

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

THE HOLY CITY: REVELATION 21:1-3

Revelation introduces us to a “holy city” as a place where God will dwell with his people. It further states that in this holy city will be the “home of God” and that it is “among mortals.” From this we can gather a couple things: first, humanity and God will live together in this city in the kingdom of God; and second, it will be a holy place. But what does it mean for humanity to live in a holy city? One would assume that humanity would have to live a holy life within the holy city, but what does that holy life look like?

In the church, and in the Church of God especially, the holy life is an important theological and doctrinal point of consideration. But often the conversation around holiness centers on behavior. This makes sense because the kind of people we are called to be ought to be reflected in the kinds of lives we live. Holy people (the kind that occupy residence in God’s holy city) ought to exhibit that holiness in their actions and behaviors. Therefore, special emphasis gets placed on those actions. We create rules to guide us in the “right” behaviors and to hedge us against “wrong” behaviors. This has been true in the Church of God, as well, where partaking in caffeine, movies, jewelry, and even neckties were considered “unholy” actions. In a sincere effort to be God’s holy people, every behavior was viewed through a lens that determined if such actions were holy or not.

However, when we turn to a passage like Revelation 21, it is interesting to see how it characterizes the holy city. There is no list of behaviors valued by the people of the city, nor of behaviors avoided. There is no description of what the people do to achieve their place in the holy city of God; and therein lies the truth – we cannot achieve our own holiness. For all our focus on moral performance, it is wasted effort. We could no more will our way out of sin than a worm could will itself to fly. If we could, what would have been the need for Jesus? Maybe, like Revelation 21, we need to free ourselves from the laborious, myopic examination of moral behavior as a proof of a holy life.

How does Revelation 21 show us what makes holy people who live in a holy city? Look again at verse 3: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.’” If God is holy, and holiness comes only from God, then we are only able to be holy by our relational proximity to the Holy One. When God declares his people holy, it is because of their special relationship with him. Instead of measuring our holiness by either what we do or don’t do, what would happen if we measured holiness by asking about our relationship with God? Do you think our behaviors might change based on our relational closeness to Jesus Christ?