

# Rev. 21:23. the Light of the New Jerusalem

by Horatius Bonar

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*The sermon explores the special, unchanging, festal, all-pervading, and life-giving nature of the light of Christ in the new Jerusalem.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 60:19, Revelation 21:23

**Topics:** "The New Jerusalem", "The Light of Christ"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar expounds on Revelation 21:23, illustrating the New Jerusalem as a city illuminated by the glory of God and the Lamb, who serves as its eternal lamp. He emphasizes that this divine light is special, unchanging, festal, all-pervading, life-giving, and rooted in love, contrasting it with earthly lights that are temporary and limited. Bonar invites believers to reflect on the significance of Christ as the light of the world and the necessity of embracing His light in their lives to prepare for the eternal city. He concludes by urging the congregation to focus on the Lamb, who embodies love and redemption, as the source of true illumination and hope. The sermon calls for a personal relationship with Christ, the light that dispels darkness and brings life.

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## Transcript

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did light it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."--Revelation 21:23.

It is the 'new Jerusalem' that these words are written; the city of glory and blessing; the city of the saints and home of the redeemed; the metropolis of creation; the city of God and of the Lamb; the habitation of the bride, the Lamb's wife; the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The passage might more truly be rendered, 'the Lamb is the lamp thereof,' or 'its lamp is the Lamb;' for lamp, not light, is the correct translation. The two clauses in this verse are meant to give us the complete idea of the illumination of the city. 'The glory of God did light it--and the Lamb is its lamp.' All that sunlight-splendor is to a city--the 'glory of God' or Shekinah is. And all that lamps are to a city, publicly or privately--the Lamb is. As with us now there is the alteration of the lights of day and night, so then and in that city there is to be the alternation of the glory of God and the Lamb. There shall be no night there; and they 'need no candle (no earthly "lamp"), neither light of the sun,' for they have that which is better than both; not created nor borrowed light, but uncreated, unreflected light from the divine and eternal fountainhead. That which is written of the earthly Jerusalem is much more true of the heavenly, for the one is the image or counterpart of the other.

'No longer will you need the sun or moon to give you light, for the Lord your God will be your everlasting light, and he will be your glory. Your sun will never set; your moon will not go down. For the Lord will be your everlasting light. Your days of mourning will come to an end!' (Isaiah 60:19, 20).

The figure here carries us back to the temple and the lamp in the holy place--the seven-branched lamp of gold which burned day and night in the sanctuary. As the Shekinah, which rested between the cherubim, enlightened 'the most holy place,' and the seven-branched lamp 'the holy place,' so in that coming day, when both these places shall be one--the veil no longer existing--the type shall be fulfilled, when that shall come to pass which is written, 'The glory of God did light it, and the Lamb is the light (lamp) thereof.'

But the figure of our text is wider than this, and refers not to a temple merely, or a chamber in a temple; but to a city, and to every house and chamber of that city. It gives us the idea of a resplendent lamp hung in some vast hall or palace, shedding a mild and tempered light down upon some festal assembly, such as that in the father's house upon the prodigal's return, when the household were gathered together to eat and make merry. But it does more than this. It shows us a wondrous lamp, of infinite luster, suspended above a whole city, as was the pillar-cloud above the camp of Israel in the desert. This is the picture presented in these words--'Its lamp was the Lamb.' Christ the light of the heavenly city; the crucified One the lamp--a lamp at once human and divine. The Lamb in the midst of the throne is the lamp of the new Jerusalem. All is concentrated in Him--all excellency, and power, and perfection, and beauty, and glory. Now at last He gets the praise, the love, the admiration that are His due.

I. It is a SPECIAL light. There is none like it. Fed by no earthly oil, its blaze is not earthly. Yet it is truly light for men. It is divine, but it is also human. All created and all uncreated brilliance is concentrated in it. The man Christ Jesus is there. God over all is there. The Word made flesh, and that flesh truly ours--that flesh broken and given for the life of the world--this is the essence of the light. Christ Jesus filled with the Spirit--the Lamb to whom pertain the seven lamps of fire--Christ Jesus, the Lamb slain--it is He as such, that is the lamp of the holy city, possessing and giving forth all the light the city needs, yet that light softened and mellowed by His cross and grave. It is not so much as God, or as the Christ, that He is the lamp of the city, but as the Lamb.

II. It is UNCHANGING light. He from whom it emanates is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Here there is no rising nor setting; no clouding nor eclipsing. It is one calm, full, clear light, from which nothing can be taken, and to which there can be nothing added; without variableness or shadow of turning. It terminates and supersedes all other lights, and itself remains forever, like the lamp of the temple which went not out by night nor by day. The lamps of the virgins who went forth to meet the Bridegroom are no more needed now; and He who in the dark ages of His own absence from earth walked in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, has now become so fully the light of His saints and of their city, that they shall fear no darkness. He Himself has become their everlasting light, and that in a larger and completer sense than when He announced Himself as the light of the world.

The foolish virgins might say 'our lamps are gone out;' but of this eternal lamp there shall be no quenching, no going out. The wise virgins would find that when they entered into the marriage-hall of that Bridegroom whom they had gone forth to meet, there was no more need of their lamps; for the Bridegroom Himself would be their light forever; a lamp that would never burn low or wax dim, but retain its brightness for evermore.

III. It is FESTAL light. The feast is spread; the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' The light of this great feast--the lamp of this hall and of this city--is the Lamb. This feast-day has not yet come; the Bridegroom is absent, and His friends are fasting, not feasting; and not only fasting, but passing through this land of deserts with just enough of light to show them the way. But when they enter the festal hall and sit down at the marriage supper, then shall they not only feed on the royal dainties, but enjoy the light of that lamp which is to gladden their festival with its soft rays--rays which shall be altogether in harmony with the bridal feast, the bridal dress, and the bridal song.

IV. It is ALL-PERVADING light. It is not confined to a few favored dwellings; to a palace, or a temple, or one region of the city. The whole city shall be full of light. It shall enter every house, and room, and chamber, until each corner and crevice is illuminated, and every face made to shine with the gracious splendor, as was the face of Moses when he conversed with God, or the faces of the disciples on the transfiguration mount. The light is all pervading. It penetrates everywhere; it fills all things; it can be excluded by no hindrances; no, the very walls, which here on earth shut out the light, there help to convey it and to enhance its brightness. Christ is all and in all, spiritually and materially, for soul and for body!

As our earthly atmosphere finds its way everywhere, unbidden and unsought, so shall it be with this heavenly light. We shall not need to go in search of it. It shall be in every place, night and day, round the whole year. Its walls are Christ; its foundations are Christ; its cornerstone is Christ; its joy is Christ; its glory is Christ; its light is Christ.

V. It is the light of LIFE. It is living light, life-giving light; not dead and inert like that of our sun, and moon, and stars, but living; instinct with life, and health, and immortality. It fills the whole man with life--body, soul, and spirit. Where it is, death cannot enter, and the curse cannot exist. It diffuses blessing as it shines--the blessing of undecaying health and an endless life. When enjoying 'summer's sunshine' here, we feel as if there were health in it, life in it; much more shall we find of the true health and life in this more glorious light. The Sun of righteousness has healing in His wings, and He who is the Sun of righteousness is the lamp of the new Jerusalem.

VI. It is the light of LOVE. For that name, 'the Lamb,' contains within it the revelation of the love of God. Where the Lamb is there is love, the love of God--the love of the Son in coming, and the love of the Father in sending. That lamp, which is the Lamb, then must be love; its light must be the light of redeeming love. It pours its radiance through transparencies, which all speak of the cross and the blood, of Gethsemane and Golgotha, flooding the golden streets of the jasper city with an effulgence that shall speak throughout eternity of the broken body and shed blood of the Lord. Every ray shall carry us back to the cross; and the light which shall be cast by it on every object in the happy city shall partake of that crimson tinge, which shall not merely remind us of the 'Word made flesh,' but of the great propitiation, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. From the lamp of the new Jerusalem there shall shine forth the eternal song, 'Unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, to Him be glory and dominion forever!'

We have then a city for our residence hereafter; a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Yes, God is not ashamed to be called our God, for He has prepared for us a city. The proprietor of it is the Lamb; and as the Lamb, He gives it to us for an everlasting possession. As the Lamb, He is its king and priest; and He makes us partakers of His royal priesthood in this city of the great Melchizedek. As the Lamb, its honors are His, and He shares them with us; its glories are His, and He shares them with us; its

joys are His, and He shares them with us; its riches are His, and He shares them with us; its festivals are His, and He shares them with us; its light is His, and He gives it to us; its trees are His, and He gives us their shade and their fruit; its halls are His, and He brings us unto His banqueting house, where His banner over us is love; its living waters are His, and the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall lead us to the living fountains of water, and God Himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes!

We are heirs of God, as His sons; but this is not all. We are not heirs in some inferior sense or degree, nor do we come in for some little fragment of the family estate. We are 'joint heirs with Christ,' sharing along with him all that He possesses as Son and as heir of all things; for not only do we read, 'He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son,' but, 'to him who overcomes will I give to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne.' This city of the living God, of which we have been speaking, this new Jerusalem, with all its splendor, He shares with us. It is our city as well as His; ours, because His; the center and capital of our kingdom, because the center and capital of His. There Christ is all. He is not only its King--the Son for whom the Father built the city--but He is its joy, its glory, its lamp and light. All that makes it bright and blessed is from him. All that gladdens its citizens is from Him. Its foundations speak of Him. Its gates proclaim Him. Its golden streets reflect Him. Its river glows with Him. Its trees tell of Him. Its dwellings are His; its palace is His; its throne is His; its beauty is His; its festivals are His; its songs and hallelujahs are His.

The Lamb is everywhere. He is on the throne; He is at the head of His redeemed, leading them to living fountains of waters; He is in every dwelling and in every chamber; He is the glory over all; Prince, Shepherd, Bridegroom, lamp and sun; alpha and omega, beginning and ending, first and last. He meets you at every step; He is seen in every object; He is heard in every sound; His name is the theme of every melody; and the chorus of each Psalm and hymn is, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive blessing, and glory, and honor.'

What are the attractions of that city to us? Are they the gold and gems that make up its everlasting splendor? And when we read, or hear, or sing of its glory, is it the external brilliance that dazzles? Is it its exemption from sorrow, and change, and death, and night, and darkness, and the curse? Or is it the presence, the universal presence, of the Lamb? Sentimentalism can feast itself upon the former--but only faith and love upon the latter.

The question--What think you of the new Jerusalem? Is intimately connected with the more searching one--What think you of Christ? What is He to you? What is His cross to you? To be engrossed with the splendor of the new Jerusalem, while yet you have not tasted that the Lord is gracious, nor been begotten again unto a living hope--will profit nothing. Your imagination is kindled or soothed with the picture of our text, 'Its lamp is the Lamb;' but what do you say to His own words on earth, 'I am the light of the world?' Has that light which has enlightened millions enlightened you? He is the light of life, the true light that enlightens every man that comes into the world, and all light is darkness, but that which radiates from Him. What has that light been to you, or done for you? It is this present light on earth, filling the soul, that is the preparation for enjoying the light of the city; and he who walks in darkness here, shall walk in darkness forever.

We bid you look away from every other light and turn to this. It is the light of the cross! For the cross is light and not darkness. It is the light of love. It sheds its rays of pardon, and reconciliation, and joy into the darkest soul. These rays go out with each proclamation of the gospel; for our gospel is the gospel of the

light, the gospel of the risen Sun. He who receives that gospel receives the light; and he who holds fast that gospel abides in the light, being a child of the light and of the day. He who receives it not, is a child of darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes!

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