

Revelation Ch. 22: The Time Is At Hand

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Here the description of the beautiful New Jerusalem is finished, and the book closes as it began. Jesus was coming to judge the nation of Israel, and His coming was imminent. The old Jerusalem was about to fall, yet the new abides forever.

Verse 1

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

This pure river represents the blessings that flow from the throne of God (7:17; 21:6; Ps. 36:8; 46:4; Isa. 12:3; 49:10; Jer. 17:13; Joel 3:18). Notice that it is the throne (singular) of God *and* the Lamb (3:21; 12:5). All spiritual blessings are found in Christ alone (Eph. 1:3; cf. Matt. 5:6; Jn. 4:14; 6:35; Jas. 1:17; cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; Ex. 17:5-7), and are for all to enjoy, if they so choose (21:6; 22:17).

Ezekiel describes a similar picture of a healing river flowing from the temple of God (Ezek. 47:1-12). Joel foretells of a day in which a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord (Joel 3:18), and Zechariah likewise describes a time in which living waters would go out from Jerusalem (Zech. 13:1; 14:8).

John elsewhere quotes Jesus, and speaks of rivers of living water as the Holy Spirit within those who believe (Jn. 7:37-39; cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16). This is a reference not only to the miraculous gifts of the first century (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46), but also the Word delivered through Him (Jn. 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:21), as it is preached and practiced by Christians (Matt. 12:35; Acts 2:38; 3:19; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:18; cf. Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).

Christians, members of the church, and therefore citizens of New Jerusalem, are “in Christ,” that is, in a spiritual relationship with Him, and so have access to the never-ending river of blessings (Eph. 1:3; cf. Rom. 8:1, 39; 1 Cor. 1:2; 15:22; Gal. 3:27; many others). These blessings were lost (cf. Gen. 2:10; 3:22-24), but are now restored, and available both in this life, and in the next (Jn. 4:14; cf. Jn. 10:10; 1 Tim. 4:8). This could also picture the sea of glass that served as a barrier (4:6), now turned into a pure river of life for all to enjoy.

Verse 2

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The tree of life is the source of immortality and eternal life from which man was cut off, but has now regained access through Christ (2:7; Gen. 3:22-24; cf. Isa. 51:3).

The tree is in the middle of the street because it is easily accessible to everyone, and on either side of the river because it is everywhere. No longer is it guarded and isolated from man (Gen. 3:24; cf. Ezek. 10:20-22; Rev. 4:6-8, cherubim guarding access).

The tree is not seasonal, but bears fruit every month, indicating that it is always available to whoever desires to take of it (22:14), and that it is always able to sustain and provide for the inhabitants of the

city (Phi. 4:19; cf. Ezek. 47:12).

Its leaves are for the healing of the nations, symbolizing true healing, spiritual healing, found in Christ alone (cf. Ezek. 47:12). In this sense we can think of the cross, representing Christ's sacrifice (1 Cor. 1:17; Gal. 6:14), as the tree of life by which we are healed (1 Pet. 2:24). Through His death we can be cleansed from our sins (1:5; Acts 22:16; 1 Jn. 1:7), and live eternally in heaven (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 5:13).

The Scriptures also liken wisdom and righteous conduct as a tree of life to others (Pr. 3:13-18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8; Jn. 15:8; Gal. 5:22-25), because they are blessings that keep on giving.

Verse 3

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

Ever since the fall, mankind has been cursed (Gen. 3:16-19). Even the law of Moses was considered a curse (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 11:26-32; cf. Deut. 28; Dan. 9:11), because transgression demanded punishment (Rom. 6:23; Jas. 2:10; 1 Jn. 3:4). But now Christ has suffered for us, and taken upon Himself the punishment for our sins, thereby removing the curse for all who follow Him (Gal. 3:13; cf. Heb. 5:8, 9). There is no curse for the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem (cf. Pr. 3:33; 1 Jn. 1:7). They are safe (Zech. 14:11), as they humbly serve God (7:15).

Verse 4

They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

Though in this life members of the church do not literally see the face of God (Jn. 1:18), we observe the wonderful effects of His love and care (Jn. 14:7-9; Jn. 16:16-20; 1 Jn. 4:12; cf. 1 Jn. 3:6; 3 Jn. 11) through the eyes of faith (2 Cor. 5:7). His face will be seen ultimately in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8; Phi. 1:23; 1 Thes. 4:17; 1 Jn. 3:2).

His name is on the forehead because He is first and foremost in the lives of His followers (Matt. 22:37; Col. 1:18), and they have His stamp of approval (2 Tim. 2:19; cf. 3:12; 7:3; 9:4; 14:1).

Verse 5

There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

See notes on 21:23. The lives of Christians are illuminated by the Word of God (Ps. 119:105, 130; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:10), and His presence in their lives (Jn. 1:9; 8:12; 12:46; 1 Jn. 1:5, 7; 2 Pet. 1:19). His people reign with him now and forever (1:6; 5:10; 11:15; 20:4; Rom. 8:37-39; 2 Tim. 2:12).

Closing

Verse 6

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

Jesus has been previously described as the faithful witness (1:5), the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness (3:14; 19:11). Everything of which He has testified is true, for He cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). The warnings to repent are just as true as the message of impending judgment, and just as true as the blessings for the faithful (cf. 19:9; 21:5). True Christianity stands out among all other religions because it is true.

The revelation that has just flashed before John's eyes pictures real events, of which the majority would shortly take place in the first century (1:1-3; 22:10).

Verse 7

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

The imminence of His coming in judgment could not be stated any clearer (2:5, 16; 3:11; 22:12, 20). He was coming to judge Jerusalem quickly, shortly, soon; the time was at hand. This is not a reference to anything at the end of time, but the time of the end of the nation of Israel as the chosen covenant people of God (1:7; Matt. 24:30, 34).

Blessed would be those first Christians who heeded the warnings (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 19) and remained faithful to God, and to those living in Judea, fled at the appropriate time (7:14; 12:6, 14; 18:4; Matt. 24:16; Mk. 13:14; Lk. 21:21). Modern Christians can certainly be blessed today if we keep to the meaning of the book, looking upon what God has done, and understand what He will do as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge (Jn. 12:48; Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27).

Verses 8-9

Now I, John saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

It seems odd that John would make the same mistake he had done previously (19:10). Perhaps he was so overwhelmed that he bowed to the angel once more. Given that both the previous and present contexts are discussing the same things, namely the bride of Christ (19:7; 21:9), another possibility is that this refers to the same instance, and that John is merely referring back to the first time (or was earlier referring to this time) in order to identify this as the same angel. We know that God alone ought to be worshiped (Matt. 4:10).

Verse 10

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

Sealing the words carries the idea of saving for later (cf. 5:1). Daniel was told to seal up his visions that referred to many days in the future (Dan. 8:26), and also the “time of the end” (Dan. 12:9), yet John is told not to seal up the book because the time is at hand. John the Baptist and Jesus Himself said the same thing regarding the coming kingdom (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Indeed, this is not a book concerning things that would eventually take place over many years, nor a discourse on the end of time, but a series of events that would transpire in the near future (1:1-3; 22:6).

Verse 11

“He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.”

As mentioned previously, all who would obey the gospel prior to these events had done so, and so their number was complete (6:11; 7:1-4; cf. 15:8). Though the opportunity to repent was still there, God through His foreknowledge knew that no one else would turn to Him at that time (9:20). The Christians fled to the mountains and so no preaching was done in Judea until the war was over (12:6, 14; Matt. 24:16; Mk. 13:14; Lk. 21:21). To the righteous, this is an encouragement to hold fast through this terrible time (2:25; 3:11).

Verses 12-13

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

Again, the imminence of His coming is reiterated (22:7). The reward here is not of an eternal nature, but the results of this temporal judgment (2:23; 14:14-16). Everyone living at that time got what they deserved, either a blessing (12:6, 14; 18:20) or a curse (11:18; 16:5, 6). It is the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7), of which everyone is subject, if not in this life, then definitely in the next (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Lord emphasizes again that He is the Beginning and the End of all things (1:8, 11: 21:6; cf. Gen. 1; Isa. 44:6; Jn. 1:1-3, Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3, 8-12), the eternal God who allows people and nations to rise up, and who also brings them down (Dan. 4:17).

Verse 14

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.

In order to enter and remain in the city, New Jerusalem, one must keep His commandments (12:17; Matt. 7:21; Jn. 14:15; Heb. 5:9; 1 Jn. 5:3). Contrary to what many believe, works are necessary in order to please God (14:13; Jas. 2:14-17). It is not the case that our own works of merit can earn His favor, but that we are responsible for doing what He has laid down for us to do (Lk 17:10; Eph. 2:8-10).

God has laid down works of faith (Jn. 6:29), repentance (Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30), and baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27) in order to enter His city (Acts 2:47), and a life filled with works of faith and love (1 Thes. 1:3; 2 Thes. 1:11; Jas. 2:20, 24, 26) to maintain the right to the tree of life, culminating in eternal life (Rom. 2:7; Jude 21).

Verse 15

But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

No evil may enter the city (21:27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:1-10). While those inside have reconciled their relationship to God (5:9; Rom. 5:10; Rom. 8:1), those outside are still cut off (Isa. 59:2). This is not meant to be an exhaustive listing, but shows the character of many who live their lives apart from God (cf. 21:8). The only phrase not mentioned previously is the term “dogs,” a reference to the character of the ungodly (Ps. 22:16, 20; Isa. 56:10, 11; Matt. 7:6; Phi. 3:2). Those who presently live apart from God have the opportunity to enter the city (22:14), yet those who die outside can never gain access (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30, 46; Jude 13).

Verse 16

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Jesus sent His own special messenger (angel) to deliver this message (1:1). Here He asserts His authority as the One True King (3:7; 5:5; 17:14; 19:16; Acts 2:30; 1 Tim. 6:15; cf. Isa. 11:1, 10), and the only Guide for our lives (2:28; 2 Pet. 1:19).

Verse 17

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.

Though the number of Christians just prior to these events would be fixed (22:11), this is an invitation extended to any who would obey before these events unfolded, and also to all those living afterwards. The gates of the city are open now (21:25), and the blessings of God are available to all who desire to accept them (21:6).

The Spirit through the Word invites (cf. Rom. 1:16; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The church invites (Mk. 16:16). The gift is free (Rom. 6:23), and blessed are those who hear the invitation and accept it (cf. 19:9).

Verses 18-19

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

The fact that we ought not add to or take away from God's word as a whole is clear from other passages (Deut. 4:2; Pr. 30:5, 6; Gal. 1:6-9). The first Christians continued in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), and we likewise must do the same. If we add to His words we are teaching that God has said something He did not say. If we take from His words we are teaching that God did not say something that He actually said. In both cases, we become liars (1 Jn. 2:4, 21; cf. Rev. 21:8).

While this principle is certainly true of all Scripture, this book has a special warning to those who tamper with it. Why? Perhaps because these words would be difficult for some Christians, especially Jews, to bear. Their wonderful city was about to fall, and there was likely a temptation on the part of some to "soften the blow" concerning the fate of Jerusalem. On the other hand, because of the suffering Christians had been undergoing at the hands of both Jews and Romans (13:7; 17:6), there was also likely a temptation to embellish John's visions.

Though Revelation appeals to our imagination, we ought not imagine things that are not there. Many interpretations have been brought forth on this difficult book, that have not followed this warning. Making the book apply to events that it was never meant to apply to, whether imagined end time events, or actual historical events, is to twist God's word (2 Pet. 3:16). Let us approach this book cautiously, and be careful not to teach merely to satisfy our own desires, or according to what we really want something to mean (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Some translations render "Book of Life" as "tree of life" which carries the same idea. Those who tamper with God's word will be cut off from His blessings.

Verse 20

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Again, the imminence of this coming judgment is unmistakable (1:1-3; 22:10, 12). It is perfectly clear here that John understood the message of the book, and what this "coming" actually entailed. To these words he says "**Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!**" (1:7) Even though much bloodshed would ensue (8:8; 14:20; 16:3-6; Matt. 24:21), and the beloved city of Jerusalem would fall, John understood that these things needed to happen, and is ready.

Similarly today, we need to be ready. We may die at any moment. The world may end at any time (cf. 2 Pet. 3:4). Can we say what John says here? Are we ready to meet the Lord? (3:3; Matt. 24:42; Mk. 13:37; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thes. 5:6; cf. 2 Tim. 4:6)

Verse 21

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Every New Testament letter ends with a benediction similar to this, yet this one is identical to Paul's "signature," which he says is a sign in every epistle he writes (2 Thes. 3:17; cf. Rom. 16:24; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phi. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thes. 5:28; 2 Thes. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Tit. 3:15; Phil. 25; Heb. 13:25). Perhaps John closes with these words to remember his companion and fellow soldier (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Regardless, the favor of God is with those who follow Him (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:8), and His wrath upon those who do not.

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