

## A CHAPTER ON THE CITY

We are now in chapter 21 which is the ***final consummation*** of faithful humanity and God.

The “New Jerusalem” comes down from heaven to earth. It is described in terms of precious metals and stones. It is a perfect cube of utter beauty. Just to get an idea of the size, the cube would stretch from Indianapolis to Salt Lake City, Utah.

The imagery speaks of how earth and heaven becoming one seamless creation; no more gulf between the two. And it tells in a powerful way of how God’s people won’t simply live WITH God, but live IN God. The imagery as understood through the Old Testament on which it is based, is absolutely beautiful.

**We’ll go into that in the evening message, but the focus of this morning is a very practical one; HOW DO WE MAKE SURE WE GET IN THERE?!**

Even though most of the chapter concentrates on the beauty, John gives ***one last list of those who don’t make it***; so we’re going to do something practical; ***we’re going to focus on the number one item*** on that list! -And quite frankly; this list is a bit surprising! It reads:

Revelation 21

<sup>7</sup> He who ***overcomes shall inherit*** all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.<sup>8</sup> ***But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.***”

***There are in fact, two surprising facts here:***

First, is that ***belief is not number one!***

In a Bible-based church, you’ve been raised on **Romans 10:**

(NIV) <sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and ***believe*** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Belief is the gateway to God; ***how can it be number two?***

The second surprise is ***what’s actually number one; it’s cowardice!***

Why, of all things, is cowardice number one on the black list?

## COWARDICE AS GOD DEFINES IT

The real goal of Revelation, in fact; the entire New Testament, isn’t simply to ***believe***, it is to ***“overcome.”*** ***“He who overcomes will inherit all things.”***<sup>7</sup> “Overcome” (*nik-ah’-o’*)- to prevail, or get the victory. The objective of the Christ-life is to ***make it all the way!*** No matter how sincerely a person may believe, no matter how knowledgeable or balanced their faith, if they are ***cowardly***, they simply won’t push on to the end.

Here’s the thing: ***when we investigate exactly what the Bible means by “cowardly”***, we’ll discover something disturbing: we are all at risk.

The Greek word used by John is misrepresented in some translations; they say “timid”, or “fearful”, that actually, misses the point.

The word “deilos” (dil-los) essentially means- “*fear-driven.*” It is: *describing a person who loses their “moral gumption” or fortitude.* It refers to *an excessive fear OR DREAD, of losing what you have.*

***Take a moment to consider: What areas of your life might fear drive you? -What in your mind? How about your heart? What physical situations would push you to be fear-driven to the point you’d abandon a Biblical faith? ...What might that scenario look like?***

Let’s do this; let’s keep it Biblical by looking at **three scenarios** in Scripture where spiritual cowardice kills.

### **Scenario #1- Denying Christ**

In Matthew, Jesus warns like this:

#### **Matthew 10**

**(NIV)** <sup>33</sup> But whoever ***disowns*** me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

But the heart of warning may be clearer in Mark:

#### **Mark 8**

**(NKJV)** <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ***ashamed*** of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

First, keep this in mind, a ***person can’t “disown” something they never “owned”***

Matthews wording is strong, it means to *contradict, or disavow.* But Mark brings in another layer of meaning, just be “*ashamed.*” In the ***middle of a “sinful generation”***, just be “ashamed”, hang your head low, don’t risk sounding uneducated or stupid. After all, you have a “private faith.” ***-Denying can be a very subtle thing; and quite frankly, so can our cowardice.***

### **Scenario #2- Earnestly starting the walk, but then giving up.**

Remember the parable of the ***Sower and the Seed in Matthew 13?*** That’s some hard teaching! The seed is good; it’s the Word of God **which** is in effect; a person’s *living relationship with God.* The soil is the heart, or in practical terms, the *core of the person’s life.*

Even though the *seed* was good and truly planted; the ***living relationship ends up dead*** in a number of situations. Consider two of these:

#### **Matthew 13**

**(NIV)** <sup>20</sup> The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But ***since they have no root, they last only a short time.*** When ***trouble or persecution*** comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>22</sup> The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but ***the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word,*** making it unfruitful.

***Two of the scenarios are “fear-driven.”*** Neither Matthew or Revelation condemn us for *feeling fear*; death comes when we’re ***DRIVEN by the fear.*** You can have a REAL faith; an EARNEST faith; but if it is shallow, if it has no roots of understanding or commitment, it can’t stand the heat. It ***WILL wilt*** when the challenges come, it’s just a matter of time. **By God’s definition; shallow faith only grows cowardice.**

**Let me confess something** that worries me as a pastor. There is always an effort here, to offer deeper teaching in some spiritual aspect. For example, in a series like Revelation, morning worship is only enough time to offer a quick application. The evening message pulls out the deeper understanding. The midweek study is doing the same thing on core values. It's "deeper roots" stuff.

And yet, just a fraction of the church takes advantage of the deeper roots stuff. Now- I understand that life is busy, and perhaps some are keeping up with some of on line; so, I'm not *judging*, but it does *concern* me.

And speaking of a busy life, keep in mind **the next seeds**. They are good seeds, but they fall among the "**worries of this life.**" Those worries are weeds that choke out the living relationship with God. At best, it is crippled. At worst; it's full-blown cowardice.

Jesus warns:

Luke 9:62

(NIV) "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Shallow roots and scattering your faith among the weeds of distraction and worry: they are directly linked to growing cowardly.

### Scenario #3- Those fear-driven in time.

- **Fear-driven to the past.**

There are those who **insisted on holding their gaze to where God had been working**. I am not talking about Lot's wife who gazed back at Sodom. I'm talking about those who look back to where God was actually working.

Example:

Exodus 16

(NIV) <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

In God's great plan, **there was a time it was necessary for Israel to be in the crucible of Egypt**. They were forged into a nation under the protection of a super power. Egypt didn't intend that, but God did! But like a baby in the womb, there came the time that they must come out. That meant following God into scary and unknown territory.

But they did what people usually do when living in the past, **they elevated the past to "glory days."** Think about it: They were brutally oppressed slaves! It is very doubtful they sat around bountiful pots of meat when Pharaoh wouldn't even give them straw to make their bricks!

**Fast forward to the New Testament**, and we find the same mentality among the **Judaizers who were constantly causing Paul trouble with the new gentile converts.**

We certainly don't want to lose our connection to our spiritual legacy, but whatever the age in history; when people try to STAY in the past, they cripple God's church. That's proven in both the Old and New Testament.

Unfortunately, that dynamic is still in full swing today; church would be right if we did it like the 80's. And in the 80's it was said; church would be right if we did it like the 50's, and we could go all the way back to 70 A.D.

God's truth is timeless, but not the place and style of His working. By Biblical definition; *going back to what "used to be", because that's where God "used to be"*, is a form of **cowardice**. Even if we are committed, and well-intended; like rebellious Israel, we are **refusing to risk going** to where God is working NOW.

- **And there is being fear-driven in the present and future.**

Cowardice in the present or future may be summed up in one word: **COMPROMISE**.

### 1 Peter 3

(NIV) <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be **prepared to give an answer** to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**, <sup>16</sup> keeping a **clear conscience...**

### 2 Timothy 2

(NIV) And the Lord's servant must **not be quarrelsome but must be kind** to everyone, **able to teach, not resentful**. <sup>25</sup> Opponents must be **gently instructed**, in the hope that God will grant them repentance **leading them** to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

**Do you catch the spirit of those verses?** There is no compromise on the truth, but you have to be deeply rooted, to have the answer. And deeply rooted isn't just the understanding, it is having the nature of the answer. Because the answer is not WHAT, but, WHO.

## WHAT THE OPPOSITE LOOKS LIKE

When it's all said and done, here's the basic premise to our focus: If godless cowardice is guaranteed to keep you out of God's Kingdom; then the opposite should cause the opposite result. The opposite of godless cowardice is Godly courage.

We've seen what the cowardice looked like; so Godly courage must look like this:

- Godly courage **affirms Christ in one's life**, professes His divinity, and is proud of Him.
- Godly courage **refuses to settle for shallow**, makes every effort to grow roots. Even when it means putting aside worldly distractions; good and bad.
- Godly courage never entertains the idea that **"looking back"** is ever an option.
- Godly courage acknowledges that to follow God, you **cannot stay in the past**; there is always new territory.
- Godly courage also acknowledges that you **don't change what should never be changed**. There is absolute truth and it is not to be compromised.
- Godly courage is willing to **risk following**; where ever, whenever, however God leads.

We are human, we all experience fear, and given a hard enough mix of circumstances, any of us could become FEAR -DRIVEN.

Spiritual courage is first on the list, Godly courage only comes from God. Even though Revelation is a vision of the end time; it is really about preparation now. Godly courage requires a God-connection right now.

You're believing? -That's good. But how's your courage?