

Text: Rev. 21:24-22:5

Title: The nations of eternity

Time: 12/16/2018 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come to the end of Revelation's prophecy about the future. What follows the passage we are in this morning is the epilogue, or conclusion of the book.

Here we find a glorious new world that awaits the people of God. The glory of that world begins with the God of eternity. He is the great Creator, the Husband of His people, the Keeper of the promises of Scripture, and the Holy One.

Then we see the glory of the Jerusalem of eternity – a holy city, a labeled city, a big city, an adorned city, and God's home.

One last category remains for us in this prophetic description of this future world. This morning we have read about the nations of eternity. Finding them here after the description of the New Jerusalem raises initial questions – who are these nations? How do they get here in this new world?

I believe our answer lies in the fact that they are distinguishable from the New Jerusalem. In our passage we have the city with its residents, and then the kings of the nations of the earth with their subjects. When we saw that the New Jerusalem was a labeled city, that it had the patriarchs on its gates and the apostles on its foundation stones, we concluded that the city was filled with believers from the Israel of the Old Testament, the true Judaism that had anticipated the true Messiah, and believers from the church of the New

Testament, the true Christianity that recognized the crucified and risen Christ for the Savior that He was.

But Scripture tells us of a category of believers that were never a part of Old Testament Israel nor the New Testament church. These are the believers from OT Gentile nations. The passage we read in Isaiah 60 describes a day when the nations of the Old Testament would become both political and spiritual allies of a redeemed Israel. A similar passage is Isa. 19:19-25. Jesus spoke of these resurrected Gentile Old Testament believers in Matt. 12:41-42; Luke 4:24-28; and 11:30-32.

So I would conclude that the nations of this future world are not redeemed Israel nor the redeemed church, but the redeemed from among ancient Gentile nations who repented and believed on the Lord for salvation from their sins.

Another conjecture regarding the identity of these nations of eternity concerns the millennial reign, which is prior to this time. We know that marriage, death, and old age among Israel and the nations of the world during the millennial period are a reality (Ezek. 44:22, Zech. 8:4-5), so that not all millennium believers are resurrected as yet.

It is clear from Matt. 25:31-46 that the judgment of the sheep and the goats happens after Jesus returns and begins His millennial reign. Many understand this judgment to be part of the beginning of the millennium, but if we understand it to be a function the Lord administers as King throughout the millennium culminating in the final rebellion of Gog and Magog, the final separation of sheep and goats, then we can say that mortal believers of the millennial period are resurrection/translated by the resurrection unto life de-

scribed in v. 46. Understood this way, this resurrection also populates the nations of eternity.

Note with me four things we are told about these nations of eternity.

I. The nations of eternity are saved (21:24-27).

Note: If you are using a newer translation of Scripture this morning, your verse 24 lacks the phrase *of them which are saved*. Since the King James Version was translated in 1611, many more Greek manuscripts of the New Testament text have been discovered. The oldest of these and the majority of these lack this phrase, which was in the Greek Bible used by our translators, and that is why newer versions have decided not to include it. Those slight differences between newer translations and the KJV always encourage my heart, because they remind me how amazingly well-preserved our Bible is. We can account for the differences, and they are so very minor that they never require a change in our doctrine.

Application: That is certainly the case here. Whether we use the KJV or a newer translation this morning, we must conclude that the nations of eternity are filled with saved people. They are saved from darkness (v. 24a); they are saved from ignominy and shame (v. 24b); they are saved from being locked out (v. 25a); they are saved from the night (v. 25b); they are saved from national disgrace (v. 26); and all of this is true because they are saved from their sin (v. 27).

Many of the Old Testament prophets pronounced God's judgment against the Gentile nations of their day because they were filled with things that defile, abominations, and

lies. Those nations were filled with that sin because they were comprised of nationals whose hearts were filled with that sin. And yet, like the Ninevites and the Queen of the South and the widow of Zerepath and Naaman of Syria, some were saved from their sins through the ministry of these prophets.

And Who was it that saved them and how did He do it? God saved them, and He did so by providing a Lamb for them. That Lamb is the one who shares the throne of this new world with the Father. God's only Son became the willing sacrifice for the sins of the nations, and He died for your sins too. For that reason, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Most who lived among these nations were not saved. Most today are not saved. Are you? Will you be the exception to the rule and call on the name of the Lord to be saved? Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets . . ." (Matt. 7:13-15).

II. The nations of eternity live (22:1-3a).

Illustration: I went grocery shopping last week, and as I am standing at the checkout counter watching my items get scanned, a sense of amazement came over me at what I had just experienced at Market Basket: amazing variety, amazing quality, amazing selection options within every category of food type. I had double-digit types of packages of bacon to choose from. As I thought of that, I just said to the ladies getting me checked out, "I am amazed every time I go grocery shopping." One lady replied, "You mean how

high the prices are?" I said, "No, I am amazed at how much you can get from all over the world for so little."

Application: I say that to remind us all this morning that we live a very nice life in our time and in our place. We have much for which to be thankful – delicacies, conveniences, luxuries, and technologies never known to mankind are our common everyday experience.

And yet, something is missing. Drug abuse is up; suicide rates are up; hostility on college campuses is up; vitriol in politics is increasing. In spite of the abundance of our existence, it is clear to us that this is not the perfect life.

The nations of eternity live the perfect life. Note with me three characteristics of this perfect life.

(1) It all begins with God's throne (22:1). And notice that there is one throne that is the throne of both God and of the Lamb. Submission to God's authority is where life begins.

(2) The perfect life of eternity includes access to abundant fruitfulness and healing (22:2). It will be the produce of the tree of life that provides the fruitfulness, and its leaves that provide the healing. Ezek. 47:12 mentions the same phenomenon as present during the millennial reign of Christ. We know from the Garden of Eden that sinful Adam and Even had to be barred from the tree of life so that God's pronouncement of death could be fulfilled in them (Gen. 3:22-24).

But what shall nations be healed from? 21:4 already told us that this will be a world without tears – no death, sorrow, crying, or pain. That kind of need for healing comes from the curse, which shall be no more (22:3a). I think the Ezekiel passage may help us understand. That chapter speaks of a

river in Palestine during the millennium that will come from the earthly temple and heal bodies of water. Verse 11 says there will be some exceptions - marshes that will not be healed but remain salt. So it may be that when we read about the healing of the nations by the leaves of the tree of life, we are actually reading about the same kind of environmental healing. It may be that the leaves provide a kind of mulch that can make unproductive areas of land productive again. Maybe even some of those saltwater marshes could become productive farmland with these leaves.

Application: What the perfect life of this future world teaches us today is that our lives will be better the more they look like this. The life that recognizes the authority of God's throne is going to be more perfect than the life that does not. Bowing before God's throne is the source of abundant life. And the life that looks to the Lord for nourishment and healing will never be turned away. We live in a world of material abundance that is missing the perfect life. We can experience many of its blessing in Christ now.

III. The nations of eternity worship (22:3b-4).

Note: Exod. 20:5 says, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." In the LXX the word *serve* here is *latreuo*, the same word for *serve* we have in v. 3b.

Application: The nations of eternity shall be God's servants who worship Him in eternity. If we are to worship as they will someday, we must keep three things at the forefront of our worship: (1) the throne of God and the Lamb (v. 3); (2) the face of the Lamb (v. 4a); and the name of God and the Lamb (v. 4b). Our worship is not about our style of entertainment. It is about God's throne, His face, and His holy name. Only when those things are rightly experienced have

we worshipped the way these nations shall worship someday, as faithful servants of Him, not ourselves.

IV. The nations of eternity reign (22:5).

Application: Back in the garden of Eden, God told man to reign over the earth. He said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Man fell and failed. Instead, Satan occupies that place of authority ruling over the earth today. But not for long. God saves the nations of eternity; He gives them life; He accepts their worship; and He causes them to reign after all forever and ever. This is what our God has planned. Are you looking forward to your part in all of this?

Conclusion: As I was preparing this message, I found helpful a book that my Mom gave me about Bible prophecy called *Heaven*. As I opened the book, some loose pages fell out of the back of it that were covered with my mom's handwriting on front and back. They were notes that she had taken from the book about what this future is going to be like. The topics she had studied were time in heaven, daily life in heaven, mental activities in heaven, various other activities in heaven, the excitement of heaven, and achievement potential that awaits us in heaven.

I wept as I thought of how wonderful it is that Mom is experiencing today what she could only read about in a book years ago.

She applied what she had learned about heaven to her own heart with a verse that she jotted down in her notes. It was Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days that we may

apply our hearts unto wisdom." I think what my Mom understood was that we are not yet in eternity, but we need to make sure every moment of every day counts for eternity. Have you numbered your days? How many did you count? Do you see that their total is a finite number that will come to an end? Is your number a range that begins with 1 (1-x)? Are you ready in Christ for the eternity that is coming after them? To apply your heart unto wisdom is to be able to answer, "Yes, I am ready, for Christ has died for my sin."

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching