

THE TIME IS NEAR!

The Victory of the Lamb, part 16: Revelation 22:6-21
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 4/30/23, Matt Heerema

Please open your Bible with me to Revelation chapter 22. It's probably the 2nd easiest chapter to find in the book, just flip all the way to the back!

Today our Revelation series comes to a close. What a great Spring it has been walking through this book with you all. I've appreciated the feedback, the questions, the conversations, the encouragement, the little bit of debate, and you know, even the tiny bit of criticism here and there. I trust that as we've walked through and made this book more clear over the past 16 weeks that its been a blessing to you all.

Today we're going to look at John's conclusion to his masterwork apocalypse. We'll take a little time in review of the lessons of the whole book, and then spend a bit of time reflecting on application.

Let's dive in to John's conclusion here, and I'd like to point out as we read that he ends the book with very similar language to how he started it in chapter 1, almost like bookends. John gets some final words from The Angel of the Lord that has been guiding him through his vision this whole time. The angel now wraps up the revelation by reflecting back on the entirety of the book.

BOOKENDS OF REVELATION

Revelation 22:6-9 (CSB)

6 Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." 7 "Look, I am coming soon! **Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.**"

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had shown them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you, your brothers the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

This angel, so brilliant and glorious that John is tempted to fall down and worship it, repeats some phrases from chapter 1, including the fact that the events in the book are "soon to take place", we'll deal with that idea of "soon" in a bit. He also repeats the blessing for those who "keep the words of the prophecy of this book"—an indication that we are meant to do something

with this book! Not just study it, try to puzzle through it, figure it out, but to do something in light of it! And not only us today in 2023, but the church throughout history.

The repetition, the “bookend”-like nature of this conclusion, invites us to remember everything that came between chapter 1 and chapter 22, and since this is the last sermon in the series, I thought it would be good to review a few of the clear, major themes of Revelation.

WHAT IS REVEALED (A REVIEW OF REVELATION):

Revelation is not a puzzle book that helps us decode secret messages. It is a picture book that paints a clear picture.

- **The reality of the Spiritual battle** - Through the imagery of the dragon waging war on the offspring of the woman, by way of great beasts, we are shown a reality that could be tempting to miss, we are engaged in a spiritual battle with an enemy who hates us, the devil, and he brings to bear lies, temptation, persecution, and oppression to try and get us to give up on following Jesus. Throwing in the towel, giving up hope, giving in and going after the attractions of the world. We fight this spiritual battle, not with weapons of the world, but “by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony” - as we trust the promises of Christ and remind each other of the truth of the gospel message, we are strengthened in the battle.
- **The spiritual reality of the attractions of the world** - power, popularity, wealth, pleasure, comfort - Through the imagery of the prostitute riding the scarlet beast, Babylon, we learn that these things have a tendency to displace our worship of Christ. These can become gods to us, idols that we pursue at every expense. We compromise with the world in order to gain or hang on to these things, and we become guilty of spiritual adultery.
- **The nature of our enemy** - We learn from the imagery of the beasts that from time to time, world government powers have risen up and will rise up to oppose God’s people, and that their power can seem overwhelming and invincible, who can stand against it? We learn from the image of the false prophet that there is another force at work in the world, worldly philosophy and deceitful messages that are opposed to God’s commands and truth. Both of these “beasts” are empowered and driven by The Dragon, Satan. We are to orient ourselves to the world knowing that it is not our ally, it is seeking to pull us away from the worship of God.
- **The victory of Christ** - We see clearly that Jesus wins. Perhaps the main message of the entire book. We see that King Jesus is in control of all of history. That the beasts have no power except that which they are allowed by God, and at the right moment, they will be destroyed for good from a word from his mouth, and in the meantime, are only active in the world because he is allowing it for the training of his people, and judgement on the world for its rebellion.

- **The sure doom of the dragon, the beasts, and those who give their allegiance to them** - We are graciously warned of the outcome of a life lived pursuing the things of the world, pursuing pleasure, power, popularity, wealth and comfort, this is the way to death, and those that pursue it suffer the fate of the dragon and the beasts, eternity in the lake of fire.
- **The certain hope of those who follow the Lamb** - Through the imagery of the 144,000 sealed, the saints standing with the lamb on mount zion, and the great multitude before the throne of God, we are shown the sure and certain hope of those who follow the lamb and die in faith—they are NOT dead, but reigning with Christ in the heavenly places. When we see brothers and sisters killed for their faith, or otherwise go before us into death, we grieve the loss, but do not fear or despair because they are now with the Lord.

There are other messages, I wanted to highlight those for us this morning. Having been reminded of the pages between the bookends, the angel now reiterates to John the nearness, the soon-ness, of the things revealed in this book!

NEAR AND SOON

Revelation 22:10-13 (CSB)

10 Then he said to me, "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. 11 Let the unrighteous go on in unrighteousness; let the filthy still be filthy; let the righteous go on in righteousness; let the holy still be holy."

12 "Look, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me to repay each person according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

These phrases, "don't seal up the words, the time is near." Are meant to remind us of, and contrast with another apocalyptic book in the Bible. Specially Daniel 8:26 - where he has things related to "the end" revealed to him, but by contrast to the angels statement here, Daniel is told: "but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now."

This gives us an indication of the time period John had in mind: immediately applicable, and applicable throughout the church's history, and applicable till Christ returns. The things mentioned in the book began, (theologians use the term "inaugurated") around the time of John's writing, with Jesus's resurrection and ascension into heaven, and this writing describes the time period between this inauguration and its "consummation" or completion, at his return.

This, I believe, is how we're meant to understand John's statement that these things are going to take place soon, that the time is near. Remember that he said this in the first century, and he wasn't mistaken. The things in this book started taking place 2000 years ago, and have been going on ever since, and will come to a conclusion, someday in the future. No one knows the day or the hour of that conclusion.

I'm sure you've wrestled with the fact that John says "soon" but it's been 2000 years! I know I have. Why is Christ taking so long to come back? Well, take heart, this was a question that Christians (and their critics) asked in the first century as well. "It's been 30 years, where is he??" Peter responds to this question specifically.

2 Peter 3:8-13 (CSB)

8 Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed. 11 Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness 12 **as you wait** for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat. 13 But based on his promise, **we wait** for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

It is coming soon. We don't know when. And we are to be found waiting for his return, living as if it is at any moment!

FINAL CALL

Next, John records the words of Jesus, through the angel, giving the same kind of warning that Peter gives. "What sort of people should you be?"

Revelation 22:14-19 (CSB)

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to attest these things to you for the churches. I am the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17 Both the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let anyone who hears, say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires take the water of life freely.

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. 19 And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city, which are written about in this book.

Who is in who is out - Jesus urges us to "wash our robes" - referring back to chapter 7:14 robes having been washed in the blood of the lamb. Through faith in Christ's death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead, our sins are atoned for and we will rise with him. Those who trust and follow Christ are the ones who get to "enter the city" - the new creation, eternity on a renewed, sin free, death free earth.

And a final warning, those who are left out of the New Earth, who are cast into outer darkness, who suffer an eternity of torment for their rebellion, those who continue in their pursuit of worldly power, wealth, pleasure, and control.

The invitation - But Christ does not leave us with that final word of condemnation, he leaves with one last invitation: COME! Any of you who are thirsty! Come! This invitation is for any who would have it. Lay down the burden of pursuing fame and power and pleasure and control, doing things on your terms! Anyone who is thirsty may come and drink from the water of life! Wash your robes!

Do not add or take away from this book. A curious little outro by John here. A warning not to tamper with these words. A warning to not edit your bible. I've often been asked if this is referring to the whole Bible or the book of Revelation only. I think it's kind of a both-and. John means just his Revelation here. but the same thing can be said of the whole bible. Who would want to add to or take away from this book? Those who love and practice falsehood. Those who don't like the full and plain words of God. How might we do this? Through ignoring or explaining away certain parts of our Bible. The parts we don't like. Let this book read you. Let this book change you.

OUR PRAYER: MARANATHA

Finally, John leaves us with a final prayer and blessing. One that should be part of our daily prayer:

Revelation 22:20-21 (CSB)

20 He who testifies about these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with everyone. Amen.

Come Lord Jesus! Maranatha! (The famous aramaic word that John used here...)

LIFE IN LIGHT OF REVELATION

What the first, and the twenty-first century churches, and all the others in between, should do in light of revelation.

1. **Wage spiritual war with spiritual weapons** - The blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony - the gospel and the life, not weapons of the world: political and social power, celebrity, physical force...
2. **Do not be dazzled by Babylon** - Remember that this world, and all its pleasures, glitz, and glamour is passing away. Don't give yourself over to it. The things that a follower of Jesus desires and runs after in life are different from the followers of the beast.
3. **Do not give allegiance to the beast(s)** - There are a few ways one could give allegiance to the beast. It mostly has to do with putting a government or a political ruler or social influencer to high in your value system. The main concern here is worshipping God and keeping his commands. Loving Christ and the way of life he teaches. The beast either through force of threat or deception of ideology is going to attempt to keep you from obeying God, either through active disobedience, or preventing obedience. As your pastor I have two primary concerns. One is pretty easy. Allowing ourselves to be unduly influenced by marketing and the messages of dragon-ish ideology through media. TV, movies, music, social media influencers. Every preacher likes to rail against these. It's easy to do. The other one is harder, and it has to do with political allegiance. Giving yourself too fully to the ideology of one political party or another. Acquainting righteousness with political platforms. Every government no matter which party is in power, is going to require us to be on our guard and to be discerning, and to be willing to call out falsehood and error, and to affirm truth, no matter which side it comes from. Turn off the political pundits on TV and youtube. They aren't helping you.
4. **Prepare to suffer and die well** - Christian, we might suffer for our faith. Either through being mocked by the world, or actively persecuted by it. Be prepared to suffer with Christ. He promised that the world hated him, so it will hate his followers.
5. **Be ready for Christ's return** - He is coming soon. Like a thief in the night! He is coming back to bring justice, to finally do away with the world's system, to bring judgement day, and to

usher in the New Jerusalem, the New Earth! As Peter warns us, what kind of lives do we want to be found living when he returns!

[Pray]

BENEDICTION:

20 He who testifies about these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with everyone. Amen.