

## The New Jerusalem Revelation 21:1-6

Built into the very fiber of the human heart is the longing for the perfect place here on earth.

Throughout the ages people have created in their imaginations the picture of the perfect city.

This ideal city into which a little bit of heaven is added is called utopia.

In this utopian existence there is near elimination of as many external forms of evil as possible where greed and crime no longer exist, peaceful relations among all people are established and all live in harmony with their environment.

You can turn to any page of human history at almost any place and find some of the world's greatest thinkers laying out their plans for this grand utopia.

Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher popularized the view of the perfect society in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. which he called Atlantis. His story describes a powerful and advanced kingdom that sank into the ocean in a single day and served as a warning about the dangers of human power, pride and self-centeredness.

Plato's story of this lost paradise has provided material for romantics, politicians, poets and even serious-minded historians for centuries.

An English thinker by the name of Sir Thomas More wrote a book in the 16<sup>th</sup> century about an ideal, imaginary and perfect world.

He was the first person to use the term "utopia."

The Puritans, the first colonists from England to North America, came with dreams of a perfect religious society in the 17<sup>th</sup> century based on the laws of God to assure happiness for everyone in the community.

Though they failed, their search for utopia is part of the American consciousness to this very day.

The idea of a paradise on earth changed forever when Karl Marx wrote his Communist Manifesto.

This is a blueprint for a “workers’ paradise” of freedom, luxury and happiness for everyone.

His theories were the foundation for the Russian Revolution in 1917 which resulted in an estimated 10 million casualties, all in a futile attempt to create a paradise here on earth.

Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Communist countries such as China and North Korea still present a real threat to world peace in our time.

Though people from all centuries of human existence have attempted to build a heaven on earth, no one has ever succeeded.

The goal for earthly happiness springs eternally from the human heart and not even the horrific failures and indescribable sufferings of the past can dampen the enthusiasm for a heaven on earth.

It’s a goal which is always present but never reached.

But there is good news, there is hope: The longing for a perfect city and a perfect existence within the human heart is not unreasonable at all.

It’s possible.

The Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible to be written, is not only a description of the church on earth undergoing persecution because of its testimony to Jesus Christ,

it is also a description and promise of a perfect society.

The human dream of a utopia finds satisfaction and completion in heaven, the New Jerusalem prepared by God.

The peace, harmony and never-ending happiness for which people have yearned and for which they have worked comes true in what John calls the “new heaven and the new earth.”

What people really wanted but no one could bring about, God was able to bring about through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For those who have been faithful to Jesus, God has promised “a new haven and a new earth, a heavenly Jerusalem.”

What makes this holy city so different from anything which humans imagine is that God and God alone

is the creator and the bringer of this new city.

In his vision John sees the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven from God.”

It is a city beyond and above human description and expectation. God does not take the human plans for utopia and rework them. God plans a salvation for us entirely of his own thinking and making. The old existence with all its troubles is replaced by a perfect one.

It will be a complete transformation of all things.

John says that “the first heaven and the first earth had passed way” and “a new heaven and a new earth” are planned where sin, death, sickness and sadness are banished forever.

Jerusalem in the Old Testament represented the fulfillment of Jewish longings.

During the Egyptian slavery, the Israelites looked forward to the Promised Land, the land of freedom, the land of milk and honey. Whether the Israelites lived in Palestine or in a foreign country, their chief goal of worship life was to go up to Jerusalem to participate in the services of the temple.

David in Psalm 122 speaks of his own happiness of worshiping in Jerusalem: “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’ Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.” Though Jerusalem was God’s favored city, her citizens began worshipping other gods and forsaking the LORD who had made them a special people.

Consequently, God permitted the Babylonians to carry them into captivity in the 6th century B.C.

Their longing for Jerusalem is expressed in Psalm 137:

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion... May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.”

Centuries later, when God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, he again singled out Jerusalem for special attention.

In this city God's Son preached the message of salvation and performed miracles to show that God was visiting and redeeming his people. In spite of the many miracles performed, like raising the dead in today's gospel, the people continued to reject their God. In utter desperation Jesus weeps and cries out over this city, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather you children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37, 38). In the Old Testament the temple in Jerusalem was the most holy place set apart for worship, prayer and the presence of God. But in 70 A.D. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the conquering Roman armies in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that not one stone would be left upon another.

The temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed, but we are now the living stones of God's temple.

Peter calls us "living stones" that "are being build into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:15).

As members of the body of Christ, we are part of the new temple. And Paul speaks of us as "God's temple" in which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. 3:16).

In New Testament times God was present with his people in Jesus Christ, but it was a presence limited to Palestine for only a short period of time.

Ever since Jesus returned to the Father after his resurrection, Christians long for his return in glory.

This longing to be with God and Jesus shall be satisfied perfectly in the New Jerusalem.

The doors of Paradise in the Garden of Eden have long been shut, but the memory of the perfect society has been a decisive force

in shaping human destiny.

Peace, harmony, happiness and the absence of evil have been the goal of great thinkers in all times.

Christians have found the real promise of the lasting paradise in Jesus Christ.

This paradise is beyond description.

But its true value does not lie in the indescribable joy that awaits us.

The true value will lie in this: that God whom we know by faith now we shall see face to face with our own eyes.

God will be the total center of our new existence as shown in John's vision:

“Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

This is the most eloquent culmination of the Immanuel theme:

“Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’ (Matthew 1:23b).

Paradise lost

will be paradise regained. Amen.

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