

THIRSTY

SERIES: WAKE UP



Catalog No. 20190616
Revelation 22:6-21
Final Message
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June 16, 2019

Revelation 22:6-21

Today we consider the epilogue of the book of Revelation, which we have been immersing ourselves in since September of last year. Because it's the epilogue, the author, John, conveys to us the essence of what he wants us to get from the composition.

We read in the final chapter what I consider to be the most important sentence in the book. It's a short sentence. It's a very short sentence. It's two words. As is the case with many of the most important things, it is often overlooked.

Certainly, Revelation is an interpretive challenge, filled as it is with apocalyptic imagery. The book can be confusing. Perhaps, then, we will be encouraged that in the end, the takeaway is simple and easy to remember.

We've already read this sentence before, in an early chapter of the book. What's the sentence? The two words are . . . well, let's read for ourselves.

Keep the words

Revelation 22:6-7:

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

It's encouraging to hear, at the end of this awesome book, that the words we've been poring over are "trustworthy and true," just like Jesus himself (Revelation 1:5, 3:14).

In the first verse of the book, John promised that his composition would reveal what must soon take place. Now, as he begins the prologue, he echoes those words—after having revealed to us what must soon take place. The developments anticipated in the book began taking place in John's day and are continuing to take place in

our day. Such developments concern God's ongoing and ultimately final victory over evil, which involves the ongoing and ultimately final coming of Jesus, which will usher in the new creation.

Jesus proclaims, just as he proclaimed to the church in Philadelphia, "I am coming soon" (Revelation 3:11). He is coming—in the present and on an ongoing basis. Jesus is always coming, in judgment and/or salvation, at times in, particularly noticeable ways. One day he will come finally and obviously and permanently.

Just as we learned in the prologue, it's not enough to hear the words of Revelation; we must also "keep" them: we must hear the trustworthy and true words in such a way that we might keep them (Revelation 1:3). What does it mean to keep the words?

Right response, wrong object

Revelation 22:8-9:

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, 9 but 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."

So great are the things that John has heard and seen that he falls at the feet of the angel, just as he did in Revelation 19:10. The angel says, just as he did in Revelation 19:10: right response, wrong object. Here it is, the most important sentence in the book for a second time: "Worship God."

The book of Revelation conveys what is taking place and what will take place, in phenomenally vivid and auditory ways, so that we might worship God. You can hardly make it through a chapter in the book without angels or humans or creatures breaking forth in worship. Worship God, especially because he is defeating evil and will finally vanquish evil and establish his eternal kingdom.

Hear and see

Therefore, hear and see the awesome and awful images: the thrones, the lion, the lamb, the dragon, the beasts, the prostitute, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls, the new creation, the new city, the new garden—and so much more. All these sounds and images are telling us and showing us what is happening and what will happen. They are telling us and showing us that Jesus is coming—both in the present and in the future. Wake up! Hear! See!

Then what? If we hear and if we see, we may just be compelled to do what John did: we may be compelled to worship. Sure, we might want to worship an angel or something else—anything—for what we have seen and heard. But we know. We know whom to worship. Worship God. The stimulus (hear and see) triggers and response (worship).

What does it mean to “keep the words” of Revelation? It means this: Worship God.

Ann Voskamp writes:

*I close the bathroom linen closet. Pick up a brush to swish toilets. I don't need more time to breathe so that I may experience more locales, possess more, accomplish more. Because wonder really could be here—for the seeing eyes.*¹

Wonder really is here—in creation, in the Scriptures, in the book of Revelation even in the bathroom—for the seeing eyes and hearing ears. Can you see it? Can you hear it? Worship God.

What does it mean to worship? How do we go about it? What does worship look like?

The time is near

Revelation 22:10-11:

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 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.”

The angel instructs John contrary to the instructions that the prophet Daniel received to “not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book” (Daniel 12:4, 9). The reason? The “time is near,” the same reason we were given in the prologue for keeping the words of the

book (Revelation 1:3). The time wasn't near in Daniel's day. Since the coming of Christ, however, the time has been near.

When Jesus came, he proclaimed that the kingdom of God—that is, God's healing, loving rule—was “at hand,” or “near” (Mark 1:15). When Jesus came, the kingdom of God was present: it was breaking in. Some six decades later, when John wrote the book of Revelation, the kingdom of God was present and still breaking in. Today, many centuries later, it is present, and it continues to break in (Revelation 12:10). One day, the kingdom of God will be established (Revelation 11:15, 16:17).

Why would the angel urge people who are defined in negative ways (the evildoer and the filthy) to remain in their states and to continue doing the things that characterize such states? Surely, the preposterous notion of such commands coming from an angel of heaven serves to wake up the evildoer and the filthy. If they don't repent and turn to Christ, then they can expect to “still do evil” and “still be filthy”—in hell. On the other hand, the righteous and the holy, those who believe in Christ, will do right and be holy in the new creation.

The time is near. Jesus is coming. Jesus will come. Worship God.

What does it mean to worship? How do we go about it? What does worship look like?

His reward is with him

Revelation 22:12-13:

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

For the second—but not the last—time in the epilogue, Jesus proclaims that he is coming soon. Now we learn what happens when he comes. He will “repay each one for what he has done.” We learned in Revelation 20:11-15 that unbelievers will be judged solely on the basis of what they have done. Those who cast themselves on Christ, however, will be rewarded for what they have done in Christ (Revelation 11:18).

In the prologue, the Lord God proclaimed himself to be “the Alpha and the Omega,” the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. As such, he created all things and will bring all things to fulfillment. Now Jesus declares

himself to be the Alpha and the Omega, equating himself with God.

How will Jesus reward us?

Tree and gates

Revelation 22:14-15:

Blessed 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. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Those who wash their robes do so “in the blood of the Lamb,” which is to say they are cleansed from sin in view of their faith in Christ (Revelation 7:14).

The tree of life, which the first humans were prohibited from partaking of after they rebelled against God, reappeared in John’s vision of the new creation (Revelation 22:2). Partaking of the tree of life grants one not the kind of endless life the first humans were graciously kept from in a fallen world but eternal life in the new and eternal creation, the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

The gates and the city also appeared in John’s vision of the new creation—the gates to the new and eternal Jerusalem. Wash your robes in the blood of the Lamb, and you’ll taste the fruit and enter the gates!

Those who do not wash their robes in the blood of Christ, defined here in multiple ways, will remain outside the new Jerusalem. Where will they be? John told us in Revelation 21:8: “their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” That is to say, they will be in hell, which is to say they will be separated from the loving, sustaining presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Root and star

Revelation 22:16:

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

Here we are reminded that the book of Revelation was a letter “for the churches”—that is, churches in Asia at the end of the first century. We have endeavored in our study of the book to understand first what John was saying to those churches in order to hear as best as we can what the Spirit is saying to our church.

In that Jesus is “the root” of David, he preceded David: David came from him. In that he is the descendant of David, he succeeded David: he came from David. The promised Messiah—that is, the final king of Israel, destined to rule the world—would come from the line of David. Jesus, of course, is the Messiah, and if when he walked the earth, he had to conceal his identity for a while, lest he be arrested prematurely, here, at the end of the first century, he tells us plainly.

Earlier, Jesus told the church at Thyatira that he would give those who are faithful to him “the morning star” (Revelation 2:28). Now, he identifies himself as the morning star. The appearance of the morning star signals a new day, and, symbolically, a new age, marked by Jesus’ messianic reign (Numbers 24:14-20, Isaiah 11:1). Jesus will bring with him new hope, new possibilities, and new adventures.

Jesus is the root and the star. What contrasting images these are! A root is on earth, even under the earth. A star is in the sky, far, far away. Jesus unites heaven and earth.

Jesus will reward us with eternal life: the tree of life. He will reward us with the bliss of community: the new Jerusalem. He will reward us with sublime leadership: he’s the root and descendent of David. He will reward us with new and intriguing adventures: he’s the bright morning star. He will reward us in countless ways in the new creation.

What does it mean to worship? How do we go about it? What does worship look like?

What the Spirit and the Bride say

Revelation 22:17:

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 the water of life without price.

John now reports what the Holy Spirit and what Bride—that is, those who believe in Christ—say. They

say one word: “Come.” They’re asking Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star, the one who has been coming and is continuing to come, to come to earth in a final and permanent sense to make all things new. John invites everyone who hears—hears him, hears the Spirit and the Bride—to also ask Jesus to come.

Then, drawing on Isaiah 55:1, John urges not Jesus to come but for anyone who is spiritual thirsty to come. Come to where? Not to earth, of course, because John is speaking to humans who already live on earth. He’s inviting them to come to Jesus. John, as much as he’s drawing on the prophet Isaiah, is also drawing on Jesus, who said in John’s gospel: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37). Jesus offers the spiritually thirsty, anyone who desires, “the water of life,” which satisfies the spiritually thirsty forever.

And how much does it cost? Nothing! It costs you nothing and gives you everything.

Come to Jesus

What does it mean to worship? How do we go about it? What does worship look like? This:

Come to Jesus with the thirst in your soul. Remember, Jesus is God, the Alpha and the Omega. Worship God by coming to Jesus with the thirst in your soul. Hear and see the awful and awesome sounds and images. Hear and see that Jesus is coming, and come to him with the thirst in your soul. Keep the words. Worship God. Come to Jesus.

Thirst is a metaphor for desire. We are creatures of desire. Everyone wants something. Everyone thirsts. In the book of Revelation, even humans in heaven thirst: they thirst for justice, for the kingdom of God to come (Revelation 6:9-10). Our thirst is from God and, whether, we recognize it or not, for God.

Start with your thirst. Identify what you want. Then bring it to Jesus. What are you doing? You’re doing what the book of Revelation most wants you to do: you are worshiping God. You are honoring God by coming to Jesus with your thirst.

I come to Jesus with my desire for validation and exhilaration. After Jesus gave the woman at the well living water, his disciples, knowing that he had not eaten in a long time, said, “Rabbi, eat.” Jesus told them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” He further said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and

accomplish his work.” When he gave the woman living water, he was satisfied. When I come to Jesus with my thirst for validation and exhilaration, I imagine that he is satisfied.

Worship God by coming to Jesus with the thirst in your soul, and imagine that he is satisfied with you as you do.

The Spirit has given us the words we need to come to Jesus.

The words we need

Revelation 22:18-19:

I 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, 19 and 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.

Adding to or taking away from the words in the book of Revelation is something that only an unbeliever would—or even could—do. In fact, disregarding God’s Revelation in the Scriptures amounts to unbelief, for he tells us who he is through the words of prophets and apostles such as John.

Unbelievers, those who disregard the word of God, will experience the plagues described in the book of Revelation: the plagues of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. If any and every unbeliever will experience these plagues, regardless of when he or she lives, whether in the first century, the twenty-first century, or the thirty-first century, then the plagues must be symbolic of God’s judgment.

The one who “keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” is “blessed” (Revelation 22:7); the one who doesn’t is cursed. Those who “wash their robes” have “the right to the tree of life” and may “enter the city by the gates”; those who don’t have no right to the tree of life and will be shut out of the city.

In the book of Revelation, and in the rest of the Scriptures, we have what need to come to Jesus with the thirst in our souls. We don’t need more words. We don’t need fewer words. God has said what he has wanted to say and what we need to know. Especially in the book of Revelation, he has given us words that convey awesome

and awful sounds and images so that we will worship him: so that we will come to Jesus with the thirst in our souls.

Hear what the Spirit says to the churches

The book of Revelation was a letter to seven churches (and probably more, because seven is a symbolic number). To each of those churches, Jesus spoke these words in Revelation 1-2: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

What is the Spirit saying to our church? Not least: Worship God. Not least: Come to Jesus with the thirst in your soul.

Along these lines, let me make two suggestions. For some of you, these suggestions will be radical. For most of you, however, they are doable.

First, come early. Come to the worship center early so that you will be ready to worship God with the worshipping community. As Keith Green sings, “Oh, Jesus rose from the dead! / Come on, get out of your bed!”² I know there are challenges. There are good reasons for being late. There are also bad reasons for late. I’ll leave it to you to discern the difference.

Right now, we plan our worship services with the understanding that most of you won’t be here when it starts. Maybe we can change that. Are the first few songs throwaways, or could they mean something?

We have three gates by which you can enter the worship center: the east gate, the west gate, and the north gate. We don’t have a south gate. Thankfully, unlike the old Jerusalem, we don’t have a dung gate. We don’t have twelve gates; this isn’t the new Jerusalem.

Then again, the writer of Hebrews tells us:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Second, sing. Some of you don’t like to sing but give it a try. You don’t have to have a good voice. You don’t have to feel it. You just have to open your mouth and sing. Focus your mind and heart on the words. Something good might happen. Sometimes, if you set the sails, you catch the wind.

Last week we sang “King of My Heart.” We came to the part in the song in which we sang “You are good” seven times. And at some point in the midst of singing those words, I lost it. I was overcome with emotion. I’m encouraging you all to sing, but I had to stop singing for a moment. Why? It has something to do with the Spirit. It had something to do with the goodness of God being driven into me. It has something to do with you singing the same words also. When I sang with you, you reached my heart.

I’ll give you one more reason to come on time and sing. We have wonderful servants in this church who lead us in worship on Sundays. They practice for you both midweek and very early Sunday morning before you get here. They pray for you. Encourage them by arriving early and singing.

You’ll bless the worshipers, and you’ll bless the worship leaders. You might even be blessed.

In some sense, as the writer of Hebrews says, we’re already in the new Jerusalem. Let’s worship like it. Come to worship God on time, and sing. It might change the dynamics of our worship service.

Beginning next week, several of us will be preaching through Psalms that have been particularly meaningful to us. Our series in the Psalms will be from June 23-August 18. Consider making a commitment to arrive early and sing during the Psalms series. If nothing good happens, I will release you from your commitment! Go back to coming late if you like. Stop singing if you like.

All right, let’s make an end.

Coming soon

Revelation 22:20-21:

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

For the third time in the epilogue, Jesus says he's coming soon, but now, in the end, for emphasis, he adds the word "surely." And if that's not enough, John caps Jesus' words off with "Amen," which can also be translated "Truly." Jesus is coming. Jesus will come. Surely. Truly.

Earlier, the Spirit and the Bride asked Jesus to come. Now, in the end, John adds his own prayer to the chorus: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

In his salutation, John wrote, "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come . . ." (Revelation 1:4). In his benediction, he's more expansive: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all." The "you" of the salutation has become the "all" of the benediction. John wants to see the grace of God, his lavish, all-forgiving, all-embracing love, to be experienced not just by those in the church but by everyone.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Jesus will come—finally, obviously, permanently. What will happen then? He will reward his followers. We will taste the fruit! We'll enter the gates! We'll delight in the Lord! We'll follow the star! In other words, we who come to Jesus with the thirst in our souls will be satisfied, not partially but fully, no temporarily but permanently.

What more can we say than what John says at the end of this magnificent book, which itself comes at the end of sixty-six magnificent books that constitute the Holy Scriptures?

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Endnotes

¹ Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 31

² Keith Green, "Asleep in the Light" track 5 on *No Comprise*, Sparrow Records, 1978, record.