

Revelation – Final Words

We are bringing this series to a close today. I've preached through Revelation twice before and I think this has been the most enlightening and informative to me personally. I'm so thankful I was able to do this with Sarah and her insight into the Scripture is always a blessing to me. Turn to Revelation 22 and I want to share some final words.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true.’ Revelation 22:1-6

Talk about a glorious promise, a life beyond imagination. Think about what John just said to us about this future home. Imagine the water of life flowing from the throne of God. Fresh water, good water is essential to life. This is more than good water, this is the water of life that comes from the throne of God and the Lamb and gives life to us and nourishes the tree of life. Think of that: the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations.

Think of nations at odds right now: war between Russia and Ukraine, tension between North Korea and every other nation, tension between Israel and its neighbors. Think of the animosity, centuries of strife between nations and tribes and people and then imagine a world made new where all the nations are healed. Conflict is ended forever. No more war or strife, no more bombs or IEDs, no more wounded warriors. The nations will be healed.

No longer any curse, John says. In Genesis 3 the ground itself was cursed because of Adam's sin. Pain and struggle came as a result of sin but in heaven there is no longer any curse: no more sin, sickness, poverty, heartache, death or despair.

The throne of God and the Lamb are in the city. God is not ruling at a distance, not uninvolved in our lives, but God is present among us. His throne, his authority, his rule is present. We will serve him, we will see his face and his name will be written on our foreheads. We will belong to him and he will be our God.

There is no more night. Many of us have experienced those long nights of pain. I don't know why post-surgical pain seems worse at night. Loneliness can be more pronounced at night, everything seems less certain at night, but there will be no more night for the Lord himself will be the light! This is just a little summary of what is in store for God's people.

It seems that the vision itself has now come to an end. We get this final glimpse into the New Jerusalem and then John is back to earth, back to the present reality of Patmos but once again he hears a voice speak to him. **“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” Revelation 22:7** John doesn't identify the voice that speaks but we know it to be Jesus. We hear the voice again in verse 12 and this time we are given additional information. **“Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” Revelation 22:12-13** Finally the voice clearly says, **“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David and the bright Morning Star.” Revelation 22:16**

Jesus tells us to “keep the words of the prophecy in this book.” Exactly what does he mean? Are there commandments in Revelation we are supposed to obey? Not necessarily. I think what Jesus is telling us is to listen and lay hold of the spiritual worldview portrayed for us in Revelation. In other words, “Embrace the values and purposes of God and His kingdom and beware of the values and agenda of Empire.” Craig Koester writes, “True prophecy moves people to serve the true God.” Keep the words of the prophecy of Revelation by serving God, obeying him. Blessing comes from remaining true to Jesus, as Revelation shows us, even to the point of martyrdom, laying down our life. The blessing of Revelation is not figuring out who the antichrist is or what 666 means, that's not where the blessing comes from. Look at verse 14.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates.” Revelation 22:14. Blessing comes as we remain faithful to Jesus and keep our robes clean by his righteousness and grace. Now, let me share some final words I hear in this last chapter of Revelation.

Don't get distracted. Stay focused on Jesus! We've made this point repeatedly during this sermon series: Look for the Lamb! Keep looking to Jesus! Stay focused on Jesus. It is so easy to become distracted by all the other stuff. Look at verse 8. **“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at**

the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’” Revelation 22:8-9

John gets distracted by all the images and voices he saw and heard so he starts to bow to worship the angel. This is not the first time John has been warned about trying to worship an angel. It happened before in Revelation 19:10. We get caught up by all the other “stuff,” by the signs and wonders and miracles, by the celebrity ministers and worship leaders and we take our eyes off of Jesus. Eugene Peterson wrote, **“It is easier to indulge in ecstasies than to engage in obedience. It is easier to pursue a fascination with the supernatural than to enter into the service of God. And because it is easier, it happens more often...Revealing angels have always proved more popular than the revealed God.” ...Eugene Peterson.**

It is so easy to get distracted when we read Revelation. It is so easy to sensationalize it that we miss the message, that we lose sight of Jesus. Let me share this from Peterson’s book on Revelation, *Reversed Thunder*. **“The way St. John’s Book of Revelation has been treated by many of his readers is similar to the way he himself treated the revealing angel, but without the promptly heeded angelic rebuke. It is difficult to worship God instead of his messengers. And so people get interested in everything in this book except God, losing themselves in symbol-hunting, intrigue with numbers, speculating with frenzied imaginations on times and seasons, despite Jesus’ severe stricture against it (Acts 1:7). The number of intelligent and devout people prostrate before the angel, deaf to his rebuke, is depressing and inexcusable. For nothing is more explicit in this book than that it is about God. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, not the end of the world, not the identity of antichrist, not the timetable of history. The use of the ‘I’ throughout the text makes this unmistakable: Jesus Christ as Lord, and the God of Jesus Christ, speak in the first person to tell us who Jesus is (‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ in the opening proclamation), or to tell us what he does (‘Behold, I make all things new’), in the closing proclamation. Nothing in the book is comprehensible except through faith in Christ. Nothing has meaning apart from his Lordship. There is not a line here that is not rigorously theological.” ...Eugene Peterson** Don’t get distracted, not by Babylon, not by the enemy, not by dragons or images or numbers or angels or heavenly symbols. Stay focused on Jesus. Look for the Lamb!

Worship God! That was the angel's instruction to John in verse 9. "Don't worship me. Worship God." If we stay focused on Jesus, then our action will be to worship and worship is a key part of understanding Revelation. It permeates the book. Worship is the language and the action of heaven but it is to be a part of our earthly life as well. Worship is how we navigate through this life. Worship provides perspective for us. Our vision gets clouded by the evil around us and by circumstances that threaten us, but worship lifts us above the trouble and into an awareness of God's presence, God's faithfulness, God's plans for us. Worship centers us. When we worship, our perspective changes even if our circumstances don't.

The importance and value of worship is one of the first things we learn when we read Revelation. In the beginning John tells us, **"I John...was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit."**

Revelation 1:9-10 John was exiled to this island, isolated and separated from his churches, his family and friends. Alone and suffering, John knows what to do and begins to worship God for who he is and to give him thanks for what he's done. In verses 4-6 John declares that God is the one who is and who was and who is to come and that Jesus is the one "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." In spite of his circumstances, John knew to worship and to give praise and honor and glory to God.

We see that lesson shown throughout Revelation. John describes judgment and trouble of all kinds happening on earth, but then suddenly the vision cuts to heaven where angels and elders are crying "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Seals are opened and famine and persecution and plagues and natural disasters are happening on the earth and people are martyred for the gospel sake, but then the vision cuts to heaven where a multitude beyond number worships and declares "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." 7:10. We must not overlook this major lesson from Revelation – Worship God! This is how we overcome. This is how we persevere. This is how we triumph over obstacles and enemies, we keep worshipping, we fix our eyes and set our affections on things above. We worship in spite of circumstances, we ascribe to him the glory and honor he is due and then we have no cause or reason to fear. Worship him and glorify him; live in a way that brings honor to him, make choices that glorify him. Worship and know that he will see you through.

A final word we don't see but we sense in this last chapter is **Urgency**. **"Behold, I am coming soon!"** As we pointed out earlier, Jesus repeats the promise/warning a second and third

time. He is coming soon. It attaches an urgency to the book. In the opening verse of Revelation (1:1) and again in 22:6, John is told this message is sent to show God's people the things that must soon take place. We can't say that John meant "soon" in the sense of "in the next couple of weeks" because obviously it hasn't happened yet. But perhaps we can read "soon" as establishing relevance to all that is shown to us in the book. It applies to today, now, this moment. Things are happening so be alert to it, be discerning of what God is preparing and doing and saying in every generation and in every season. Eugene Peterson writes, **"Urgency must not be misunderstood as hurry. It is something more like a quiet attentiveness, alert to Christ's coming among us. The urgency is in the attending, being wholly present to the presence of God that Christ presents to us in his coming. Thorleif Boman in his profound study of time in the Bible, says, 'Present means exactly what the word says; 'presence,' i.e. we are at the place where action is taking place.' St. John's emphasis is never on the future as such, but on the present that is pregnant with futurity." ...Eugene Peterson**

"The present that is pregnant with futurity." That's today. That's everything we see that seems pregnant with prophetic meaning and purpose. But don't fixate on the future. Don't miss the point for today. The urgency we sense and feel should motivate us to action in the present. Peterson writes, **"People who are preoccupied with the future never seem to be interested in preparing for the future, which is something that people do by feeding the poor, working for justice, loving their neighbors, developing a virtuous and compassionate life in the name of Jesus. They want to predict the future. Prediction becomes a substitute for action."** ...Eugene Peterson We mustn't let that happen. Live in the moment, attentive to the urgency and importance of the gospel message of hope we share with the world!

Notice verse 10. John writes, **"Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.'" Revelation 22:10** Daniel was told to seal up his book, the time wasn't yet, but John is told to not seal it up because the time is near. The urgency is present because we can identify Babylon and we can find ourselves in the book of Revelation. We are living in spiritual warfare, pressured by Empire and attacked by the enemy. Our response must be to stay focused on Jesus, don't get distracted, worship God, and get busy, tell others about Jesus, serve others, make a difference, let your light shine and your life count while there is still time and opportunity!

Finally, we hear **“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” Revelation 22:17**

Jesus has said “Behold I am coming soon.” The response of the Holy Spirit and the bride, (both the city and the church as the bride), is to say “Come.” It’s the church saying “Yes, please, do come on. The sooner the better.” But then the verse says “whoever is thirsty, let him come.” I wonder if we can think of this in two different ways. First we can view this as our response, saying, “yes, come on.” But could we also think of this as the Spirit and the bride, the New Jerusalem saying “Come”, beckoning people to come to Jesus, come to the Spirit. Whoever is thirsty, “Come!” Perhaps it is a response but perhaps it is also an invitation. The church, the bride of Christ is supposed to be calling people by the Spirit, beckoning them to come and meet Jesus, come and take the free gift of salvation and eternal life he offers. Are we calling others to come? Are we putting up barriers or are we clearing a path for people to come to Jesus? Come!

I keep thinking of a pastor that was all over the internet in the last couple of years saying, “If you’re a democrat just get up and get out of this church.” I just can’t imagine how grieved the Holy Spirit is to hear that. The Spirit and the bride say Come! Whoever is thirsty, dying of thirst, let him come and drink of the water of life. That’s what the church is supposed to be doing, offering the water of life to a world dying of thirst.

We get a final warning not to add anything to this book. In my opinion, that’s going to be a problem because so many already have...ahh, but there’s good news in the form of the final words. **“‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”**

Whatever is coming, however it comes to us, stay focused on Jesus, keep worshiping, live with appropriate urgency and attentiveness and rest in knowing the grace of the Lord is with us and everything is going to be all right! I’m counting on the grace of the Lord Jesus being with us!