

“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 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. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Love It or List It. Fixer to Fabulous. Flip or Flop. These are only a few of the shows available on HGTV or through the Discovery Plus system that seem to have a similar premise behind them: there is a room, a home, or a yard in desperate need of renovation and redecorating. With the help of a designer, a team of carpenters, a budget and the encouragement of a camera crew, you change the old, unkempt or ugly into something marvellous.

I remember older names of such shows like *Trading Spaces*, and *Extreme Home Make Over*. Personally, I’m not into these programs. I’m not at all handy. A real handyman would look at my tools and assume that I bought them for display purposes, not for practical use. I don’t see much in these shows that applies to me. Yet these shows are popular, even with teenagers. I think that may have something do with dreams and wishful thinking. While many of the make-over homes involve just simple homes like yours and mine, we like to see how other people live and the things that they have. We may think, wouldn’t it be nice if we had a room like that? Wouldn’t it be nice to redecorate our bedroom? Sometimes people watch to get ideas; other times they watch and suddenly feel envy or feel that they aren’t all that happy with what they have. We may long for something more. Another show from years ago called, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* gave viewers video tours through homes and cottages, yachts and private planes of some of the richest people in the world. We were given some insight into the way the ‘other half’ lives. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a separate wing in our home for the staff, and that nice six-car garage for the Bentley, the Porsche and the Tesla, as well as the kid’s cars? Why can’t we live like that?

Well, I have some good news from God’s Word for you today. In our text this morning, John gives a description of the New Jerusalem, that home where the saints of God will spend all eternity. This city is described in words that do not even begin to paint a picture of its true splendour. It is a city where the streets are paved with gold. Each of the twelve gates of the city are made from one huge pearl, the walls of the city are encrusted with jewels and gems. It shines with the splendour of God Himself. It is the home that is fulfilment of the promise that Jesus gave to His disciples and to us: **“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”** (John 14:2, ESV)

One of the hymn writers points us to this wonderful home and tells us: *Jerusalem, my happy home, When shall I come to thee? When shall my sorrows have an end? Thy joys when shall I see? O happy harbor of the saints, O sweet and pleasant soil! In thee no sorrow may be found, No grief, no care, no toil. Thy gardens and thy gallant walks Continually are green; There grow such sweet and pleasant flow’rs As nowhere else are seen. There trees forevermore bear fruit And evermore do spring; There evermore the angels dwell And evermore do sing.* (LSB 673)

You and I have the blessed hope of a home beyond all homes; a home of beauty, of comfort and of lasting joy. It is the home that the greatest master designer has prepared for us. It is our home because the Lord of heaven and earth traded places with us, giving us the glory of heaven in place of the pain and sorrow of this earthly existence. He gives us that home so that we may not dwell in hell, that eternal hovel of horror which is the home that we deserve.

Psychologists tell us that one of the most stressful things in life is moving into a different home, but if you had to move, what would you look for in a new home? I know there are people who might like the challenge of a “fixer-upper”. There are those who relish the thought of building their own home and doing it just the way they want. But most of us feel that if we are going to move, we want more space; or if we are downsizing, we want something better and easier to maintain. Isn’t it nice to look at the home you want to buy, and realize that you don’t have to do any decorating in the near future? That is the home that John describes in our text—the home that God has built and designed for us in heaven. In His house, there is only joy and peace—no sorrow, no strife, no hatred, no pain. In His eternal kingdom everything is perfect; nothing breaks down. And it is all

maintenance free!

But before we can move into this home, something has to be changed. In this case, it is not the house that is the problem; it is our hearts. John makes it clear in our text: ***nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false.*** Now that is a problem. We look at our lives and we see that we are spiritually unclean. We do those things that are shameful and deceitful. Our hearts are sinful; they are in a poor state of repair. If nothing impure can enter that wonderful home, then we can't live there, either.

Our lives and our hearts need a make over. Actually they need something greater than a make over. A fresh coat of paint and some slip covers for our lives won't do enough. We have neither the resources nor the ability to fix our sinful hearts. But God is merciful and in His love for us He comes and trades places with us. St. Paul assures us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*** (2 Corinthians 8:9, ESV) The Eternal Son leaves the glory of heaven, that perfect, wonderful home, and comes into our world of sin and pain and death. He sets aside His glorious majesty and puts on our human flesh and blood. He takes the garbage and decay of our lives upon Himself. He comes to set right all that sin has destroyed. He comes to cleanse and purify everything that is impure. He declares: ***“Behold, I am making all things new.”*** (Revelation 21:5, ESV)

This renovation—or regeneration, as Scripture calls it—is a major project. It is, to say the least, the most extreme of all make overs. It doesn't require a great deal of manpower or materials, just one Carpenter and the wood of the cross. The budget however, is beyond the reach of all mankind. Scripture says: ***“Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice,”*** (Psalm 49:7-8, ESV) There is only one price that can ransom us; only one cost sufficient to 'fix us up'. The cost is the very life of the Son of God on the cross. Without this expense our whole life into eternity would go from bad to worse—as if life isn't bad enough now. All the suffering of this world is related to sin. All the cancers and diseases of this world are related to sin. All the strife in our homes or in our jobs or at school is related to sin. Sin is like dry-rot or termites in our earthly existence. It continues to eat away at the hearts of people. Someone asked me not that long ago whether or not I was pessimistic about the future. I think they were doing a political survey, but I don't think that poor girl would have room for the full answer to that question. On the one hand, I am pessimistic. I see what sin is doing. It is destroying this world in ways we haven't even begun to comprehend. The wonderful world that God created would still be a wonderful world were it not for sinners like you and me who continue to mess up God's perfection. And sin brings forth more sin, which means that things are getting worse. Yet I am optimistic. I have hope and confidence because the Son of God came to trade places with us. He came to live in our world of sin so that He could give it that make-over that will set things right. And because He has done this for us, we get to live in the glory of His home forever.

How blessed we are that Christ has traded places with us! Paul assures us: ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV) The holy, sinless Son of God lives with us in perfect holiness. He trades His glory for our suffering and shame so that we can live in His glory. That trade comes through our Baptism. Through the cleansing water of life, God razes or demolishes the old, sinful part of us, so that He can rebuild us in the new life we have in Christ. In Baptism we die to sin, as Christ has died for sin. But we also rise to life, even as Christ is risen from the dead. Through faith we trade the old life of sin and the habitation of hell for the new life of hope and love and for the mansions that God has prepared for us. Singer Keith Green once compared our earthly existence to our heavenly life by pointing out that we are living in a garbage can compared to the home Christ is preparing for His people. Our text only reinforces that truth. What a beautiful home awaits us! No more weeds, or worry; no termites and no upkeep. No more mortgage payments or even taxes.

Yet that isn't what makes our future home so glorious. Our text says: ***And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 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. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.*** The glory of heaven is not in the streets or the gates or the jewelled walls. These are simply ways of trying to describe how wonderful it will be. But the glory and joy of heaven are found in the God who created us and in the Lamb, who was sacrificed to redeem us. Heaven's glory is in the Spirit, who brings us to faith and who leads us to know all that is ours by the grace and mercy of God. The glory of heaven is in being with our God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to see Him as He is and to rejoice in His love, peace and joy forevermore. Amen.