

Rio Rancho Presbyterian

May 25, 2025

Rio Rancho, NM

Rev. Frank Yates

## THE DESTINATION

### Revelation 21: 1-7

This morning I invite you to consider two journeys and their one destination. The first journey is ours, the spiritual path we are all on. The old gospel hymn says: “We are marching onward to Zion, the beautiful city of God.” Our pilgrimage is marvelously portrayed in John Bunyan’s 1678 classic allegory of the Christian life. Its full title is **The Pilgrim’s Progress from this World to that which is To Come**. This classic depicts the pilgrim’s journey filled with temptations and struggles and hardships. It is indeed a long and winding road.

Finally, Pilgrim comes to a mountain range where he sees light shining on the clouds. Pilgrim is not sure where the light is coming from. Like Pilgrim, we too have to ask, “Where is this light coming from?” But we must first scale the cloud-covered peak to see the source of that light. Only then do we have confirmation of our faith. Only at the very end of our journey is it confirmed that the light is indeed coming from the New Jerusalem, the beautiful city of God. We do not know for sure until we get to the mountain top. That’s

called “eschatological verification,” when at the end we know for sure.

That’s the first journey I want you to consider this morning-our journey from baptism through all our life to the grave which ushers in eternal life. Our destination, God willing, is the New Jerusalem, the beautiful city of God.

Now consider the second journey-God’s journey down to us. Our text in Revelation describes the descent of the New Jerusalem to make its home with us. The City of God descends to be with us, to be our Immanuel. Thus will be fulfilled the angel’s promise at Jesus’ Ascension: “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way to you as you saw him go up to heaven.” Grace abounding, grace descending.

Then and only then are we fully and finally God’s own people, transformed and renewed. Our journey fills us with anxiety, struggle, sorrow, momentary joys, boredom, defeat, distractions, small victories, relapses, despair, elation, confusion-in short, the ups and downs of life. Our journey leaves us with countless bumps and bruises-ask anyone who has lived a long life. The original readers of the book of Revelation had seen persecutions, hardships of all

kinds, and official opposition. They lived in fear because of a government turned demonic, Rome that had become a beast.

Now God comes to us and meets us on our spiritual journey. The two roads converge at a single destination, the Omega Point, as Teilhard de Chardin called it. The Omega Point is where God is reunited with God's people. Here we finally meet face to face in the beautiful City of God. Here God wipes away every tear from our eyes. Here there is no death, no grief, no crying, no pain. There is no sea, no primordial chaos, no haven for the beast and the dragon, those mythological opponents of God. The terrors of the sea, the Leviathan and the Behemoth, have vanished.

All the burdens of our journey are lifted from our shoulders. All our sorrow, Lord, will soon be over. Here in the presence of God who provides a Balm of Gilead to heal every wound from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. And around the River of Life is the Tree of Life, whose leaves bring healing for all the nations.

So God comes with healing in God's wings and declares, "I make all things new." God replaces the old city that stones the prophets and crucifies the Son of Man. God presents a New Jerusalem, unlike Babylon and Rome so filled with pomp and arrogance and violence. A New Jerusalem, adorned like a bride, pure

and spotless. What eye has not seen will be seen-a new heaven and a new earth.

Now God speaks and voices a divine affirmation: "Write this because these words are true and can be trusted. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty, I will give a drink of water from the spring of the water of life." From the river of life flowing from the throne of God, we are promised living water that wells up into eternal life.

This is a magnificent picture of life eternal in the beautiful City of God. The picture will be filled out with streets of gold and gates of pearl, a city four squared encased in precious jewels. This picture differs from other visions of life after death, visions of Green Pastures, Elysian Fields, the Isle of the Blessed, Mount Olympus, Paradise Revisited in the Garden. No, this is a city, an urban delight. It is Babylon and Rome purged of its evil and made pristine and pure. This is not back to Nature, but onward to the City of God.

This is the New Jerusalem filled to overflowing with God's children, all of God's children. In God's house there are many mansions, many rooms teeming with the communion of saints from every nation. In the Beatific Vision we shall see God face to face. And in the light of God we shall see our sisters and brothers,

perhaps really see them, for the first time, as beloved children of God.

In this land of fadeless day, the throne of God is surrounded by countless angels and archangels, a vast throng who praise God continually. For those who want to walk in the garden alone with Jesus, this heaven can wait. For those who think that Hell is other people, for those who would be absorbed into the vast Alone, this heaven will not do. But if you desire to join people from east and west and north and south to sit at table in the everlasting banquet of the Lamb of God, this heaven is for you. For those who wish to join the everlasting choir, to cast your crown before God, lost in wonder, rapt in praise, this city is for you.

Paul Johnson is a renowned English historian from the Roman Catholic tradition. He wrote a wonderful spiritual autobiography entitled **The Quest for God**. In a chapter entitled “The Timeless World Waiting,” he analyses how theologians and artists depict the life of the world to come. Writers are usually much better at describing hell than they are at describing heaven. Why? Because, as Johnson suggests, “It is easier to depict suffering than ecstasy. We have all suffered. Few of us have experienced ecstasy.”

So Paul Johnson tries his hand at describing the ineffable that is heaven. This is his imaginative vision: “I have a perfect visual memory of an ecstatic moment, part real, part reconstruction. It is Paris, on a warm, clear spring day in the early 1950’s. I am twenty-one and am escorting a beautiful woman. We are on the Left Bank and have just sat down at a table on the terrace of a lovely outdoor café. We are across the street from a magnificent old church. At the table next to ours is Jean-Paul Sartre. He has ordered a glass of wine. Soon he is joined by Simone de Beauvoir and miraculously by his former friend Albert Camus with whom he is now reconciled. The singer Juliette Greco, looking as beautiful as ever, at another table. Suddenly there is a flurry as the young Brigitte Bardot, still a schoolgirl, scampers in swinging her satchel in one hand and twirling her hat on the other. It is a perfect visual memory-no waiting, no overcrowding, no anger, no arguments, no drunkenness, no boredom, no hangovers, a magic moment infinitely prolonged.”

For Paul Johnson, Paris in the springtime of our lives is almost heaven. For him, the essence of heaven is love given in plentitude. “God gives us love and for the first time we are in a position to receive it fully and undiluted. Purged of all human limitations we reciprocate God’s love. In that moment of loving embrace we are

granted that ecstasy which is timeless and eternal. That is the timeless world waiting for us.”

The world that awaits us can be experienced even now as a foretaste. It happens when two or three are gathered in the name of Christ. It happens when sisters and brothers love one another, really love one another. It is a hint of that world awaiting us. It is a glimpse of heaven, an intimation of immortality. Those moments of shared love draw us toward that beautiful City of God. My friends in Christ, when we love one another deeply and fully, it is almost heaven. Thanks be to God. Amen.