**Glorified**

Revelation 21

Remember getting a ***Gold Star*** on an assignment in school? Seeing that ***100% A+*** on the top of your spelling sheet in bright red? Some of you are shaking your heads, saying, we got the other thing marked down in red. Well, think about how it felt for your sister who got the gold star or your friend who always got the 100% A+ and imagine that was you.

100% meant PERFECT, right? Some of you came to really **dislike getting a 97** because you considered even that a blemish on your record. In the end, it’s all relative, right? Your good grade was especially good because of the kid who did not do as well. Some of you were **curve wreckers**, and you’re smiling inside because you took pride in it. Everyone else in class was moaning and groaning with their 60s and 70s and the teacher was all, “There will not be a curve on the test because two people got 97s.” And you were all smug and self-satisfied as you quietly put your test into your folder to show Mom later. “Yes, that’s one for the fridge, Honey.”

Oh, we long for the simplicity of a spelling test or math test, don’t we? As adults we have to live with so much gray area. And **nothing is ever really PERFECT**, is it? We call things perfect, but are they - really?

* Your kids ***set the table*** and when they’re done you say, “Perfect! Thanks”
* You hunt for a ***birthday present*** and when your friend opens it they say, “Oh, it’s perfect!”
* You send in an assignment for work and your boss replies back with a two word email: “Perfect! Thanks!”
* Your husband ***folds the laundry*** and when that process is done you say, “Perfect!” But then you wait until he’s gone and do it over again.

We call things perfect, but we know they aren’t. It’s a friendly thing to say, so we say it. But we all know that even our best efforts fall way short of perfection. One more example, and this one will sting.

You get all dressed up for a wedding. You actually take a full shower, not the partial one you usually do. You take some time on your hair. You brush your teeth. Then you pull out **your good suit** - the one you only wear for weddings. Only then do you realize that those pants don’t fit at all - not even close. How long has it been? A few years, apparently. Oh well. Back to the old tried and true black funeral suit. Gotta get the Jos. A Bank one tailored for next time. (I still haven’t done that yet, I just now realize.)

Your wife is kind so she looks at you and says, ***“You look perfect.”***

You look back at her and agree - you do look pretty good for 45. Then you quickly add that she is even more perfect. “You were perfect last year - but somehow you’ve improved on perfection!” Young guys, there is a marriage tip for you - every year you are married, even year 50, 60, 67 - she is more beautiful and somehow, miraculously, more perfect. You can’t just say it, you have to sell it.

Now, let’s take this in a theological direction. **We are the BRIDE OF CHRIST**. The whole church, all believers from all over the world and throughout all of history make up the One Bride of the Lord Jesus. You know Jesus loves you. You know that you will be with Jesus forever. But ***listen to how Jesus looks at you***, how He sees you, according to Hebrews 10.

**How Jesus Sees His Bride:**

“By a single offering he has made perfect for all time those who are being sanctified.” Hebrews 10:14

At the moment that you called on Jesus to forgive your sins and save you, ***He covered you with His righteousness***. He took your filthy, wretched sin-stained clothes upon Himself and wrapped His pure white robe of righteousness around you. That’s what it means to be JUSTIFIED - declared righteous and holy before God. This verse says you have been made perfect for all time. Past tense. Completed action. Done. Finished. That’s how powerful the one sacrifice of Jesus is - it covers everything. Jesus paid it all.

He has already made us perfect, yet we continue to be sanctified - which is also a work He is doing! Here is how Paul says it in Romans 8.

**How Jesus Sees His Bride:**

“Those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Romans 8:31

At the moment of saving faith you are **JUSTIFIED**. Throughout life you are being **SANCTIFIED**, made more and more holy. And when you die or when Jesus comes back you will be **GLORIFIED**. This process is so certain Paul can present it here in Romans 8 as an already completed fact. Jesus is applying His perfect righteousness to us - and it’s ***a three step process***. Think of it in terms of three levels of freedom:

| **Salvation** | **Freedom from...** |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Justification | The Penalty for sin |
| 1. Sanctification | The Power of sin |
| 1. Glorification | The **Presence** of sin |

I like to think of **the Gospel in 3 Dimensions**. You can see it’s not just a line that you cross so you are saved. It’s wider than that - it’s also a relationship you enter that brings power, life, purpose and freedom. But it’s higher and deeper even than that - because the good news of salvation extends to eternity when we will be glorified - when we will finally see Jesus face to face and when we see Him, “we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Today we are going to study and rejoice in the doctrine of **GLORIFICATION**. God gave the apostle John a detailed vision of the Bride of Christ in Revelation 21. Let’s walk through the details of this passage and take time to marvel at the glory that will be revealed in us!

We talk about things being “Perfect” now but we know that nothing is actually perfect. But when Jesus comes back for us, in that moment we will be truly, really, and permanently perfect. We will be GLORIFIED. ***The righteousness Jesus has already given us credit for will become REAL in us*** - it will become our actual experience when the last traces of sin are purged from us and from our world and we step into the joys of eternal life with our Lord and our God! Revelation 21 shows us the **three mind-blowing realities** of our glorification. Here is the first.

**God’s People Perfected:**

1. Remaining sin finally **Removed**

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” Rev. 21:1

***Through the tribulation***, especially with the sounding of the seven trumpets and the pouring of the seven bowls, ***the world is UNMADE***. Everything gets destroyed in the fiery wrath of God. Everything has to be destroyed because it was all under the curse - it was all tainted, corrupted by sin. Finally, after the Great Tribulation and after the 1,000 years and the final defeat of satan, that purging of sin is done to the point that heaven and earth “passed away.”

**The sea being no more** doesn’t mean there won’t be water or beaches in eternity - there certainly will be. The sea was ***the symbol of chaos, evil and destruction*** in ancient times. Remember in the creation account how the Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the surface of the deep even before oceans existed? That line in Genesis 1 is not meant to be chronological but theological. Even before the sea existed, the Spirit of the Living God was hovering over it. And when history ends, that hand of God will bring to an end all the evil, suffering and death that the sea represented.

Why was **the calming of the storm** so terrifying to the disciples? They saw Jesus heal people, drive out demons, even raise the dead. But calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee - that was a manifestation of the power of Jesus even over the most powerful untamable forces in the world. Only the hand of God Himself could stop a storm with a word of command. The disciples said, ***“Who is this that the wind and the waves obey him?”*** because they were begining to realize he was not just a great human Rabbi - He was God in the flesh - God Himself walking among them.

1. Remaining sin finally **Removed**

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more… for the former things have passed away.” Rev. 21:4

The former things include everything on earth and everything INSIDE OF US. The sadness of pain and suffering and death but also the sadness of sin and guilt and shame.

There are three conditions of people related to sin.

* Non-believers are SLAVES to sin. ***Sin REIGNS over non-Christians.*** They are under both its penalty and power.
* Believers are free from the penalty and power of sin. But ***sin still REMAINS in our flesh*** - those old patterns of thinking and acting that we must continually put off as we learn to put on our new nature in Christ. “Sin is no longer your master, but it is still your enemy” (Colin Smith).
* But for eternity even that remaining sin will be removed. The glorified Christian is free from the penalty, power and even the PRESENCE of sin.

Someone asked **Joni Eareckson Tada** what she most looked forward to about heaven. Joni has been a quadripalegic since she was 16 - so for many decades now. I expect the one asking assumed she would say, “Sure, a new body will be a nice fringe benefit.” But then she immediately went on:

“I’m looking forward to a new heart; a heart free from manipulating others... a heart free from fudging the truth; a heart free from hogging the spotlight… a heart free from caving into fear or anxiety about the future. I can’t wait to have a heart free from sin.”

Joni Eareckson Tada

(https://www.preachintoday.com/illustrations/2020/august/what-joni-eareckson-tada-is-really-looking-forward-to.html)

Brother, sister - ***imagine that glorious day!*** Yes, we will have perfectly healthy young bodies that can run and jump and slam dunk and climb mountains and whatever else - but the main upgrade as we enter eternity will be this single reality: we will finally be free from every last trace of remaining sin.

***That sin you have to fight every single day*** - those temptations you have to actively resist - those desires that still linger in you - that selfishness, that pride, that impatience, that anger, that greed, that laziness, that self-indulgence… all of it - in an instant - will be gone. You will be FREE.

We can’t even really imagine what that kind of **PERFECTION** would feel like. To have only desires for worship, only impulses to gratitude, undiluted, unpolluted joy and devotion. Look at verse 2 - this is our future! This is our eternity!

1. Remaining sin finally **Removed**

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem… prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Revelation 21:2

John sees the bride as an enormous, radiant city descending from heaven, resplendent in majesty. Go down to verse 11:

1. Remaining sin finally **Removed**

“The holy city Jerusalem… having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” Revelation 21:11

Clear as crystal. Not a single blemish or stain. Blinding in beauty. How? Because we will **HAVE the GLORY OF GOD**. Right now we have CREDIT for the righteousness of Jesus, and we HOUSE the glory of God in the Holy Spirit. Then we will HAVE God’s glory - it will infuse every part of us and shine through us without any obstruction.

Sin will be fully and finally removed from our hearts and lives - and also from the whole world.

1. Remaining sin finally **Removed**

* Along with all evil, suffering, sadness and death

“Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Rev. 21:4

Remember back in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned - remember ***where the curse of God fell***. First it fell on the serpent. Then when God turned to Adam we expected the curse to fall on him, but instead God redirected the curse to the GROUND. Sin has been passed on from parents to children since Adam and Eve. But the curse of sin has also spread to every corner of our world, causing it to groan under the brokenness, waiting for its redemption and healing, just as we do.

All of those former things connected to this cursed, broken world, will be healed in the new heaven and earth. All evil will be finally purged away - including all people who have done evil and refused to repent and call on Jesus. That’s why the final judgment is necessary before the creation of the new heaven and earth.

That’s the first wonderful reality of God’s people PERFECTED as we enter eternity - remaining sin removed from us and our world. Here is the second reality.

1. **Righteousness** forever realized

“And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” Rev. 21:5

Right now **the Christian has righteousness as a CREDIT.** That’s what it means to be JUSTIFIED - you are given credit for the perfection of Jesus. It’s a judicial term referring to the final verdict God will render for you on judgment day. We have that verdict in advance - not guilty but justified, RIGHTEOUS!

Right now it’s a credit applied to us - but when we enter eternity it will be our REALITY - the righteousness of Jesus will truly and fully and eternally be ours. This is what all the **jewels and gold** represent - perfect, complete holiness and purity.

Right now we see Jesus through a dark window and at best we provide a dim reflection of His glory. But when we see Jesus face to face 1 John 3 says “we will BE LIKE HIM,” just because we see Him as He is. That dim reflection will become a blinding radiance of the shekinah glory of God! Look again at vese 11.

1. **Righteousness** forever realized - **Glory**

“The holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ***having the glory of God***.” Rev. 21:10-11

Right now we have the righteousness of Jesus by faith. Then we will have it in reality - in our full and constant experience. ***It will be REALIZED in us.***

Think how shocking this must have been to Jewish believers 2,000 years ago. Everything in their religious culture was about keeping sinful people AWAY from the holy presence of God. First the tabernacle, then the temple were all about **DISTANCE**, separation. The closer you got to God’s actual presence the fewer people were allowed to go there.

* Gentiles were not allowed in the temple courts at all. Signs were all over the outer walls threatening death to any gentile who crossed into the temple area.
* Jewish women could come into the temple area but just to the outer court.
* Jewish men could come a little further, to the inner court.
* But then only priests could minister around the altar and in the holy place of the temple where the show bread was, and the altar of incense and the lampstand.
* And only the high priest could go through the veil to the MOST HOLY PLACE - and even that one man could only go in one time each year, on the Day of Atonement.

The whole system was designed to illustrate **the awesome holiness of God** and the blood sacrifices that were necessary to approach Him at all. Look at this detail in verse 16.

1. **Righteousness** forever realized - **Glory**

“He measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.” Rev. 21:16

The new Jerusalem is an enormous CUBE. 12,000 stadia is a massive size - 1,500 miles. It was the length of the entire Roman Empire in the days of the early church. John sees the Holy City as the size of the whole Empire, CUBED.

Why a cube? ***The holy of holies in the temple was a perfect cube.*** The temple was a rectangle, but behind the veil, the most holy place was totally symmetrical and that is where the glory of God dwelt.

Do you see the point? **We are the most holy place**. The Church is the holy of holies. For the endless ages of eternity we will not only HOUSE the glory of God, ***we will HAVE the glory of God in us*** and shining through us. Look again at verse 11.

1. **Righteousness** forever realized - **Glory**

“Having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” Rev. 21:11

Right now we can only glimpse the glory of God in the face of Christ. Since we can barely glimpse that glory, people can only see in us the dimmest reflection of His glory. But when God makes all things new **we will be transformed** - our lowly earthly bodies will be clothed with immortality and we will be changed, at the last trumpet, in the twinkling of an eye - we will be GLORIFIED. The righteousness, holiness and purity of Jesus will be perfectly REALIZED in us.

* We will not just TRY to be holy - we will BE Holy.
* We will not just TRY to be good - we will BE good.
* We will not just TRY to do what is right - we will BE righteous - and forever unable to do anything wrong.

***The specific jewels*** mentioned here give scholars fits trying to match them with the High Priest’s breastpiece - what’s clear about the jewels is that they are precious, beautiful and radiant. Jasper is the main one mentioned, which was known as the most precious and rare of jewels in ancient times. It was like an opal - not a clear jewel. So being a JASPER, clear as crystal, was something no one had ever seen or imagined. To us we would picture the largest, most dazzlingly perfect diamond - carat, cut, clarity all off the charts flawless.

Hear this brother, sister - that is YOU John is describing. That is me. That is US together - GLORIOUS. “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the GLORY to be revealed in us.” “Those he called he also justified and those he justified he also GLORIFIED.” “We will be changed!” We will be transformed. We will be LIKE JESUS when we see Him face to face. Glorious. But that’s not all! Part of the beauty of the bride of Christ is the UNITY that will be realized in us.

1. **Righteousness** forever realized - **Unity**

“On the gates the names of the twelve tribes… and the wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them were the names of the twelve apostles.” Rev. 21:12,14

The holy city is **12,000 stadia** wide and long and high. That’s roughly 1,500 miles in each direction - which is a ridiculously huge city. In the days John was writing it was the length of the entire Roman Empire. Today it’s the distance from here to the tip of Maine or the far side of Texas.

But the distance in miles is not the point. 12,000 stadia is **12 times 1,000**. 12 was the number of the children of Abraham, ***the patriarchs***. 12 was the number of ***apostles***, in the formation of the church as the new people of God. 12 is the number of God’s people - and notice that there are 12 gates - one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel; and there are 12 foundations - one for each of the 12 apostles. This is what we see around the throne of God in Revelation - ***not 12 elders, but 24*** - merging the patriarchs and apostles in the eternal people of God. How many are sealed from the 12 tribes of Israel in Revelation 7? **144,000** is 12 times 12 times 1,000 - the number of total completion that probably represents all believers from all times, both from Israel and from the Gentile mission.

Do you see the picture here with the giant cubic city? ***Jews and Gentiles are perfectly and eternally united!*** Israel and the Church - one people for all time! The dividing wall of hostility that separated Jews from Gentiles, Samaritans and everyone else was demolished by the blood of Jesus. But division and hositilty, sadly, still remain - as part of the remaining sin in our rebellious broken world.

But as we enter eternity and God makes all things new, one expression of that will be the perfect unity among God’s people. There will be **no divisions** over

* ***Ethnic background*** or cultural identity - we will be ONE
* Not divisions over ***financial status*** - rich and poor, slave and free will be ONE
* ***Gender distinctions*** will be gone - male and female will be ONE

There will be ***no denominations***, no separation between Catholic and protestant, Baptist and Prebyterian, charismatic and non-charismatic - all divisions will be removed, all conflict purged when sin is removed from us. In place of conflict and division there will be love, overflowing, unending love for one another!

Do you feel the significance of this truth? **We will be PERFECTED** in righteousness, glory and unity! What is true of Jesus will not just be applied to us, it will be INFUSED into all that we are. We will BE LIKE JESUS in reality. His perfection will be ours.

***Love, joy, peace, patience***, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Every perfection of Christ will be yours and mine. We will not have to work at being loving and patient and joyful and grateful - we just will be.

This is what it means to be **glorified**. All sin will be removed from us and the world. Full righteousness will be realized in us and one more reality of the glorified people of God. The one that makes the other two possible:

1. Relationship with God fully **Restored**

“The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people.” Rev. 21:3

The main thing that was **broken in the fall of man** was relationship with God. When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden they were separated from the peace and love and harmonious relationship they had enjoyed with God before sin severed that connection.

Adam and Eve originally ***dwelled with God.*** The walked with Him. He lived with them - they were together. They were naked and felt no shame. Shame did not exist because sin had not come in. Guilt was not a part of life. There was nothing to separate Adam from Eve or either of them from God. They were one.

But then came **the rebellion**. The fall. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden and God was forced to withdraw His dwelling place from earth to heaven. For all of history people have suffered with this separation, and God has progressively worked from His end to address it. First in Abraham and the promise. Then in Moses and the Law. Then in David and the kingdom. Ultimately in Jesus and the cross.

***All of God’s work in salvation history has been His initiative*** to reach out to sinful, rebellious people who start far from Him and run farther. But God has never let up. He has never let us go. The Bible is the story of God’s relentless pursuit of sinful people.

And that’s **my story** - and it’s your story too. None of us went seeking after God. If He had not come chasing after us, none of us would be saved. BUT GOD.

And here in Revelation 21 we see **how this great love story ends** - it ends with love. It ends with unity. It really does end with, “And they all lived happily ever after - through the endless ages of eternity.” The Prince and His Bride are united, have the greatest wedding celebration, beyond anything any of us can imagine, have a honeymoon called the Millennium (we can hope that something called the Millennium Falcon will be a wedding gift). And then eternity will begin in the new heaven and new earth where we will dwell with God forever.

Two pictures of the blessing that will be ours forever with God.

1. Relationship with God fully **Restored**

* Overflowing **Joy**

“To the thirsty I will give from the spring of ***the water of life***.” Rev. 21:6

Jesus has given us springs of living water that flow from inside us - that’s the person of the Holy Spirit who comes to live in us at the moment of salvation. But our experience of the Holy Spirit is just a seal, just a deposit, just a down payment on the actual reality when we dwell with God face to face.

***Now we sip the water of life. Then we will swim in it.***

Now we experience God from a distance. Then He will hold us in His arms.

Now we muddy the water with our remaining sin, then we will be totally free from sin so the water of God’s presence and life will stay clear even with us in it!

Think about what **WATER represents**. Without water, obviously, you would die. Without enough water, you would struggle and get sick. Without clean water, you would definitely get sick. Water is life to the human body.

***We are so thirsty*** in this broken and barren world. Even the things that give us the most happiness - like family and meaningful work and service to others - cannot satisfy our deepest desires for long.

* Every relationship disappoints us.
* Every task and every job wears us out as much as it is rewarding.
* Every act of service falls short of providing what people most need.

But when we are finally with the Lord directly, our thirst will finally be quenched. Our longings for love and relationship will finally be satisfied. Our desire for meaning and purpose and fulfillment will finally be realized.

Not just the water of life - but the SPRING of the water of life - we are going directly to the source of love, joy, peace, fulfillment - the source of life itself. This will be joy overflowing. This will be happiness beyond anything we have ever experienced or could even imagine. And still there’s more good news.

1. Relationship with God fully **Restored**

* Unending **Love**

“I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” Rev. 21:22

What a beautiful picture! The city is the temple - a perfect cube to represent the Holy of Holies. And God Himself is the temple. Notice it’s not just GOD - it is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. It is Father and Son - we will enter the eternal love that has always existed between God the Father and God the Son. That will be our home, forever. We won’t need to GO TO a temple - because God will be there, available anywhere, present with us - forever.

Unending love. That is a description of the nature of God. He IS unending love. The other picture is LIGHT.

1. Relationship with God fully **Restored**

* Unending **Love**

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” Rev. 21:23

When history began God simply said, “Let there be light.” There was no sun or moon or even a single star in the heavens - so God Himself provided that original light for days one, two and three. Eternity will bring us back to that reality - we won’t need the sun our planet has depended on for thousands of years. God will be our center of gravity. God will be our source of light. God will be our giver of life and nourishment, our provider of warmth and security. God will be EVERYTHING we need.

This is the vision John saw of God’s people PERFECTED.

God’s People **Perfected:**

1. Remaining sin finally **Removed**
2. **Righteousness** forever Realized
3. Relationship with God fully **Restored**

Brother, sister - we will be GLORIFIED. Listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 15 as we close.

“So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” 1 Cor. 15:42-43

“Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven… We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” 1 Cor. 15:49,51

“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” 1 Cor. 15:52-53

“Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” 1 Cor. 15:54-56

“But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 15:56

Let’s pray.