

# The City that Is to Come

By Bob Vincent

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 13:14; Galatians 4:21-31; Revelation 21:9, 10

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Starting at verse seven.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.<sup>1</sup>

May we pray?

*Lord, you once spoke years ago through a false prophet's donkey. Lord, if you could speak through Balaam's ass, then you can speak through mortal, weak, frail, sinful man. Our confidence, Lord, to hear the Word of God is entirely in you and not at all on us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill me so full of Jesus that what comes out of my mouth, Lord, would be through your Holy Spirit, the very words of God rooted solely in Scripture, applied by your Spirit and heard from the very voice of Jesus himself. Get me out of the way, Lord, and lift up Jesus in this place. Please come, Holy Spirit. I pray, Lord, for such an outpouring of your Holy Spirit in this place that every single heart here would be melted, that you would give us a true vision of life as it is and life as it shall be and that in that true vision we would all be humbled, we would all be melted and we would find everything that keeps us from a full communion with you and a full enjoyment of you in the here and now would be melted away. Lord, hear our prayer because we come to you in the name of him who taught us when to pray to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead*

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:7-14 (All Scripture references are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

*us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

The passage of Scripture, as we continue in this section of Hebrews is verse 14. “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”<sup>2</sup>

In its contact this is about the city of Jerusalem. We know that from the preceding verse where he says, “So Jesus,” in verses 12 and 13, “So Jesus also suffered outside the city,”<sup>3</sup> outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem. And we are admonished to go outside to him.

It is an interesting decade, the time in which this epistle is written. It is, undoubtedly in the 60s of the first century. The 60s were a very momentous time. In that decade, of course, you know, that the city of Rome experienced a great burning and the emperor Nero blamed it on Christians and a great persecution of Christians and of Jews broke out in the city of Rome. Terrible persecution.

But things were happening in the city of Jerusalem as well. Things were coming to a head. James the Just, the half brother of Jesus, was martyred in the year 62 AD for the faith. And that which was kind of loosely tolerated within Judaism became completely severed from Judaism in that decade of the 60s so that Christianity, instead of being seen as a somewhat heretical offshoot of Judaism now becomes a distinctive force, distinct from Judaism.

And it is also, of course, in this decade that war finally breaks out between the Jewish people and the Romans in the year 66 AD. Just to give you the highlight of that war: War breaks out. The Jewish people had had enough of Roman persecution, of the iron hand of Rome, of its intolerance, of its trying to force its idolatry on the Jewish people over again, for example, in 49 AD, the emperor Little Boots—Caligula—Gaius is his name, tried to have a statue of himself placed in the temple of God in the city of Jerusalem. And it was only the fact that he had been assassinated by his own Praetorian Guard that kept that from taking place.

Those things broke out into a full fledged war in the year 66 AD and wave after wave of the armies of the Jewish people were defeated by the Roman legions until finally the city of Jerusalem itself was surrounded by armies in that same year, 66.

Then for some strange reason the city of Jerusalem, being completely surrounded by foreign armies, those foreign armies retreated. It was amazing because the city was ready to fall. Yet Cestius Gallus in the year 66 orders a retreat of the Roman armies. This had two effects: The Jewish Christians who were in the city remembered a prophecy of Jesus—what we call the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13 and Luke 21—and they remembered the admonition of Jesus, “When you see the city surrounded with armies,” Luke 21, “When you see the abomination prophesied by Daniel the prophet,” the desolating abomination which is understood as the Roman armies with their idolatrous insignia,

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 13:14

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:12

“then let him who is on the housetop not go down to get anything out of his house.” In other words, leap from rooftop to rooftop and get out of the city. “If you are out in the field don’t go back to get anything because severe trouble is coming on the city. Let those who are in the city flee.”<sup>4</sup>

And they did. And so we know from history that the Jewish believers in Jesus fled the city at the time when Cestius Gallus ordered the retreat in 66.

Well, the other thing that happened was that the people who were in the city, the Jewish people who were not Christians became emboldened by this. “Look at this. God is coming to our rescue. God will deliver us from the Romans.” And so their effort to resist the Romans increased dramatically. And so for four years war increased.

At a point in time the Roman legions once again surround the city of Jerusalem and the terrible things that happened in that siege were foretold in the book of Leviticus in Leviticus chapter 26 and in Deuteronomy chapter 28. Among the other things that would happen, people would be so reduced by starvation that they would actually kill and eat their own children. Those things were imprecations spelled out in literal, graphic, gory detail by Moses in Leviticus 26 and repeated in the second giving of the law in Deuteronomy 28. And that is what happened.

It was terrible persecution. And so, finally, the city fell in the year 70 AD and it was trampled under the foot of the Gentiles as Jesus prophesied. The Jewish people would then go into exile into all the world and the city would be trodden under the foot of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles would come to an end.

One wonders—not at the year 48, 1948 AD, but after the 67 war and then after the Yom Kippur War—one wonders if that is not the point of termination of Jesus’ prophecy that the Jewish people are not just back in that land, but in the city itself.

However, the most critical part of the city is not yet in Jewish hands and that is the temple mount which is held very much by the Muslim people who regard it as the third holiest shrine in Islam after only that of the Kaaba in Mecca and Medina where Mohammed fled till he could raise an army and go back and butcher the people of Mecca. And Jerusalem the third place where, on a flying horse, Mohammed is said to have gone. And on the dome...where the dome of the rock is the hoof print of his horse, Arabic for his horse’ name is “Lightning.” But in the Arabic translation of that—which I don’t know what the Arabic word for lightning is.

So Jerusalem is a city that hardly lives up to its name. It was the city of the Jebusites. And its name originally is *Jebus Salem* or *Jebus Shalom*, the city of peace of the Jebusites. But Jerusalem has hardly been a city of peace.

And look at it today. Three groups of people contest over that city: the Muslims, the Jewish people and various groups of Christians who attribute some kind of resident grace to

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<sup>4</sup> See Luke 21:20-21

the material objects of the city, not really *Jebus Shalom*, not really a city of peace, but of war.

It is on the threshold of the destruction of the city that the writer of Hebrews writes to these believers in Jesus who are probably Jewish people by their ethnicity but followers of Jesus. And he tells them not to worry if they are excluded from the way of worship spelled out in the Old Testament—not to worry if they are having to leave their city.

Why not worry if you have to leave the city of Jerusalem he says in this verse in Hebrews 13? He says in verse 14—page 1879—“Here we do not have an enduring city.”<sup>5</sup>

You know, the disciples found it so hard that the city of Jerusalem—as magnificent as it was—would not endure forever. Turn with me, if you will, to Matthew chapter 24—page 1538. “Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.”<sup>6</sup> And as he walked away across the Kidron Valley and began to ascend the Mount of Olives he was able to look down on the city with his disciples.

In the year 2000 I was able to stand on that same Mount of Olives and look at the city of Jerusalem below, an inspiring sight, a breathtaking view. And the disciples looked at it, one of the great wonders of the world, the temple, the second temple—the one that was rebuilt after its destruction on the ninth day of Av in the year 586 BC by the Babylonian armies—had been rebuilt and within exactly 70 years, in the year 516 BC that temple is dedicated to the Lord.

But that temple went through a number of beautifications and remodelings, and so in the year 19 BC the Edomite, Jewish ruler, Herod the Great began a massive remodeling program of the temple that had been built in 516, the second temple. And it became one of the most magnificent buildings in the entire world.

And so as Jesus and his disciples begin to ascend the Mount of Olives and look back on the city of Jerusalem, and they see the temple with its beautiful white stones, with its gold everywhere, with its magnificence, they begin to point out to Jesus, “Look at this temple. Look at this city. Surely you are not talking about them.”

And that takes us back to the context in chapter 23. Why did Jesus’ disciples point out the city to him? Why did they point out the temple to him there on page 1538? He says in verse 37, Matthew 23:37, Jesus says:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your

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<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 13:14

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 24:1

house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

That is why when Jesus left the temple in verse one of chapter 24 and was walking away his disciples began to point out these buildings to him. He has just said of the city itself and particularly of the temple, “Your house has left you desolate. It is a windswept house.”

Jesus is echoing the words of Ezekiel the prophet because Ezekiel the prophet foretold the time back in the sixth century before Christ when the Holy Spirit of God, the shekinah glory of God would depart from the temple. Ezekiel saw it occur. The shekinah glory of God lifted up from above the ark of the covenant went out from the holy of holies, through the holy place, departed from the temple grounds, departed from the city itself. The very presence of God, his glory left the city and left the temple. Ezekiel saw it. He foretold it and that is exactly what happened. And that is why the Babylonians were successful in destroying the city. The Babylonians were successful in destroying the city of Jerusalem.

And specifically on the ninth day of the Jewish month Av in the year 586, they were able to destroy the temple because the glory of God had left the temple, and it was now only a windswept house. It was left desolate.

And Jesus is saying, speaking and remembering the words of Daniel the prophet, for Daniel the prophet foretold that the temple would be rebuilt only to be destroyed again.

And so Jesus looked at the second temple in all of its magnificence and he says, echoing Ezekiel’s words, “The temple has become a windswept house. Your house has left you desolate.”

And so the disciples are saying, in effect, to Jesus, “Do you mean to tell us that it is now that this prophecy is going to be fulfilled, that the second temple is going to be destroyed just as the first temple was going to be destroyed? How can you say that, Lord? Look at these buildings. Look at how strong the city of Jerusalem is. Look at its magnificence. This city can withstand the siege for years. We have our own water supply. We have our own food supply. Look at this magnificent house of God. It is the very temple of God. God won’t allow it to be destroyed.”

Jesus says, “It is a windswept house.” He is saying the shekinah glory of God has left the house. It is going to be destroyed. And he goes on to say to them in verse two of Matthew 24, “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”<sup>8</sup> And we know that the words of Jesus literally and exactly and absolutely came to pass.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 23:37-39

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 24:2

When we go to the city of Jerusalem today, as I have been, and we go to the wailing wall, as I have gone to that wall and touched that wall and prayed at that wall, I am not touching the temple. It is just the foundation stones of the temple. The temple itself was knocked down, absolutely every block. It was amazing how the Romans did it.

You see, in order to keep the city clean and pure with all of the shedding of blood they had aqueducts bringing water into the temple, into the temple itself. And what the Romans were able to do in order to destroy the city was to get the gigantic stones of the temple incredibly hot and then release this dam of water. And as those burning hot stones, these gigantic, multi-ton stones suddenly were hit by the cold water the stones blew apart like dynamite, and that is what happened to the temple. It was as if the Roman army dynamited the city.

And the day that the temple of God was destroyed in the Jewish calendar was the ninth day of Av, the exact same day, of the exact same month that the first temple was destroyed in the year 586 BC. An odd coincidence? Not at all.

According to the Talmud it was the ninth day of Av that the spies who, in the year 1445 BC, go into the Promised Land to spy it out come back and give the people a bad report and say, “You know, it is a land flowing with milk and honey, but we are too weak to take this land. We are like grasshoppers in their sight. The people of the land are giants.”<sup>9</sup> And they spread an evil report, and they spread unbelief by the words of their speaking. The people disbelieve, and it is the ninth day of Av. And, according to the Talmud, it is a curse day. It is a day when great calamity comes.

And so, strangely, on the ninth day of Av in the year 586 BC the first temple is destroyed, and on the ninth day of Av in the year 70 AD the temple is destroyed again.

But the writer of Hebrews is admonishing these Jewish believers, “Don’t worry about that. It is not that city that is important. Here on earth we don’t have a continuing city. We seek a better city,”<sup>10</sup> he says.

Turn with me, if you will, to Galatians chapter four, Galatians chapter four—page 1814—Galatians chapter four—page 1814—starting at verse 24. Well, really, pick it up in context verse 21.

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, [Galatians 4:21]are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.<sup>11</sup>

Verse 24:

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<sup>9</sup> See Numbers 13:27-33

<sup>10</sup> See Hebrews 13:14

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 4:21-23

These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.<sup>12</sup>

This is an amazing statement that the rabbi, Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as Paul the apostle would make. He is saying in his day—because when he wrote Galatians the city had yet to be destroyed, the temple had yet to be destroyed by the Romans—he could look at the present day city of Jerusalem in his day and he could say, “Looking at the history of God’s people, the present day city of Jerusalem corresponds to Mount Sinai, and the giving of the law, corresponds, not to Sarah and her child Isaac, but corresponds to the Egyptian slave woman, Hagar and her child Ishmael.”

Do you see what he is saying? It is an amazing thing. He is saying that rather than the people who were living in the earthly city of Jerusalem at the time that he wrote the epistle to the Galatians about midway in the first century, rather than their being the people who could expect God’s deliverance—then they’re being the people who could expect God’s favor—then they’re being the ones who could expect that God would rescue them and that they could live their lives under his blessing—he is saying they are under a curse. Why? Because you are under a curse. Everyone who believes that he can approach God by his own efforts is under a curse. Your own efforts will only damn you to hell. Those who trust in themselves that they are good, that they are righteous, that they are better than others will find on the Day of Judgment, they are no better than others, because by the works of the law no flesh will be declared righteous in God’s eyes.<sup>13</sup>

And look, again, at what Saint Paul is saying. He is saying that the present city of Jerusalem, the city that was existing at this time mid point of the first century, he is saying that that city is in slavery with her children. Look at, again, at this thing. He says in verse 24, “These things may be taken figuratively.”<sup>14</sup> He is not denying that they are literally true. They are literally true. Abraham the old man actually did produce a child in his old age by an Egyptian slave by the name of Hagar and that child’s name is Ishmael. And God did and, excuse me, Abraham literally did when he was 99 years old, by his own beloved wife Sarah, produce a child who was born when he was 100 and Sarah was 90. And that child was Isaac. He is not denying those things literally happened. He is simply saying that through the Holy Spirit he has an infallible interpretation of the application of this truth and his infallible interpretation of the application of this truth is to say in verse 24,

These things may be taken figuratively, [Galatians 4:24] for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 4:24-25

<sup>13</sup> See Galatians 2:16

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 4:24

Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi Saul of Tarsus is saying of his own race, they are Arabs. Do you understand what he is saying? Let it sink in. Rabbi Saul of Tarsus is saying of his own Jewish people, of his own race, "They are Arabs. They are the children of Ishmael."

You read it again. Verse 25. "Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children."<sup>16</sup> Do you see that? Saul is saying, Saul of Tarsus, the rabbi, is saying that he once was an Arab, but he has now become a Jew. Let it sink into you for a moment. He once was an Arab, but now he has become a true child of Abraham. What kind of child of Abraham? He was a literal, physical descendant of Abraham at one time. That is how he was born. When he was circumcised on the eighth day this Benjamite was a literal, physical descendant of Abraham, but so is Ishmael, so are Arab people.

But he is saying that when he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, when the Lord Jesus sent Ananias to preach the gospel to him and to baptize him, not only did he recover his eyesight physically, but he gained spiritual vision for the first time in his life and he was transformed from being a natural descendant of Abraham, an Arab, into being a true Jew whose circumcision is not merely outward in his body, but in his heart.

Let's read further what he says. Verse 26, Galatians 4:26. "But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother."<sup>17</sup> Who is he writing to in Galatians by the way? He is writing to a bunch of Turks. Galatia is in modern day Turkey. He is writing to Gentile and Jewish Christians in Galatia, the Romans province of Galatia, modern day Turkey. And he is saying to them....what is he saying to them?

He is saying, "You and I are brothers. You and I are one."

But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labour pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."<sup>18</sup>

Now, verse 28. "Now you, brothers," Gentile and Jewish believers living in Galatia, "like Isaac, are children of promise."<sup>19</sup> In other words, I am a descendant of Abraham and so are you if you are trusting in Christ, not by natural descent I said at the baptism this morning. We don't become God's children because Momma and Daddy are Christians. We must come to Christ ourselves and appropriate the promises for ourselves.

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<sup>15</sup> Galatians 4:24-25

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 4:25

<sup>17</sup> Galatians 4:26

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 4:26-27

<sup>19</sup> Galatians 4:28



If we appropriate the promises, we become adopted into God's family which is to be adopted as children of Abraham.

Look at what he says again. Verse 28. "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise."<sup>20</sup> You are not children of slaves, of a slave woman. You are not in bondage. You are free people because you have come to know the Lord Jesus.

Verse 29.

At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."<sup>21</sup>

So when the writer of Hebrews writes to the Jewish believers and he says, "Here we don't have a continuing city but we seek one to come,"<sup>22</sup> he is not talking about that earthly city of Jerusalem because the Christian apostles of Christ understood that that city was going to be destroyed because the Lord Jesus Christ explicitly prophesied that within a generation that city would cease to exist, that within a generation that temple would be destroyed and not one stone would be left standing on another within a generation. And we know that Jesus' words were literally, absolutely and exactly fulfilled because Jesus spoke those words in 30 AD and by the late summer of the year 70AD on the ninth day of Av the temple of God was blown apart and not one stone was left standing on another.

Here we don't have a continuing city. Our focus is not on a piece of real estate. Our focus is not on any earthly thing, not on any material object. Our focus is in heaven, the Jerusalem that is above.

Let me read it again and may God almighty through the Holy Spirit grant that you see the truth of these Scriptures in your mind as I read them one more time. Verse 24 of Galatians four.

These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.<sup>23</sup>

Turning back to Galatians chapter three and verse 26—page 1813.

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<sup>20</sup> Galatians 4:28

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 4:29-30

<sup>22</sup> See Hebrews 13:14

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 4:24-26

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.<sup>24</sup>

Turn with me if you will to Revelation chapter 21. What is my hope about the future? Here we don't have a continuing city. And what was told those early Christians and Jews—well, they were all Jews in the year 30 AD—what was told to that first band of Christian disciples among the Jews? That the city would be destroyed within a generation, that that generation would not pass away until all those things were fulfilled. And they were fulfilled literally, graphically, exactly as Jesus foretold, in the year 70 AD.

Here is an application to you and me today. I am an American, and I feel secure. I feel secure because since the War for Independence, with the exception of the late unpleasantness from 1861 to 65, our nation has never known a war on its own land. "War is hell." America's first great terrorist said that. He was a general named William Tecumseh Sherman, and he practiced state terrorism in his march to the sea, as he said that he would make the south howl, and so he began to take the war to non-combatants as an aspect of psychological war. "War is hell," said Sherman. And he made it as hellishly terrible as he possibly could.

But that war came to an end at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia in 1865. And we have known incredible security in this nation. Yes, we have fought some wars since 1865, but they have been wars not on our home turf. When wars are in your home turf, your wives and daughters get raped, your sons get killed, your home gets plundered, you lose your wealth. There is great destruction in your homeland. We are incredibly blessed that we have not known that in this country since 1865. So I feel secure.

And I look at Alexandria and I look at the banks of our city and I say, "These are secure." And I look at Social Security and I think, "It is social and it must be secure." And I look at all of the things that our government provides us and I think, "This is security." And I have a nice home. And I have a stable supply of water in case there is a great drought. In case we lose infrastructure, I've got access to food and water and other things. I feel secure.

But should I?

The write of Hebrews has a word for me. "Here we have no continuing city."<sup>25</sup> The people who in the year 66 AD—who after the Roman armies under Cestius Gallus retreated from the city—felt secure. "God is on our side. God is on our side."

Isn't it an amazing thing down through history, most people will say that of themselves and of their armies. "God is on our side." Both the Union army and the Southern army in

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<sup>24</sup> Galatians 3:26-29

<sup>25</sup> See Hebrews 13:14

the War Between the States said, “God is on our side.” But is he? “God is on our side. We are secure. We have a future.” Do we?

The writer of Hebrews says, “Here we have no continuing city.”<sup>26</sup> But he tells us something else. “We seek one to come.”<sup>27</sup>

What is the city which he seeks? Look with me, if you will, at Revelation chapter 21 and verse nine—page 1937.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.<sup>28</sup>

The city is the bride. The bride is the city. We are that city. We just haven’t manifested it yet. That city is going to come on earth. And how is it going to come? When the Lord Jesus Christ issues the shout of the archangel and the trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ will leave the city and return to earth, will go into their graves, will go into the cremains, even if their cremains are scattered to the four winds in ashes. And they will reinhabit those elements that comprise their bodies. And something amazing will happen, something that is pictured in the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel. These bones live again.

And so the molecules that comprise the human body—even if it is burial at sea and a great white shark devours the corpse as soon as it is thrown overboard—the molecules that comprise that body will come back together again and in an incredible act, God reconstitutes that body from the elements that once made it. And that body is inhabited, once again, with a human soul, a human spirit. And that body bursts out of the ground or out of the sea or out of the bowels of a fish and immediately ascends and is caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And then we who are alive, if we are alive when Jesus comes—and I think we will be—we are going to be caught up to meet them in the air as well with the Lord, to join them and the returning Lord.<sup>29</sup>

That’s the picture that is in view. The Lord returns with his people to earth, and the picture is what? Of a city. That is what I am looking forward to.

He says in verse nine:

“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Hebrews 13:14

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 13:14 (KJV)

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 21:9-10

<sup>29</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 21:9-10

I am waiting to see her dress, are you? What is she adorned with? What is the bride? Let's see what she is. What does she look like? "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem."<sup>31</sup> That's the bride. The city is the bride, because you and I are the new temple of God. You and I are the new city of our God. We are the people of God. We have become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. And it is the city that returns, and returns as the bride of Christ. That is my confidence.

Turn with me, lastly, to 2 Corinthians chapter four, 2 Corinthians chapter four verse 16—page 1798—2 Corinthians chapter four starting at verse 16. See, America is going to be destroyed, and our economic system is going to collapse, and we will come to a point where people will no longer want to buy what we have, as we sell off our country. And what you put your trust in will not last. For "here we have no continuing city." Nothing of this world and of this life can make you really secure.

2 Corinthians chapter four verse 16. "Therefore we do not lose heart."<sup>32</sup> Why not? If I am going to go bankrupt, if the stock market is going to crash, if Social Security won't pay off when I reach 65 or 70, if this happens and this happens and this happens, why won't I lose heart? If all my canned goods that I have got stored away become rotten, if my money is no good, how can I feel secure? Here is what he says. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."<sup>33</sup>

Listen to what he says further.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.<sup>34</sup>

What is seen is temporary. What is seen is temporary.

Ritchey sitting here is temporary. Merrill sitting here is temporary. The clothes on his back are temporary. They are going to rot sooner or later. This pew is temporary. All you can look at and see is temporary. The person sitting next to you is temporary. The person on your left and your right, they are going to age, they are going to wear out. And if Christ tarries, they are going to be carted off by the undertaker. And in spite of the art of the undertaker with his wax and colors and injection of dyes into the bloodstream, in spite of people saying, "He looks like he is asleep." You know, it is just a lie. I have never seen anyone in a box look like they were asleep. Have you?

In spite of the undertaker it is like that song in *Oklahoma*, "Poor Jud!"

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<sup>31</sup> Revelation 21:10

<sup>32</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Poor Judd is dead  
A candle lights his head.  
He looks oh so peaceful and serene.  
He looks like he's asleep.  
It's a shame that he won't keep.  
But it's summer and we're running out of ice.

And I, what I am telling you is: You are going to rot. And everything that you hold dear in life is going to rot. It is dust and ashes. Everything that you look at to give you security, everything that you are willing to sacrifice yourself to get and to hold onto is going to rot. It is going to see corruption. It is going to be destroyed.

And Saint Paul says, "That's okay. We don't have here an enduring city. We look for one to come."<sup>35</sup>

I want to tell you, that's my hope. My confidence is Jesus is going to come again. My confidence is that, even if I die before Jesus comes again, and they cart me to the cemetery and they dig a hole in the ground and the worms eat me up—because they will—even if all that happens, my body is going to rise again. The trumpet is going to sound and the archangel is going to shout, and I am going to come bursting out of the ground just like Jesus did. That's my confidence. That's my hope.

And as I look at the future, I put no confidence in princes, nor do I look for man for help. I don't look at the motto on the United Nations that is twisted and perverted from Isaiah's glorious prophecy that says that the nations will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.<sup>36</sup> The United Nations isn't going to bring that to pass. You are a fool if you think that man is going to bring that to pass. You trust in the United Nations? Look at the corruption in that. Look at the politicians who skimmed all that money with that embargo against Iraqi oil. How many people made themselves rich? Do you trust the United Nations? Do you trust in your government?

You are an American. I am an American. I love my country. I am a patriot. You want to know what to trust in your country at the federal level, state level, local level? Look at New Orleans with Katrina. That's your government. You are a fool to trust in your government.

What can you trust in? Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other hope. There is no other hope but the Lord Jesus. Jesus is all there is. Jesus is all there is. And Saint Paul says that as he looks away from his body and this life and his possessions...even though he says...look at how he describes it here.

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 13:14

<sup>36</sup> See Isaiah 2:4

Though outwardly we are wasting away,” verse 16, “yet inwardly,” he says, “we are being renewed day by day.”<sup>37</sup>

Do you know when we have this perspective of the city that is coming, when we have this perspective of heaven, when we realize this world isn't our hope, but it is heaven that is our hope? You know what? It changes our whole perspective. It says then in verse 17, “For our light and momentary troubles...”<sup>38</sup> Getting raped is light and momentary. Having a child murdered is light and momentary. Having somebody defame you and lie about you, and you be charged with a crime falsely and going to prison—that is light and momentary. Being persecuted for your faith is light and momentary. Burying a child, burying a father, burying a mother, burying a spouse, it is light and momentary. Going bankrupt is light and momentary. Having cancer is light and momentary. Having heart disease is light and momentary. There is nothing that can happen to you in this life, if your perspective is the Lord Jesus Christ and that he is coming again, that is not light and momentary.

I am not trivializing your pain. I am not minimizing the affliction that all the things I just mentioned are. But I am saying that if you put them in perspective with eternity, they are light and momentary.

And something else in (2 Corinthians) 4:17—he says, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”<sup>39</sup> Life has purpose and meaning. I am not just a creature subject to chance. My life isn't governed by horoscopes, fates, or rolls of the dice. God, my Father, is in control of my life and he doesn't let anything happen to me that he is not going to turn to my ultimate blessing to make me like Jesus. That is my confidence why I get up on March the 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006, because I know it is a good day. It is a good day. “This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it.”<sup>40</sup>

But something else—it is not just that all things work together for my good in the here and now. It is that God wants to tear away from me everything that I think that is essential and important.

And I want to close with this thought. You know, if you really can grasp the significance of Hebrews 13:14, here on earth we have no continuing city, not the earthly city of Jerusalem, not the earthly city of Alexandria, Louisiana, not the earthly city of New Orleans, not your bank account, not your this or your that. But you realize the only security of the earth is to belong to Jesus. It totally and radically alters how you live.

When somebody does something bad to you, you look at it in the light of eternity. That is nothing compared to what I deserve.

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<sup>37</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> See Psalm 118:24

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century said, “When somebody says something bad about you, really bad, even if it is not true, that specific thing, think about this. If somebody really knows you, a whole lot worse could be said about you.”

Come on, now. You know I am talking to you. It is true. I don't care what they say about you, if somebody really knows you, they could say something worse.

Don't most folks have a latent fear of letting other people know them? Because deep down, don't we feel that if people really knew us the way we are, they would reject us? The Church, not how the Church usually manifests itself, but the Church as Jesus describes it in the New Testament, is a Church for “rejects.” It is a Church for people who realize, “Man, if people really know me, they will reject me. But I can join an affiliation with other people just like me, ‘Sinners Anonymous.’ And it is a place where I can forgive other people. No matter what they have done, no matter what the hurt, no matter what the humiliation, hey, what difference is it going to make 100 years from now?”

Even if Jesus didn't return for 100 years what difference does it make 100 years from now when your body like John Brown's, lies a' moldering in the ground? What difference is it going to make?

The perspective, then, finally is this. Be happy. Lift up your head. Be cheerful. Be optimistic. God is in control of the world now, and Jesus is coming again. And everything else measured by that is just—to quote Saint Paul—*skubalon*.<sup>41</sup>

Let's pray.

*Lord, keep that city ahead of my eyes, that city that is to come, the bride of Christ, adorned for her groom, coming down out of heaven, resplendent with glory, radiant, bedecked with gold and jewels and silver, every precious stone, the city that is four square, immeasurable by our standards, vast and immense, full of the people of God, as high as it is long, as long as it is wide, coming on earth. For Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, not by the efforts of men with their plots and scheming and their good intentions, but when our sovereign Christ gets up off that throne at the right hand of the Father and charges to earth to take us to himself.*

*Lord, that is my hope. I pray it is the hope of everyone here. I pray if there is anybody here today who believes that he or she can come before God based on their own merit, their own works, their own deeds, their own record, that they will remember Paul's words about his own people born in slavery, in bondage.*

*But, Lord, may we flee from our ethnicity and cast ourselves on your mercy in Christ, knowing that Jesus died for sinners. What great comfort is that, Lord: Jesus died for sinners. I confess that Jesus died for me.*

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<sup>41</sup> Philippians 3:8

*May we all know that. May we all be born again. May we all hear that trumpet sound and archangel shout as a call of blessed consummation and fulfillment and not the first tolling of the bell of the day of doom, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

(b)