

Well we've finally come to the end of the book of Revelation. It's been about a year although there have been a number of Sundays when I did not preach on Revelation for one reason or another. There have been about 40 sermons. Anyway this is the last one in the series. Today we will consider the ending which goes from 22:6-21.

I'm not going to go through this section verse by verse, but rather we will deal with the main topics that it covers because those topics are spread throughout the section. The first topic is the book itself. In these last verses of the book of Revelation John makes a number of reference to the book that he is now finishing up.

First there is the claim that what has been written is the truth. Verse 6 "And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true.'" These words are spoken by an angel to John and John has included them in the book. John is claiming that everything that he has written in what we have as the book of Revelation is "trustworthy and true."

That is quite a claim. The same claim is made in more detail in the first two verses of the book. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw." So John claims that everything that he has written is a revelation of Jesus Christ given by God through an angel to John who wrote it down for the churches. John claims to have seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ and heard his voice giving instruction to the churches. John claims to have been shown an open door into heaven and that he has seen into heaven. He saw the throne of God in heaven. He saw various creatures around the throne.

He saw the Lamb who alone was worthy to take the scroll of the plan of God and to open its seals. He saw what happened on earth when the Lamb opened the seals of the scroll. He saw history unfolding as the plan of God was un-scrolled. He saw visions of calamities on the earth. He saw visions of the final judgment of the wicked. He saw visions of the saints of God around the throne of God. He heard their songs of worship. He saw visions concerning the persecution of the saints. He saw visions of God's wrath being poured out on the wicked. He saw visions describing the enemies of God seeking to bring the whole world under their control. He saw how the rider on a white horse defeated all the enemies of God and threw them into the lake of fire. And he saw the visions of the new heaven and new earth, the new Jerusalem, the final temple, and the end-time Eden.

And now as he brings the book to an end he repeats the claim – "These words are trustworthy and true." John has seen a highly symbolic account of reality with God and the Lamb on the throne, with the people of God suffering and enduring and being delivered and enjoying the fullness of life at the end of the age, and with the defeat and destruction of the wicked. And John is saying – the book of Revelation is saying – "These words are trustworthy and true."

This book is claiming to be true. And in that claim it includes the rest of the Bible, because the book of Revelation is profoundly connected to the rest of the Bible. Almost every phrase is an allusion to an earlier part of the Bible. To claim that the book of Revelation is true is to claim that the rest of the Bible is true as well.

The Bible claims to give the true account of reality. The God of the Bible is real. He is the only true and living God. He created all things. Adam and Eve sinned. God instituted a plan of salvation that is based on Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection. All men are accountable to God. God offers salvation to those who will believe Jesus and follow him. Those who refuse to submit to Jesus will endure eternal condemnation. In the end God is going to renew all things. This is what the Bible claims to be true. Not just a way of understanding reality. The **only** true way of understanding reality. That is John's claim here and it sums up the claim of the whole Bible.

The book is about what must soon take place. Verse 1b. "And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." The book of Revelation shows us what must soon take place. This does not mean that it is always about the future. It is largely about principles that are in operation throughout the period between the first and second comings of Christ. But for any generation reading the book of Revelation, it helps them to interpret both their present and their future. We know that there will be opposition to Christians. We know that that will intensify as we get closer to the end. But most importantly we know that the end will come and what that will be like. The book of Revelation tells us what we can expect as followers of Jesus living in the midst of the warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one. And we know how that is going to end.

Verse 7 says, "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." To keep the words of the prophecy of this book is to endure in the face of opposition. It is to be faithful unto death. It is to witness to Jesus in the face of persecution. It is not to lose our first love. It is resisting idolatry and false teaching. It is not denying Jesus' name. It is not being lukewarm. To keep the words of the prophecy of this book is to live faithfully in the light of its teaching. It is resisting temptation. It is persevering in serving Christ. It is living in the hope of the new creation, the new Jerusalem, and the new Eden.

Such people are blessed. This book was written in order to be a blessing to those who keep it. Its purpose is to show the way of life and blessing. Part of that is warning. There are many warnings in the book of Revelation. A huge part of it is about how the enemies of God will be punished. Those who do not keep the words of the prophecy of his book will not be blessed. They will ultimately be thrown into the lake of fire. But those who keep the words of this book will be blessed. Most of the blessings mentioned in the book of Revelation are future blessings – blessings that will be experienced after death and especially in the new heavens and the new earth. There is a lot in the book about the suffering of the followers of Jesus and the great

encouragement for them to endure and to persevere is the blessing they will experience when all of God's enemies are defeated and they are received into the eternal blessedness of the new creation.

Verse 10 quotes the angel as saying to John, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near." The book is not to be hidden away somewhere. It is not to be sealed away in some hiding place. It is not to be kept away from the people of God until some future date. It must be circulated along the people of God. It must be made available to them. And there is some urgency about that because the time is near.

That means that the message of the book of Revelation is very relevant for us. It is an important message for the church in her spiritual warfare. It is a message that the church needs to hear. The application for us is that we must pay attention to it. We must do the work of understanding its message and applying it to our lives. The book of Revelation is often neglected because it is perceived as being strange and difficult. But like the rest of Scripture, it is both simple and difficult. On the one hand the basic message is clear and simple. On the other hand, a scholar can spend a lifetime seeking to understand all the details.

The book is intended to be useful in the life of the church. It helps us to look at the goings on, on earth from the perspective of heaven. It reminds us that everything that happens on earth is part of the plan of God and is under the control of Jesus Christ. It reminds us of the great spiritual warfare that is going on and of the victory that Jesus has won and will complete when he comes again. It encourages us in the fight against evil in the world. It encourages us to be faithful unto death. It encourages us with the hope for eternal blessedness of God's people. The message is important and relevant and so the book is not to be sealed up, but rather read and kept by the people of God.

In verse 16, Jesus tells us, "I Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches." The book comes from Jesus. It is given by Jesus to the churches. It is part of the way that he equips his people in the fight of faith. Again it is impressed upon us how important the book of Revelation is.

Finally it is not to be changed. Verses 18-19, "¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

The book is a message from Jesus. It is not merely a human composition. It is inspired Scripture. And as such it is not to be changed. No one is allowed to add to it. No one is allowed to remove anything from it. The consequences for doing so are the worst possible consequences. "God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city...." That impresses upon us how special this book is. It impresses upon us how important it is to God that his message be proclaimed to the churches without any human additions or subtractions. To make changes is to claim that God's message is lacking in some way. It is to claim that it can be improved by human additions or subtractions. That is blasphemy.

This point is generally understood to apply to the whole of the Bible. Initially it applied just to the book of Revelation, but as the book of Revelation became the last book of the Bible this verse is appropriately applied to all of Scripture. As the inspired word of God, the Bible is different than any other literature. Any human literature is fallible. It will have errors. It comes with only human authority. The Bible is in a class of its own. It is a communication from God himself. It comes with the authority of God. And as such it is to be received in its totality without reservation. Human beings do not stand over it in judgment deciding how it might be improved. Because it is God's word, we stand under it. We are to receive it as the authoritative message from God. The word of God is to be received, submitted to, believed, and obeyed because it is God himself speaking to us.

So in this last section of the book of Revelation, John underscores the truthfulness and the importance of what he has written in a number of different ways.

The next thing that stands out in these verses is Jesus' repeated announcement that he is coming soon. Verse 7, "And behold I am coming soon." Verse 12, "Behold I am coming soon...." Verse 20, "He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."

Clearly this is something that the Lord Jesus wants to emphasize. It is repeated three times in these closing verses of the book and of the Bible. This is something that Jesus wants to impress upon us.

These words of Jesus and the emphasis that he gives to them give our lives a certain character. We are to live in the light of the fact that Jesus is coming soon. The urgency of this is not diminished by the fact that it has been almost 2000 years since these words were written. In a passage that is also about the coming of the Lord, 2 Peter 3:8, we read, "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." When Jesus says that he is coming soon, it is soon from his perspective. The point is not so much that Jesus will return after a short period of time, but rather that he can come at any time and we must live in the light of that truth. 2 Peter 3:10 makes this point when it says that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief...."

We must live as if the Lord will come at any moment. And that gives a certain character to our lives. It means that we should not be complacent. It means that we need to live with a spirit of readiness and that basically means that we should be doing what we should be doing – living as we should be living and not living as if this world is our home. Paul describes the attitude we should have in 1 Thessalonians 5 when he writes, "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober." He goes on to say that being awake and sober means living with faith, love, and hope.

The three times in our text that Jesus says he is coming soon are each followed by statements that suggest how we should be ready for his coming. In verse 7, after saying that he is coming soon, Jesus continues, "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." That is one way to be ready for Jesus

coming – keeping the words of the book of Revelation and by extension the whole bible – enduring in the fight of faith. In verse 12 after saying that he is coming soon, Jesus says that he is, “bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.” So being ready for the coming of Jesus is living in the light of the final judgment when believers will be rewarded for how they have served Jesus by his grace and unbelievers will receive the punishment that they owe for refusing Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

In verse 20, after Jesus says, “Surely I am coming soon” the church responds by saying “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” This reflects an attitude of anticipation and longing for the coming of the Lord. The people of God are often described as waiting for and looking forward to the coming of Jesus.

Thomas Schreiner writes, “The coming of Jesus represents the hope of believers and thus is eagerly anticipated.... The glory and joy will be so great that the coming of Jesus is designated as the “blessed hope” of believers (Titus 2:13). The saints will marvel and be full of joy when Jesus returns. Not only will they rejoice in God, but they will also find pleasure in what God has done in and through other believers.” (p. 817)

Think of what we have considered in some detail from Revelation 21-22:6. The new heavens and the new earth. God dwelling with his people. He will wipe every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. God will make all things new. Drinking from the spring of the water of life. Reflecting the glory of God. Being the dwelling place of God. The end-time Eden. The river of the water of life. The tree of life. No more curse. Seeing his face. The light of God filling the earth. Reigning with God forever and ever.

This is something to look forward to. Our deepest longings will be fulfilled. We will enjoy fellowship with God as we have never known it in this life. We will rejoice in the Lord. We will serve him without sin. There will be no more suffering. And so the coming of Christ is something for us to look forward to. And the book of Revelation is given to help nurture that longing. The whole Bible is given to help nurture that longing. The Christian life is a life of hope – which means a life that is not satisfied with the pleasures of this life but which looks forward to the greater joys and pleasures that God has in store for us. And we nurture that hope by nurturing our relationship with God, growing in the knowledge of God and meditating on the future life as the Bible describes it for us.

These are the two main subjects of these closing verses of the book of Revelation. John says quite a bit about the book itself and how important it is and Jesus tells us that he is coming soon – three times in these verses.

There is also a strange section where John falls down to worship the angel who had shown all these things to him. Verses 8-9, ⁸“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, ⁹but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.””

We can perhaps understand John here. Angels are heavenly beings. No doubt it was an awe-inspiring experience to see one. But the angel is horrified. “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.” The angel makes a very clear distinction between God and everything else. Even the most glorious beings in heaven that are not God are created beings – servants of God. Only God is worthy of worship.

It is not obvious why this little episode is recorded here in the last few verses of the book. Perhaps it is here to underscore the most fundamental requirement for human beings – namely to worship God. There are many spectacular things in God’s creation. There are many things that we are tempted to worship. But there is only one God and he alone is worthy of our worship. This is the first commandment. Everything else follows from that. This is our great purpose as people created and saved by God for his glory. Perhaps that is why, just before the end of the Bible, God makes this point one more time.

Also in these final verses Jesus reminds us of his glory. Verse 13, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” We find similar words in chapter 1 of Revelation only in that case it is the Lord God who speaks. 1:8, “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’” Clearly Jesus is equal with God. There can only be one who is the beginning and the end. And the book of Revelation describes both the Lord God the Almighty and Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega. God is the eternal one. Gregory Beale writes, “[T]he fact that Christ is present at and sovereign over the beginning and the end of creation is boldly stated to indicate that He is also present and sovereign over all events in between.” He is worthy of our worship. And as his people we are secure in him.

Jesus also refers to himself as “the root and the descendent of David, the bright morning star.” (Verse 16). He is the king in David’s line who will reign forever. As the bright morning star he is the dawn of a new day – a new age which began when he was on earth and will come in all its glory when he returns. Jesus is the king who defeats all his and our enemies and he is the one in whom the new day of the new creation dawns. He is our hope.

There are a couple of references that compare the righteous and the wicked in these final verses. Verse 11 “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right and the holy still be holy.” After the second coming of Jesus, the wicked will remain wicked forever and the righteous will remain righteous forever. The wicked will be forever enslaved in their wickedness and the righteous will forever live lives of righteousness and holiness to the glory of God.

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

The book of Revelation has made much of the contrast between God's people and God's enemies. And the last few verses of the book reiterate that contrast. This is the fundamental division in the human race. There is no other division that is as significant as the division between the righteous and the wicked other than the division between God and everything else. The book of Revelation has said a great deal about God's wrath and judgment upon the wicked and the blessedness of those who have been rescued from their wickedness and who by God's grace remain faithful unto death. The most important issue in life and in death is the issue of to which of these two groups we belong. The book was written mostly to God's people to encourage them to remain faithful in the spiritual warfare, but the warnings of the book certainly are relevant to those who are outside – to flee the wrath to come.

And the book closes with a wonderful invitation which in many ways sums up the invitation of the whole Bible. Verse 17, "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'" And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take of the water of life without price."

Right at the end of the Bible, God extends the invitation one more time. Come – Come to Jesus – Follow him – There is nothing to be done beforehand. There is no requirement to somehow make yourself presentable. There is nothing to earn or to merit. Everything we need is found in Christ and is received as a gift. And so come.

This is how the gospel invitation goes out to the lost. Come to Jesus and find life in him. But it is that same gospel invitation that sustains the people of God. For we come again and again and again. And the freeness of the offer – the sincerity of the invitation – is balm for our souls as we daily come to Jesus as those who are thirsty and as those who desire and we take of the water of life without price. And so the book ends as the benediction is pronounced upon the church, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."