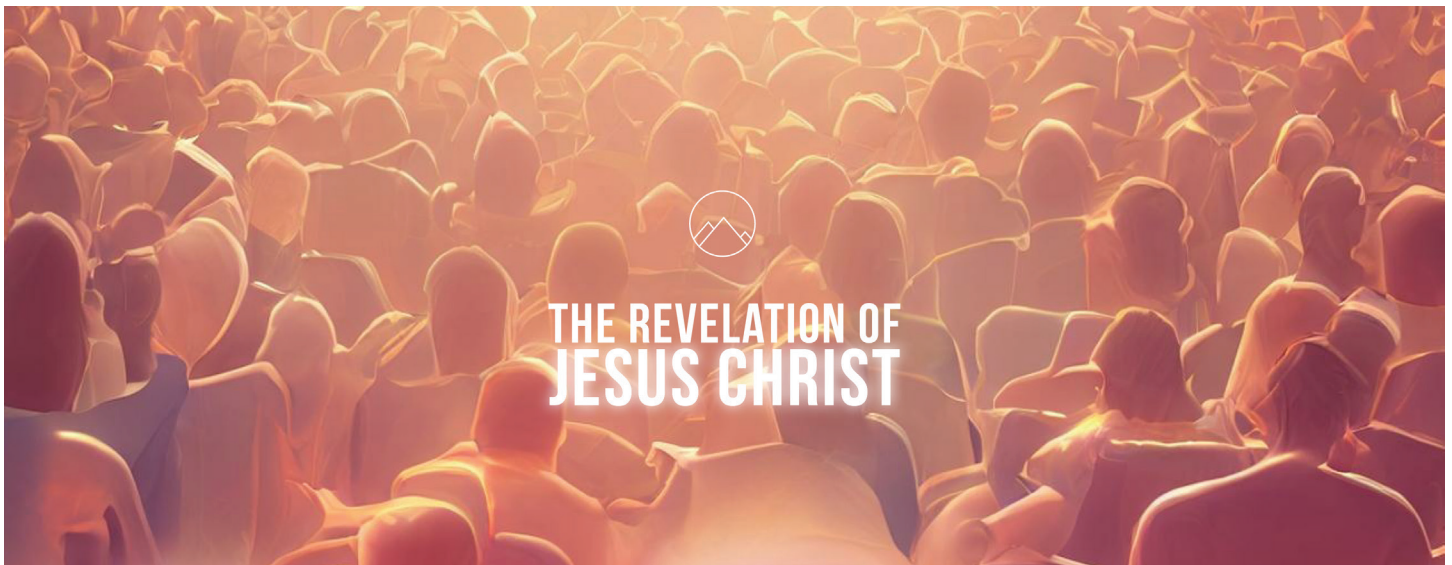




Sunday, June 16, 2024
Revelation 22

Revelation 22

'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 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. 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. 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 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.

The Time Is Near

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.

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

8 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.

9 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." 10 And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 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."

Jesus Testifies to the Churches

12 *"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."*

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

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."*

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.*

A Warning

18 *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; 19 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.*

I Am Coming Quickly

20 *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."*

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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

In this our very last text from the Book of Revelation, it really is one of great hope and anticipation. The first 5 verses are the final imagery from the vision of the New Heaven that was given in Chapter 21 and here we are introduced to a beautiful river flowing from the throne of God. It contains the water of life and is crystal clear. Notice the difference from the first vision where John saw a vast crystal sea before the throne instead. In both images, the crystal water represents the purity and holiness of God. And, whereas God's purity and holiness once acted as a barrier to His presence - represented by the vast sea - now we see that His presence flows freely from the throne - as a river - imparting life to all it touches. Life and presence are fully restored as we can now see His face, knowing that His name is imprinted on our lives for eternity. We are His and He is ours. Perfect unity for all of eternity.

We touched on the concept of eternity last week and how it is beyond the ability of any human being to fully comprehend the complexities of all that is involved in this. Our lives are ruled by time, and so we simply cannot fathom what existence looks like outside of that limitation. One of the challenges we identified last week was that even though eternity will be incredible, there will also exist the realization that not all of our loved ones will share in this experience with us. And how can we truly be at peace and filled with joy and not sorrow knowing that they are eternally separated from

God? This profound question has no easy answer, except to say that it is beyond the limitations of our earthly understanding, and so we simply have to take the Lord at His Word. That we don't need to know exactly how it works, we just need to know that it works. And that fact alone can install great hope in our hearts.

All we know is that death and hades will be utterly destroyed in the Lake of Fire and because of that, there will be no more death and as we read today, the curse of sin will finally be eradicated forever.

Which again, is a hard concept for some people to grasp because all we have ever known in this world is the tension between good and evil. The tension between temptation and obedience. The tension between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Lord. To try and picture a world where this tension simply does not exist is impossible for us. And so, for some, it actually raises a very complex theological question about the security of our salvation in eternity.

The question goes like this: since Adam and Eve were created into perfection, yet fell to the curse of sin, who's to say something like this won't happen again in eternity? Especially seeing that we will still have free-will and the ability to choose.

So the answer - quite simply - is that it will be impossible. But let me take a few moments to walk you through the theology of this because unlike eternity, this is a concept that I think we can actually start to grasp.

The first thing we need to understand is that the comparison of Adam and Eve to the transformed humanity in the New Heaven isn't really a fair comparison. It's not an apples to apples comparison even though we're talking about humanity here. It's more of an apples to oranges comparison. Let me explain. When God created Adam and Eve He gave them free-will. This was crucial because love isn't real if it is forced. The only way that love can be real is if it is chosen. So, it was critical that humanity be given free-will - thus the ability to choose to follow God. Cue the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in which the instruction was given to not eat of its fruit. This instruction was not heeded by Adam and Eve and their choice to disobey welcomed the curse of sin and death as a consequence of their action. All of humanity would now be born into this curse as it passed through every single generation. Jesus Christ came and died on the cross, paying the price for the curse of sin and when He rose from the dead, declared victory over sin and death. This gift that was given though still has to be received - it is not forced upon anyone. Humanity in its free-will must decide whether or not to accept this gift. Those that accept the gift will experience eternal life in heaven and those that don't will experience eternal separation from God.

You see - in this life, we make the choice to follow Jesus. We choose to accept the forgiveness of sin and align our lives with Him. This crucial choice, which is made during our earthly lives, determines our entrance into Heaven but is not a continual choice that keeps us there because the simple fact that we are in Heaven clearly indicates that our salvation is already secured. In Heaven, our wills and desires will finally be like His and because sin, death and Hades are destroyed in the Lake of Fire and cease to exist, free-will in Heaven will also cease to exist as it did on earth. But it's not that

free will is removed from us in Heaven, rather it needs to be understood that it undergoes a transformation: in Heaven, free-will is transformed into perfect-will. Whereas the ability to choose still exists, it is now limited in a sense because evil no longer exists. So, what remains for us to choose is only in the realm of goodness and righteousness. Thus, the capacity to choose between good and evil is no longer relevant anymore because that choice simply does not exist anymore.

This is also why we no longer see the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Heaven. That tree has served its purpose and the only tree now is the tree of life which stands as a symbol of eternal life and the fullness of God's eternal blessing.

We are told that the tree of life bears 12 fruits and yields a harvest every month. The symbolism here is beautiful as we have already seen throughout the book that the number 12 is highly symbolic and representative of the fullness and completion of God. The symbolism of 12 fruits and 12 months is meant to remind us that God's provision is perfect, complete, and never-ending - ensuring that His blessings and sustenance will always be available for eternity. The leaves provide healing to the nations which is a reminder of the restorative and redemptive nature of God. Making us whole - symbolizing the end of all curses, conflicts, and divisions among humanity. Perfect unity for all of eternity!

Now after John sees the final images of this vision, he is completely awestruck and dumbfounded and we read that he attempts to bow down and worship the angel who gave the vision. The angel makes it clear that this is an incorrect action and that worship is meant for God and God alone. Why John would attempt to worship the angel is startling and has baffled theologians for years. After all, John walked with Jesus, supped with Jesus and was arguably one of the closest disciples to Jesus so why would he make this grave mistake? I think the answer lies in the fact that even the strongest and most devout believers need to be continually aware of being overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude and glory of the divine. The most congruent idea here is that the intensity of his experience mixed with the angel's glorious appearance could have temporarily led him to misdirect his worship.

But in the same breath it also serves as a powerful reminder of the exclusive nature of worship that belongs to God alone, a principle that even someone as spiritually mature as John needed to be reminded of in that moment of overwhelming revelation. No matter how extraordinary the messenger or the message may be, there must be a constant vigilance in maintaining the purity of our worship, directing it to God alone. Angels do not get any of our worship - nor do they want it. Nor do the apostles or saints. Not even Mary, the mother of Jesus. Only God and God alone gets our worship. Only God and God alone is worthy to receive our prayers. And only God and God alone is worthy of our deepest reverence and adoration.

And now that the vision is finally complete, we see the final instruction now given by Jesus Himself. In it He reminds us that He is the alpha and the omega - the beginning and the end - the author, sustainer and finisher of life - the first and the last. He gives challenges and warnings and affirmations and even an invitation to drink from the waters of everlasting life. And this whole last section is bookended by the term: 'I am coming quickly,' in verse 12 and again in verse 20.

Which is a really interesting phrase, because even before Jesus says that He is coming quickly, He shares with us in verse 10 that, ‘...the time is at hand’ and if you go all the way back to the beginning of the book, in Chapter 1:3 we see John saying that: ‘the time is near.’ Now follow my train of thought: at the beginning of the vision in Chapter 1, John says that the time is near, and then, at the end of the vision in Chapter 22, he says that the time is at hand which is just another way to say that time is up. The very next phrase after that is the closing section where Jesus is declaring that He is coming quickly. So the entire vision of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is bookended by a reminder that we are short on time because Jesus is coming quickly.

But since this book was written in AD96 when John received the vision, what does this actually mean, for us here in 2024 and the fact that Jesus has still not returned?

The first thing that I want us to see here is that the prophecies and the instructions in the Book of Revelation, aren’t necessarily a map book showing us when the second coming of Jesus Christ will take place. It is very clear that no-one will know the time or the hour. We’re simply not supposed to know. And so the question arises that if we’re not supposed to know, why would Jesus give us all of these signs that the end is near? Well, because ever since the ascension, the end has always been at hand. Every generation has witnessed wars and rumours of wars, false messiahs, natural disasters, revivals...and so on and so forth. These exist NOT to show us when He will come but to show us THAT He is coming. This is key. Notice that the words are specific. Jesus says over and over again that He is coming. Not, He will come. Both in Revelation 1 and 22 we learn that, ‘...these things must take place.’ Why? Because this is the natural response of light pressing in on the darkness. It resists and fights back - resulting in wars, rumours of wars, false messiahs, natural disasters, and yes, even revivals. This shows us that He is coming and not just sitting off in a corner waiting around. So when we see these things occurring it should serve as a reminder that the light is making headway. That Jesus is coming in victory and is in process of making it known all throughout the universe. The second thing I want us to see is that when Jesus uses terms like quickly and soon, it might not mean the same thing to Him as it does to us. Jesus is simply not confined or controlled by the element of time like we are. In 2 Peter 3:8-9, we are reminded that ‘with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’ This teaches us that what may seem long to us is not long to God because His ‘quickly’ is not tied to our understanding of time. So, for Jesus, it’s only really been two days.

And so I think that because every generation has been able to create a case for the second coming being in their timeframe, and because Jesus’ ‘quickly’ is not necessarily tied to our interpretation of speed, I actually think that all of this works together and serves to remind every single person in every single generation - past, present and future - that we are to live with a sense of urgency. To be ready for His return, as it could happen at any moment. And so it’s a reminder that Jesus could come back tomorrow or something could happen and we could pass away. Any way you look at it, our time here on this earth is limited and so we must choose - as verse 16 puts it - to follow the Bright Morning Star.

Why as we conclude the Book of the Revelation is Jesus now being referred to as this Bright Morn-

ing Star here and not Alpha and Omega? Because Jesus wants to remind us that He is the light breaking in through the darkness. You see, the morning star appears when the night has reached its greatest degree of darkness. In fact, the morning star ONLY appears when the night has reached its greatest degree of darkness. Although it is still dark and although there may be there or four more hours until daybreak, when you see the morning star, you know that it's only a matter of time before night turns into day.

In his book, Idols of our Time, Bob Goudzwaard says:

'The morning star often appears between two and three at night, when the darkness is complete, and the faintest sign of morning is not yet visible. So small that it threatens to vanish, the star seems unable to vanquish the overpowering darkness. Yet when you see the morning star, you know that the night has been defeated. For the morning star pulls the morning in behind it, just as certainly as Jesus pulls the kingdom in behind Him.'

Friends the Bright Morning Star is near. Dark though it might still be, it will never again be totally dark. He is coming and it's only a matter of time as the light fully penetrates the dark of night and shines though in complete victory. So let us live with this great hope, staying alert and ready, continuing to spread the light of Christ in all we do. The morning is coming, and with it, the fulfillment of God's glorious kingdom.

And so concludes our journey through the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. To God be All the Glory, All the Honour and All the Praise.

Amen and Amen.

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