The Holiness That Transfers

On the Leper Who Worshipped, the Centurion Under Authority, and the Open Gates of the City

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The Will Passed Down

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is what we have been taught to pray. And what we are praying for, week after week, is the desire that God has to see his creation healthy and strong made manifest in the world as it already is in heaven. The will of God was transferred to his Son. The Son's will became to do the will of the Father, exactly as Jesus said in John 6:38: I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And that same will is now extended to us, the body of the Son in the earth. Our will is being conformed to the Son's will, and the Son's will is the Father's will, and the Father's will is the healing of the creation he made and called good. That is the framework for everything else this chapter will say.

Bookends in Matthew

We have spent several weeks in this assembly walking through Matthew 5, 6, and 7, the Sermon on the Mount. *That is the teaching portion of what Jesus has been doing in Galilee*. Matthew structures his Gospel deliberately, and we should pay attention to the structure. Listen to two verses that bookend the section we are about to enter:

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23).

That is the opening bookend at the *end of Matthew 4*. And here is the closing bookend at the *end of Matthew 9*:

> Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:35–36)

Same description, repeated almost word for word. Teaching, preaching, healing. Matthew 4:23 opens the section; Matthew 9:35 closes it. In between those bookends, Matthew 5, 6, and 7 give us the teaching content (the Sermon on the Mount) and Matthew 8 and 9 give us the healing content (the ten-episode, twelve-person healing narrative we have walked through in earlier chapters). Matthew has structured his Gospel so that the teaching and the healing are presented as inseparable expressions of the same kingdom-work. The kingdom of God is not first a set of doctrines and second a set of practices. It is teaching and healing welded together as one work. And the Sermon on the Mount and the healings of chapters 8 and 9 belong together as the full content of what the kingdom looks like when it shows up.

And then comes one of the most important pastoral moments in the Gospel:

"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'" (Matthew 9:37–38).

The burden of all that teaching and healing began to be so much that not even Jesus could bear all of the weight by himself. The demand from the crowds outstripped what one preacher with one set of hands could meet. So Jesus told his disciples to pray for more laborers. And then, in Matthew 10, he conscripted them as the laborers they had just been praying for. He gave them authority over unclean spirits and sent them out two-by-two to do the same work he had been doing alone. The prayer for laborers became the commission of the praying-ones as the laborers. That is a pattern worth noticing. When we pray for God to raise up workers for the harvest, we should not be surprised if the answer comes back as we are the workers we have been praying for.

Not a Feeble One Among Them

And before we get into the specific healings of Matthew 8, I want to walk through one Old Testament image that frames everything Matthew is about to record. *The Passover night.* When Israel was waiting in Egypt for Moses's call to leave, *staff in hand, sandals on their feet, eating the lamb and the bitter herbs, standing while they ate because they were ready to leave the moment Moses called out, something happened to them in the middle of that night that the text records in a single, easily-overlooked line*. After Israel had walked out of Egypt the next morning, the Psalmist would later write:

"He also brought them out with silver and gold, and there was none feeble among His tribes" (Psalm 105:37).

None feeble among His tribes. Picture what that means. Israel had been in slavery for *four hundred and thirty years*. Multiple generations of forced manual labor under brutal Egyptian taskmasters. *The accumulated physical damage of four centuries of slavery should have been in every body that walked out of Egypt that morning*. Bent backs. Damaged joints. Old injuries that

had never healed properly. The arthritis of elderly slaves. The diseases of malnourishment. The wounds of generational mistreatment. *And yet (somehow, in that single Passover night, between sundown and sunrise) every body in Israel was healed*.

A foundational older brother in our tradition used to preach on this verse, and every time he did, I felt like I was right there in the Egyptian household with him. He would describe old grandpa's gnarled toes beginning to fill out his sandals as he stood there waiting for Moses's call. His arthritic hand beginning to grip the staff with strength again. The bent back of a lifelong slave straightening as he stood by the table eating the lamb and the bitter herbs. Something happened in the night when the blood of the lamb was applied to the doorposts. When Israel (against all odds, against all the power of Egypt) believed that they were going to receive deliverance, the belief itself caused them to be completely healed in that night. So that when they left out the next day, there was not a feeble one among them.

That is what God has called us to. *That is what the Exodus from the world is meant to solve.* It is meant to solve *the maladies of sin, the maladies of slavery, the maladies of imprisonment*. *That is why we sing about chains breaking.* Sin is the deep disease. And disease itself, physical disease, is often *the outward manifestation of the inward disease*. The uneasiness that exists in us because of the sin we carry around most of the time. *The Passover-night healing is the prototype.* And Matthew 8 is going to show us the same healing pattern operating in the ministry of Jesus, episode by episode.

Coming Down the Mountain

And now look at how Matthew sets up the transition from the Sermon on the Mount to the healing ministry:

“When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean’” (Matthew 8:1–2).

When He had come down from the mountain. Hold that detail. It is a deliberate Mosaic echo. Just as Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of stone, Jesus now comes down from his teaching-mountain with the new law of the kingdom. But the parallel takes an unexpected turn at the bottom of the mountain. Moses came down to find an idolatrous people: three thousand Israelites dancing around a golden calf, getting excited about gods that had not brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 32). And Moses’s response was sharp. He instructed the Levites:

“Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor” (Exodus 32:27).

Three thousand died that day. And that is what the first Moses found at the foot of his mountain. Now look at what the new Moses finds at the foot of his. Not idolaters. A leper. Coming forward in worship. Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.

The first Moses came down to judgment. The second Moses comes down to healing. The first found three thousand dancing in idolatry. The second finds one bowing in faith. The first commissioned swords. The second commissions touch. The contrast is everything.

The Holiness That Transfers

And the healing itself reveals one of the most theologically significant reversals in the entire Bible. Watch how Jesus responds to the leper:

"Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8:3).

Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him. In the Levitical code, this is one of the most shocking sentences in the New Testament. Lepers were *ritually unclean* (Leviticus 13). They lived outside the camp. They were required to announce their own uncleanness by calling out *unclean, unclean* whenever they approached others. They could not enter the temple. They could not be touched by anyone who wanted to remain ritually clean. *They were socially, religiously, and physically isolated.*

And the Levitical code worked on a *one-way contagion principle*. Listen to Haggai 2 for the precise formulation:

> "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?" Then the priests answered and said, "No." And Haggai said, "If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean." (Haggai 2:12–13)

The priests' verdict. Uncleanness is contagious. Holiness is not. If a clean person touches an unclean person, the clean person becomes unclean. Holiness was, under the old covenant, fragile. Uncleanness was, under the old covenant, contagious. That was the directional logic of ritual purity for centuries of Jewish religious practice.

And now look at what Jesus does. He puts out His hand and touches a leper. By the Levitical logic, Jesus should have become unclean by that touch. The leper should have remained leprous, and Jesus should have been forced into a period of ritual washing and isolation. That is what the law required.

But the opposite happens. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. The contagion runs the wrong direction. The leper becomes clean. Jesus does not become unclean. The holiness has transferred outward from Jesus into the leper, and the uncleanness has yielded. In one moment, the entire directional logic of the Levitical code has been reversed. Under the old covenant, uncleanness transmitted by contact. Under the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus, holiness transmits by contact. The contagion-direction is permanently reversed. And every subsequent healing in Matthew 8 and 9 reinforces the reversal. The woman with the issue of blood touches Jesus' garment, the unclean touches the clean, and she is healed. The dead are touched, the unclean is touched by the clean, and the dead are raised. The new contagion is the contagion of holiness.

And here is the pastoral application. *What is it that you and I could bring to the Lord that cannot be cleaned?* What is it that we have done that prohibits us from coming into contact with Jesus? *Nothing.* There is nothing in our history, in our family inheritance, in our private failures, in our public embarrassments, *that prevents us from coming into contact with the life-giver who can make us clean from our uncleanness*. *Just come to him.* Just stretch out a hand, the way the leper did. *Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.* And the answer that comes back is *exactly* the answer the leper received. *I am willing. Be cleansed.* The contagion-direction has been reversed, and the holiness flows.

Israel as the Leper

And there is a deeper symbolic layer to this healing that Matthew wants us to see. *The leper is not only an individual sufferer.* He stands in for the *condition of Israel as a whole*. Listen to how Isaiah 1 described the spiritual condition of Israel:

> Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment. (Isaiah 1:4–6)

From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. I love that King James phrase: putrefying sores. There are some words we picked up from the King James translation that we should not let fall out of our spiritual vocabulary. Putrefying. The word captures something modern English does not quite have. Israel's idolatry and rejection of God had produced something like leprosy across the entire body of the nation, from foot to head, with the sores never tended, never closed, never healed.

And so when Jesus heals the Jewish leper in Matthew 8:1–4, he is symbolically enacting the deliverance of Israel from her idolatry. The individual leper is the corporate Israel in concentrated form. *His cleansing is her cleansing.* And the priestly examination Jesus tells the healed leper to undergo (*go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them* (Matthew 8:4)) is the public ratification of the cleansing, performed by the very priesthood that had been incapable of producing such a cleansing on its own.

On our own, we cannot pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We do not possess the power to break the disease. That is why we sing about the Holy Spirit coming in and dwelling among us. We need an upper room. The reason we need an upper room is because alone, we are powerless to fight against that thing that is drawing us down toward the grave. We need

something to come in from outside the system and counteract the gravitational pull of the world, the devil, and the flesh. Jesus is what came in. The Spirit is what continues to come in. And the new contagion of holiness is what keeps working its way through every leper who reaches out to be touched.

The Centurion's Authority

And the very next healing in Matthew 8 is even more remarkable, because it involves a person every category of first-century Jewish sensibility would have rejected. Listen:

> Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (Matthew 8:5–9)

A Roman centurion. That is who comes next. An occupying military officer, the rank of officer commanding one hundred soldiers in the Roman legion. The very face of the imperial power that was oppressing Israel. To put this in contemporary terms, imagine if China or Russia had occupied the United States, and the children of America were living in gulags under foreign rule, and one of the occupying generals walked into a synagogue asking for help. That is the social position of the centurion in Matthew 8. And this is one of the men who is going to receive a blessing from the Lord.

And look at what the centurion says about *authority*:

“For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes . . ” (Matthew 8:9).

I am also a man under authority. The centurion has understood something the disciples have not yet fully grasped. Authority is structural. The centurion can issue commands at a distance because he is positioned within an authority-structure that extends from the emperor down through the imperial chain of command to his particular legion to the soldiers under him. He does not have authority because of his personal qualities. He has authority because he stands under authority. And the soldiers under him obey his commands because they recognize the chain of command above him.

And the centurion is recognizing that Jesus operates the same way. There is God, the ultimate authority. Under his authority is the Son, the Messiah, the King that God has set on his holy hill, according to Psalm 2. And that King has been given authority. Jesus had been given, as he would say after the resurrection, all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The centurion sees the chain of command. Lord, if you’ll just speak the word, my servant will be healed. The centurion does not need Jesus physically present in the house. He needs only the word from the One who has the authority to issue it. Because the centurion himself operates that way, he can recognize that Jesus operates that way.

And Jesus’s response is striking:

“When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’” (Matthew 8:10).

I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel. The occupying Roman officer has greater faith than the disciples Jesus has been walking with for months. That is a stunning

statement. The Gentile gets named as the exemplar of great faith. The chosen-people-Israel disciples will be named, repeatedly in coming chapters, as those of little faith.

The Wink to the Disciples

And Matthew is doing something deliberate here. *Look at what Jesus says to his own disciples in the same chapter*. After the centurion-healing, after several more healings, Jesus and the disciples get into the boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. A great storm arises. The boat is swamped by waves. *And the disciples come to Jesus in panic*:

"Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?'" (Matthew 8:25–26).

O you of little faith. In the same chapter. The Gentile centurion in verses 5–13: great faith. The disciples in verses 25–26: little faith. Matthew is winking at his readers. The communities that received this Gospel in the first century would have read these two passages and felt the elbow in their ribs. Be careful, disciples-of-the-second-and-third-generation. If the original twelve who walked physically with Jesus could be repeatedly called little faith, and if the Roman occupying officer who never walked with Jesus could be named great faith, what does that tell us about how to evaluate our own spiritual standing? The answer is not in our religious lineage. The answer is in the posture of our heart toward the One who has the authority to heal.

And the warning is sharp. We can get super comfortable about what God has called us to do, and we can start to believe our own press. We can start to think we can do no wrong. And then the people of God become like every other group. It becomes political. It becomes diseased. It becomes like every other religious-power-structure that has ever existed. The little-faith

disciples are not an example to imitate. They are a warning to take seriously. Help us, Lord. Help us not to forget that we were the lepers. We were the centurion. We were the unclean. We were the dog returning to its own vomit (2 Peter 2:22). And somehow you did something to us. So when we are dealing with someone else who is broken, may we deal with grace, remembering how we ourselves were washed from our wallering in the mire.

Many Shall Come From East and West

And here is one of the most striking lines in the chapter. After Jesus marvels at the centurion's faith, he continues:

> And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 8:11–12)

Many will come from east and west. That is Isaiah's anticipation of the nations coming to the mountain. Listen to Isaiah 25:

> And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6–8)

A feast for all people. On the mountain. Wines on the lees, well-refined. Death swallowed up. Tears wiped away. Rebuke taken away. That is the eschatological feast Isaiah is anticipating. And the same prophet, two chapters earlier, had already framed the trajectory:

> Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." (Isaiah 2:2–3)

All nations shall flow to it. The promise was always wider than Israel. The Gentiles were going to come. They were going to ask the God of Jacob to teach them his ways. They were going to walk in his paths. And the table on the mountain was going to have room for them, alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is the chapter's promise.

But there is a twist. And it is sharp. The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. Natural Israel, that had been bidden to the wedding feast for centuries, may find herself excluded if she will not receive the King her own prophets had promised. And the warning extends. It is not only an Israel-warning. Matthew is writing to Christian communities. He is also warning us.

The Wedding Feast

Look at the parallel that Matthew sets up later in his Gospel, in chapter 22. Jesus tells a parable that picks up exactly the same image:

> And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm,

> another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests." (Matthew 22:1–10)

Those who had been invited were not worthy. So the king sent his servants into the highways and the hedges. Anyone who would come; come. The wedding hall would be filled, one way or another. The wedding was going to happen. If the original guests would not come, those who had not been on the original guest list would be brought in to take their places. And the hall would be furnished with guests, both bad and good.

But there is a second twist. The parable continues:

> But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:11–14)

Cast into outer darkness. Weeping and gnashing of teeth. Exactly the same phrase Jesus used in Matthew 8:12 about the unfaithful sons of the kingdom. Same warning. Different audience. And the point Matthew wants us to see is this: whether you are one of the originally-invited guests who refused the wedding, or one of the highway-and-hedges guests who accepted the invitation but came without the wedding garment, the same outcome is possible. The

kingdom is not built on lineage. It is built on receiving the King's provision for the wedding feast.

If natural Israel could be rejected, and the parable suggests significant portions of natural Israel were rejected, those of us who have been bidden in from the highways can also be rejected, if we will not be transformed by the presence of Jesus. Same verse. Same warning. Different application. The kingdom does not have lineage-based protection. Every generation must respond to the King the same way the first generation did. And the response is not theoretical. It is whether we will receive his holiness, take on his wedding garment, and let his transforming presence remake us into the bride.

Just Embrace Him

And the pastoral application is direct. If we will come like the leper, worshipping, asking simply for cleansing, we have nothing to worry about. If we will come like the centurion, recognizing the chain of command, asking simply for the word to be spoken, we have nothing to worry about. If we will come like the woman with the issue of blood, just reaching out to touch the hem of his garment in the press of the crowd, we have nothing to worry about. The holiness that transfers is more than adequate for whatever we have been carrying.

What the religious leaders missed is that Jesus's friendship with publicans and sinners was not corrupting him; it was transforming them. They did not remain publicans and sinners. Their hearts and lives were converted by the presence of the Lord. His holiness transferred to them. He was not corrupted by their sin. He cannot be corrupted by your weaknesses either. Just embrace him. Just grab a hold of him. Just reach for the garment. Whatever the condition we face, the deep cure is the pressing, driving, insatiable desire to be close to the Lord all our life.

And here is the warning embedded in the chapter. Do not get comfortable. Do not start saying I have much stored up for many years; I will build new barns (Luke 12:18, Jesus's parable of the rich fool). Do not settle into spiritual self-satisfaction. Continue to see yourself as that leper. Continue to live like the one who is not worthy. Because it is only him who has made us worthy, and the worthiness is sustained by ongoing dependence rather than by spiritual accumulation.

The Bride and the Open Gates

And the chapter's final pastoral landing is in the closing chapters of Revelation, because that is where every thread of the wedding-feast image arrives at its consummation. Listen to John's vision of the New Jerusalem:

> Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1–4)

We have been bidden to a wedding, friends. And here is the surprise at the end of it. *We are the bride.* The Holy City coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband; *that is us*. The community of those who have been made holy by the contagion of the Lamb's holiness. *The bride is the city. The city is the bride. And we are the city.*

Notice what is going on in this final image. Two women appear in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 17, Mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots, who has seduced the kings of the earth. In Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem, the bride adorned for her husband. And the paradox is that both women are made up of the same humanity. Come out of her, my people, and do not share in her sins, and do not receive of her plagues (Revelation 18:4). We get to come out of Babylon's harlotry in all our uncleanness and be joined to the bride and become something beautiful. What a scheme God has, to take broken humanity and redeem us and make us worthy to be the bride of his Son.

And God's promise to wipe away every tear is direct fulfillment of Isaiah 25:8, the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth. Have you been abused? Have you been hurt? Do you feel like there is no hope for you because of the sins of your past or the sins of your parents or grandparents? Listen. The old proverb that the fathers ate sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge is never again to be spoken, as Ezekiel 18:2–4 specifically declares. No longer are you implicated in the sins of your parents. The intergenerational chain of inherited deformation has been broken. Each soul stands directly before the Lord on its own terms, no longer locked into the patterns of the generation that produced it.

Outer Darkness and the Light Streaming Out the Windows

And in Revelation 22, the chapter that closes the entire biblical canon, John records the categories of those who remain outside the city:

> Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. (Revelation 22:14–15)

And many people look at this passage and feel the harshness of it. Outside. Outer darkness. Weeping and gnashing of teeth. And the picture can feel oppressive. Let me offer you the image that has been growing in me about how to read this picture pastorally.

Imagine the wedding feast that the Father has prepared. The lights are streaming out of the windows. The wine is on the tables. The bride and the bridegroom are there. All of the guests are there. The Father is celebrating the love between his Son and his bride. The light is pouring out the windows into the surrounding land. And then you go a little bit beyond that, into the country surrounding the city, and that is outer darkness. Where the light has not yet reached. Where the wedding feast can be seen, but cannot yet be entered.

And here is what John records about the gates of that city:

> Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Revelation 21:25–27)

Its gates shall not be shut by day. And there shall be no night there. Which means the gates are never shut. In every ancient city, the gates were closed at night against marauders. White House, Tennessee, does not have gates anymore, because we no longer live in a world where rival cities raid each other through the night. But ancient cities did. And every ancient walled city closed its gates at sundown. The city of God does not. Because there is no night. The light of God and the Lamb is the light of the city. The gates are wide open forever. And the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into the city through those permanently-open gates.

And listen to what the very next chapter records, the Spirit and the bride speaking together from the threshold of the city:

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

Come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. The bride is standing at the open gate of the city, calling outward into the darkness, addressing those who are still outside. Dogs. Sorcerers. Sexually immoral. Murderers. Idolaters. Whoever loves and practices a lie. And the bride's voice carries through the gate into the darkness, saying: come. All you have to do is stop believing the lie. Come into the kingdom.

And the lie is that you are destined to remain in the darkness. That is the substance of the lie. You are a dark creature destined for darkness. And God is saying through the open gate: lie. Come to this. All things are ready. Come to the feast. The Father has prepared the dinner. The oxen and the fatlings are killed. All things are ready. Come.

Come Toward the Light

I hope this gives you the same hope it gives me. I can get up at the end of a devil-of-a-week, and the devil is still running around like a roaring lion wanting to destroy our weeks, and the temptation is to lose sight of *the beautiful by-and-by where God sets all things right and wipes away every tear*. *The devil wants us to lose sight of that.* He wants us to be beaten down by the immediate week until we simply cannot believe anymore. *I cannot believe it. All I can see is the nasty now-and-now.*

But God continues his voice, his call. Believe, all things are ready. Look at the light. Come toward the light. Stop believing the lie. The doors of the city are open. The gates of the wedding feast are open. The bride and the Spirit are standing at the gates calling outward. And anyone in the surrounding darkness who hears the call and turns toward the light can come.

God has called us to be a particular kind of body in this earth. Once we are inside the gates of the wedding city, we become bearers of the light back outward through the open gates. Yes, we were this and that and the other. And God continues to draw us on the long path of obedience in the same direction toward him. But he is also saying: come, be the people I have called you to be. Represent me to the world the way I represented my Father to the world.

Be the leper who came and worshipped. Be the centurion who recognized the authority. Be the woman who pressed through the crowd to touch the garment. Be the publican and sinner whose presence at the table did not corrupt the Lord but rather opened the door for the Lord to transform you. Be the bride who has come down out of heaven, prepared and adorned. Be the people of the open gate, calling outward through the darkness to whoever still thirsts: come. All things are ready. Come to the feast. The Father is waiting at the head of the table, and the wine is poured, and the song of new creation is already being sung.