world, and much has been learned about cities in general in the work that's been done in excavations of the more than twenty successive settlements at that location. What's interesting about the study of Jericho is the point on the historical timeline in which it transitions from being just a

village to what archaeologists consider a proto-city. That transition actually takes place at the construction of walls and a tower.

In light of what we just read here in Genesis 11, I found that interesting. I'm going to quote here, from an article in The Jerusalem Post, talking about some of the work done in the archaeological digs at the city of Jericho. Quoting from The Jerusalem Post, *Archaeologists Ran Barkai and Roy Liran used computers to reconstruct sunsets and recently found that when the Tower of Jericho was built, nearby mountains cast a shadow on it as the sun set, specifically on the longest day of the year. The shadow fell exactly on the structure [speaking of the tower] and then spread out to cover the entire village of Jericho [one day a year].*

In that article, archaeologist Ran Barkai argued that the structure was used to create awe—that was the point. You've got this massive shadow being cast that covers the entire village. My point in sharing this is that one of the intentions of cities in an ancient context was control and protection. This could be against natural human forces, armies, wild animals, even floods and weather. Again, not typically what we think of when we think about a city today.

We drove from our home out here to the Feast and as we were going through Spokane, I wasn't shocked by the stunning lack of ramparts protecting the city, I was more interested in the gas station, honestly. Within this context, let's consider a few of the defining characteristics of the New Jerusalem that we read of in Revelation 21. Again, my intention is not dogmatic, not exhaustive, but rather it's to extract, if this picture is a representation of the bride, what we are striving in this life to become, what we can learn from it today, and the application to our future millennial role.

Three key attributes we're going to talk about, explicitly defined in Revelation 21—walls, gates, foundations. We will start with the wall. No need to turn back to it—I'll just reread it; Revelation 21 and verse 12.

Revelation 21:12 *It had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel: (NASB)*

In the interest of connecting some dots, let's make an application to us as spiritual Israel in scripture. Turn with me to Romans 2, verses 28–29.

Romans 2:28 *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;
29) but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (NASB)*

Galatians 6 please. We'll read verses 15 and 16.

Galatians 6:15 *For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [That's what matters.]*

16) *And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (NASB)*

We see that the emphasis on the spiritual heritage is what matters here, and we can project that forward into what we read here in Revelation 21, again, as our future, our end-state—the imagery of the roles and the functions, and the characteristics of those functions at play. Back to Revelation 21; two key attributes of the wall that we're going to talk about: The first is that it's great and high—we see that in verse 12—and the second is that it's made of jasper, and we saw that in verse 18. Again, thinking back to the ancient context, the walls of the city were pretty important, vitally important, in ensuring that the citizens and its resources were protected and defensible.

Without that wall in place, all bets are off, as the stability of the city, the stability of perhaps the entire region, was at stake, and that wall wasn't a facade, it wasn't a split-rail fence, rather it was a functional fortification and was valued if it was great and high. It's an account I know I've spent time on at the Feast in years past, but it fits very neatly into this concept of the exploration of a wall.

Turn with me to the book of Nehemiah, chapter 1. We're going to start by reading the first three verses, and as you're turning there, we'll be setting the stage: It's 445 B.C., Judah has been exiled to Babylon, the city of Jerusalem has been laid to waste, and you can read that in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36; there have been some exiles. These have gone back to the land, about 538 B.C., in a couple different waves. We pick up the story in Nehemiah 1 and verse 1.

Nehemiah 1:1 *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Shushan the capital,*
2) *that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.*

3) *They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." (NASB)*

Notice walls and gates; notice Hanani's response to Nehemiah's question about the state of affairs of Jerusalem. What was Nehemiah's reaction? He learns this, verse 4:

4) *When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (NASB)*

Hold on to Nehemiah's reaction, we're going to come back to that. Later, Nehemiah petitions King Artaxerxes for leave to go back to his home; notice what he asks for. Nehemiah 2 and we'll read verses 7 and 8.

Nehemiah 2:7 *And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through till I come to Judah, 8) and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city [priority one: getting those structures rebuilt] and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me. (NASB)*

Nehemiah is granted his request, makes his way to Jerusalem, surveys the situation, and then approaches the city officials. Notice what he says, verse 17. I'm going to read this from the New Living Translation.

Nehemiah 2:17 *But now I said to them, "You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!" (NLT)*

There are a few ways we can view the analogies here; I know this is something I've talked about in the past and Nehemiah is one of my favorite books of the Bible, so I spend some time here. If we are to be a wall—multiple layers, contexts, walls in our own lives, our own hearts, our own minds, our physical families, that fortification, that protection, our spiritual families—what's the condition of our wall? Are we strong, are we fortified, or are we in shambles? If we take an honest look at the state of the church today there might be some sections of the wall that are solid but there are definitely sections that are not. In the context of what a wall is supposed to do in the first place, it's only as good as its weakest point, right? So, if we know there are weak points, if the wall has breaches, if it's in disrepair, the first question we can ask ourselves is what is our response to this reality?

What was Nehemiah's response? What was his reaction when he learned about this? Are we moved? Are we praying for the state of our spiritual wall? Are we praying for the resources needed for the wall to be made whole, or, like the city officials in Jerusalem, are we resigned to it being a disgrace? Compare our walls, to what we read in Nehemiah, to the wall of New Jerusalem—that end-point, that state toward which we're striving. I think we're going to see a pretty strong contrast.

So we establish a perspective that's realistic, focused on restoration—okay, we acknowledge there's a problem, we start working on it, we start moving towards a solution; what should we expect next? Nehemiah 4; we're going to start in verse 7 but we're going to jump around for a time so just hang with me. What next? We start working, we start doing what we're supposed to do.

Nehemiah 4:7 *Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry.*

8) *All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. (NASB)*

As we're making our efforts now and in the future, to fortify these walls in our lives—to become points of strength, points of refuge, points of protection, for our own hearts and minds, as individuals, for our physical families, our spiritual families—there is going to be opposition and it might be pretty stiff. The question becomes, how strong is this wall becoming in this process? Are we building our walls as when Tobiah scoffed? We didn't read it in verse 3, but he said, this is so flimsy, if a fox jumps on it, it's going to fall over. I thought, that's interesting; why a fox, why did he say a fox? Looking through a few commentaries, apparently foxes were prevalent in the area, but I think it's an interesting image.

What are foxes known for, what are they characteristic of?—stealth, cunning, craftiness—does that sound familiar, like an adversary we're fighting in our lives? Perhaps a better question to ask ourselves is where does the strength of the wall come from in the first place? We actually sang this hymn this morning so I appreciated this; Psalm 127 and verse 1; no need to turn to it, I'll just read it from the New Living Translation.

Psalm 127:1 *Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. (NLT)*

That's where the source of strength has to come from and Nehemiah knew this. Notice his reaction; skip down to verse 9 of Nehemiah 4.

Nehemiah 4:9 *But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. (NASB)*

Skip down to verse 14.

14) *When I saw their fear [speaking of the people there in the city], I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." (NASB)*

We remember, we have the perspective—it's first things first—God builds the house but we also fight. We do our part. Notice what happens, verse 15.

15) *When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. (NASB)*

When we invite our loving Father to be intimately involved, not only does He take care of our needs but we're able to focus on our part of the process—we turn it over to God, we can fight, and it's a lot easier to our work when we know our Father is involved.

Skip down to verse 19.

19) *I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. (NASB)*

The Contemporary English Version of the Bible translates the first part of Nehemiah's words in this way: *Our work is so spread out that we are a long way from one another.* I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty familiar to me; it about sums up the state of affairs in the church today. But even though we may be scattered, a long way from one another, even if work is done in isolation—we didn't cover it here, but Nehemiah outlines very specifically the different families that have different responsibilities along the wall, for their part of the wall—there's an accountability for all the others in that outcome, even for someone on the other side of the city, because that wall is only as secure as its weakest point. If I'm not pulling my weight in Vancouver, Washington, then it's felt in Spokane. We all have a part to play.

So all the turmoil, the tension, the hard labor—it has a purpose. It's not just God making us jump through hoops, to, in the end, do it all for us anyway. Recall back in Revelation 21 what the wall of the New Jerusalem was made of—it was made of jasper. We read that in verse 18. I'm not a rockhound so I apologize for not regaling you with lots of technical details, but I did take a look at jasper—what is jasper?—and I found it fascinating. Not only is jasper extremely hard, it's towards the hardest end of the scale that's used to measure the hardness of minerals and rocks, which I guess makes it pretty good wall material, but from a gemstone perspective, if you have something very hard and you want to smooth it out and make it shine, it has to go through the tumbler for quite a long time.

Jasper is also opaque; it contains impurities introduced in its formation process, and is generally found on sea floors or is formed due to volcanic activity. This in turn gives it tremendous variety—there are thousands of types and colors across the spectrum. Jasper is hard, solid, can endure the test of time, whether it be in the formation or refinement processes, and it has a unique yet brilliant end result. Does that sound familiar at all? Our role is to be a source of strength, of spiritual defense—durable, solid, and yet beautiful and vibrant. Our Father provides us today with the opportunity we need to become this amazing creation. Again, the point is to be in service to all mankind, not to crow about how awesome and pure we are. And in our service we are beautiful and perhaps battle hardened, in a warts-and-all kind of way.

We talked about the wall, let's talk a little about gates. So, here we have a city, it's got walls, and they're great and they're high, but if there are no gates, one can't get in—the city is inaccessible. It requires both the boundary of protection and the avenue in which the wall can be passed through to get to what's inside. This is worth considering in the context of our past perspective in the church—have our views, our attitude, our emphasis towards the world or even towards other churches of God been that of acting as a gate or as an impenetrable wall? As future kings, priests, born members into the

family of God, in our roles in the future, there are going to be aspects of defense, aspects of protection, but there's also access.

Rick mentioned previously that I work for an independent music-distribution and rights-management company out of Portland, and one of our company's objectives in the music industry—and I love how this is phrased—is that we are a gateway, not a gatekeeper. We don't police what musicians create, we simply empower them to get their art out into the world. We connect artists with their fans by removing the barriers to entry to let the fans decide whether they like what the artist is doing or not. We are gateways, not gatekeepers. Again, in verse 12 of Revelation 21, we see an angel is stationed at each of the gates. It's not the job of the gate in and of itself to determine the access, it's the one who administers the gate.

We have our part in our roles and responsibilities to protect and defend—our minds, our hearts, our families, the spiritual family. But, a question—who ultimately is the gatekeeper? Consider that a gateway and gatekeeper are two different roles. One is the actual avenue, one is to control the access through that avenue. Let's see this; please turn with me to John 10, verses 27–29. Christ is speaking here.

John 10:27 *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28) and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (NASB)*

Notice verse 29.

29) My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (NASB)

So we see Christ taking responsibility for the sheep, but who ultimately is the one with the power and control? Who is the one who made the call to give them to Christ in the first place? Ultimately, in whose hands are the sheep? Let's move up the chapter to verse 2, same chapter, John 10—we'll cover a little background on this statement. I'm going to read this from the New Living Translation.

John 10:2 *But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3) The gatekeeper opens the gate for him [again, in the context of the shepherd], and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (NLT)*

So notice, there are two distinct roles here: There is a gatekeeper and a shepherd, and in the end, in verse 7, what does Christ say?

7) so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 9) Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. (NLT)

So Christ's role as the gate—I think most translations say “the door”—is to be a gateway to salvation, to an avenue of access for us today. Hebrews 10, verses 19 and 20, from the Contemporary English Version, says this,

Hebrews 10:19 *My friends, the blood of Jesus gives us courage to enter the most holy place
20) by a new way that leads to life! And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself. (CEV)*

So if Christ is our forerunner, the one who sets the example for us to follow, the standard for us to emulate as spiritual gates, if you will, are we then functioning as avenues to life? Are we becoming pathways so that others can have access to the one who ultimately keeps us all, the one to whom, at the end of the day, all the sheep belong? Or are we so focused on being walls that no one gets in? Or, also worth considering, could it be that the power of God's Spirit, within us, can't get out, because it isn't allowed to shine out to those around us?

It's interesting that in John 10:9 Christ uses the phrase “to come and go”—the sheep come and go and find good pastures. Life is dynamic, isn't it? We breathe in oxygen, we exhale carbon dioxide. Water evaporates into the air, it condenses and it falls back to the earth as rain. We won't turn there but Solomon, much more eloquently, describes this in the first eight verses of Ecclesiastes 3. There's a time and a season for everything—all aspects of life and creation, and without this flow what would happen to the natural world? It would stagnate, it would die.

The same holds true for a city; without those avenues, those gateways, through which commerce takes place, the city is going to fail. In an ancient context, what was the surest way to conquer a city? A general could send his troops up against it with their slings and arrows—that might work—or he could pitch his tents around the city and wait. It's called a siege. What is a siege? It's a wall with no gates—nothing gets in, nothing comes out—the city inside dies.

Our roles in the future, as we see reflected in this picture of New Jerusalem, are in part going to be to provide that access—that flow, again, through the ones who are at the heart of this city: God and the Lamb. It's up to God, though, to determine who is worthy—that's not our job, that's not our role. It was God the Father who deemed Christ's sacrifice worthy on our behalf, not Christ Himself. Christ is the door, He is the gate for us, as His sheep today.

The final aspect of this image of the New Jerusalem that I would like to explore is that of the foundation. Turn with me please to 1 Peter 2, verses 4–6.

1 Peter 2:4 *And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God.*

5) *you also, as living stones [that's us], are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

6) *For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."* (NASB)

We see here clearly that we share a role with our Elder Brother, in being living stones, Christ being the chief cornerstone of this spiritual foundation concept. Arguably more important than walls, more important than gates, is the firm footing of a foundation. We're familiar with the parable we're going to read next, but I just want to catch the very first part of what Christ shares and records in Matthew 7, verses 24 and 25. Again, a parable we're all very, very familiar with.

Matthew 7:24 *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

25) And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. (NASB)

This is a reminder for us, both in our lives today and in the context of our future roles, that having a firm foundation affords us the ability to weather the storm. A firm foundation does not mean no storms. So what's the point? Are we peaceable, are we strong, are we solid, do we have our foundation built upon the chief cornerstone in our lives today? Does this in turn reflect in how we are living our lives as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God? Do we give others a safe, strong, solid basis for a relationship with the Father and the Son? Are we preparing now for these attributes in the future, when, if you think about it in the context of the Great Tribulation, then the Millennium, what conditions are going to be extant on that first day of the Millennium? Humanity is going to be in pretty rough shape, humbled to near oblivion. Folks are going to be looking for a foundation of strength.

While the description of the foundations in Revelation 21 details twelve precious stones—we didn't go through that—there's one little word worth noting in verse 19 of Revelation 21, and that word is "garnished". Some translations render that word as "adorned" or "inlaid", and the Greek word used here, according to Thayer's, can mean to put in order, to ornament, or to gain honor. Why does that matter? It's absolutely vital, that once carefully considered, crafted and even celebrated—when a new building is built, when that first stone goes in for the foundation, and there are often all kinds of activities around that—once that foundation is laid and the building is built on it, the awareness of that foundation begins to disappear.

What's more apparent? The walls, doors, windows, and other aspects of the building receive the attention. However, when there are issues with the foundation of a building, that's bad, that's a catastrophic situation. It's critical—vital—that the foundation be right, be made ready, be in order, but then it's obscured. The less attention the foundation of

a building gets, the better for the building. If we are living stones, is our purpose to get attention, or is it to serve, in strength, those looking for a solid foundation upon which to build? Would the Father build the foundation of the New Jerusalem with twelve foundations of sand? No. If we stop and deeply consider this, how should this be impacting how we live our lives today—the attitudes, the approaches that we have toward our fellow living stones—those with whom we come in contact?

As we wrap up, one additional general attribute of New Jerusalem that I'd like to leave us with—turn back to Revelation 21 and we will pick this up. We've read the first two verses of the chapter.

Revelation 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*
2) *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.* (NASB)

We briefly reflected on the state of the world at the start of the Millennium—even if we look at the timeline coming into Revelation 21, going back to Revelation 20, what do we see? It's going to be pretty rough. You've got Satan being released, you have rebellion, war, final judgment, the lake of fire—it's not a pretty picture. When all is said and done, and we get to Revelation 21, we see an end state; we see an ultimate goal, an ultimate objective in the life that we are living today.

So what do we see here? And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, screaming towards earth as a flaming fireball, and slamming down in an epic crushing of mankind. Oh, sorry—wrong translation. We see her as a bride. That's the description that's used. In our culture, at a wedding, how is a bride presented? With great care, precision—in the finest, most luxurious gown a woman may ever wear in her lifetime—deliberate, dignified, yet with an air of joy, anticipation, hope and love.

Brethren, as we are preparing for our ultimate destiny—as we are living our lives today, with all the effort, the sacrifice—are we mindful of and practicing our end state? Again, being in service to all mankind, protecting, fighting for what's right, yet being gateways, being avenues to life and safe harbor for those in need. Not that desiring reward for our toil in this life is wrong—absolutely not—but considering eternal life as a tool.

Eternal life is a resource, making us instruments of service to our Father in ways that we can only dream of. We have no concept of what that's going to mean for us. And it's not given to us so that we can gloat or bask in our own glory, but rather it's to share the love that our Father and our Elder Brother have for us. And Jesus Christ, in being the door, in being the chief cornerstone, in offering to us life today, does all this so that in turn, in the future, in the Millennium, beyond the Millennium, we will be ready, and we will desire to say, "Come!"