

34

REVELATION 22: 6 – 21

REMEMBER CHRIST'S URGENT MESSAGE: I AM COMING SOON

We have come to the end of the Book of Revelation. Rev.22:5 marks the end of John's visions on this remarkable Lord's Day on the island of Patmos. What did we all see and hear? And what do we do with this? Let us have a quick look at the big picture.

The Bible tells us the story that begins with the Tree-of-life in Paradise, and that ends with the Tree-of-life in the New Jerusalem. From a literary viewpoint you can picture it in a U-shaped form. After paradise, the corruption of sin and evil sends everything down toward disaster and destruction.

But Jesus Christ comes, and through his messianic restoration God reverses this, as he had promised right away. By his grace, the course of history goes upward again, toward a new heaven and a new earth. And as this goes on, people in this world are called to break with Satan, the Beasts, to repent from the values and beliefs of Babylon (the world that resists God and his plans), and to follow the Lamb Jesus Christ in the new exodus to the new Promised Land.

Revelation has given us the view from above on the final episode of this journey to God's renewed creation. Then all evil will be removed, the damaged universe will be completely repaired, and God and man will live to-

gether in eternal joy and harmony. All that is now needed is for Jesus Christ to come again.

The passage we look at here, is some sort of epilogue to all this. It is a final opportunity to reinforce the message of John's visions. And the whole passage is dominated by Jesus' final promise that he is coming soon. He repeats it three times. That makes it an important reminder.

TRUST THE PROMISE

After he has taken him on a tour around New Jerusalem, explaining here and there what he was seeing, the angel of Rev. 21:9 assures the apostle John in 22:6 that what he has seen and heard is *trustworthy and true*.

He talks, of course, about what he has shown and explained to John about God's holy city (Rev. 21 and 22). But it is more than that. He confirms all of Revelation as 'true and trustworthy', the whole content of this book.

How do we know that? Listen to what he says next: *God has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place*. We have come full circle. This is the same expression the apostle uses in Rev. 1:1 when he starts recording all his visions. And in line with Jesus' instruction to John in Rev. 1:11, 'write what you see in a book', we now have this 'trustworthy and true' book.

Now here is an interesting observation: in this passage the expression "this book" is used seven times (v.7, 9, 10, 18[twice] and 19 [twice]). That tells us that we are at the end of John's visions. This is the closing paragraph that wraps up the whole book, and all the speakers here talk about everything God has revealed in those visions.

As we journeyed through the Book of Revelation we have seen and heard many different things. And not everything was always so easily accessible. But the message is reliable. All these events make clear one thing: Jesus Christ is coming. He will punish God's enemies and win the final victory over all sin, evil and wickedness. And that promise you can trust.

But how do you know for sure? Throughout history many people have tried to predict the future. So why are the things we have found here true and

reliable? Well, this book comes from him, who is called *the God of the spirits of the prophets*.

In the Old Testament, God authorized men like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and many others to bring his message to his people. The spirit of these prophets were under his constant guidance and control. This separated them from false prophets.

The same God is the driving force here. He is the source of all the things we have seen and heard throughout Revelation. The Holy God himself is the author of this book. And that makes it true and absolutely trustworthy.

But this angel is not the only witness. Suddenly we hear the voice of a second witness, the glorified Christ himself (v.7). And he reinforces the words of the angel, indeed, the book of Revelation is true and trustworthy.

Behold, I am coming soon, he says. He will repeat this announcement two more times, with increasing emphasis (v.12 and 20). “Behold”, please, pay attention! That is how urgent it is to remember what this book is all about.

Sometimes we struggle a bit with the word “soon”. This promise was made about 2000 years ago. What do you mean, ‘soon’? But the point is not that we should be able to put it on a human timetable. Revelation speaks about things that are already in process today. Since Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into heaven we are in the final stage of the history of God’s redemption. There is one more event to come and wrap up everything. But you and I, we do not know when he will return. So, we better be watchful, all the time!

But he **is** coming! This is so trustworthy that Jesus calls you “blessed” if you keep these words. The glorified Christ qualifies the book of Revelation as “prophecy”. We hear again that this is God’s own message. Trust his promise and be blessed.

Realize that *keeping the words of the prophecy of this book* is not just a matter of keeping them on a bookshelf, or just listening. Take these words to heart. Apply them in your life and live by them, every day. Keep them alive so that the promise of Jesus’ return determines your choices and actions, your hope and perspective. Think of the words of the apostle Peter. *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness..., since you are waiting for these things, be diligent to be found*

by him without spot or blemish, and at peace (2 Peter 3:11–14). If you do that, you are blessed; you are to be congratulated. Your future is secure.

And then the third witness takes the stand. In v.8 the apostle John himself speaks up to confirm what both the angel and Jesus have said. He has seen a lot of spectacular visions. He has heard many powerful words. And now he testifies that the words of this book are trustworthy and true indeed, because it is an accurate record of everything I saw and heard.

The book of Revelation is not made up by a man with a bizarre fantasy. It has not been assembled from ancient religious mythology. It is not the brainchild of a man whose imagination has spun out of control. No, no, it is a trustworthy report of reliable ear- and eyewitnesses, three of them!

When God wants to assure us that his message is absolutely trustworthy, he pulls out all the stops, so to speak. He calls three witnesses: his angel, his Son, and his apostle. And they all say the same things. They all confirm, they all guarantee the truth and the reliability of what we have seen and heard in John's visions.

And as all these events unfold, during our journey through the centuries toward the return of Jesus Christ, we can trust that the prophecy of this last book of the Bible is a reliable guide. It is so reliable that we can have absolute certainty in the trustworthiness of God's promise.

Yes, the storms are raging in this world. Watch a bit of TV news for a week, and you see it come by on your screen: wickedness, evil, hatred, violence, cruelty, war, terrorism, infectious diseases, political uncertainty, and economic instability, etc. No wonder many people live in fear. But in this world full of insecurity, always remember, God's promise is sure.

Jesus Christ is coming, and he will right all wrongs. He will make straight what is crooked. He will heal what is broken.

It is overwhelming when you come to think of it; as it was for John. He tells us that he was so totally perplexed, that he makes the same mistake as in Rev. 19. He goes down on his knees to worship the angel who is still with him. But this angel was only his tour-guide, just a fellow-servant. "Stop

that,” he says. “No one is worthy of worship but God alone. You and I, we only testify to the truth of his Word.”

HEED THE WARNING

In that role the angel continues. Yes, in the v.10–15 the three witnesses speak again. God’s promises are so reliable, you can trust them always. But that makes it also important to emphasize the warning not to ignore or reject what you find in the book of Revelation. And so God’s angel, God’s Son and God’s apostle are coming again, now to urge us to heed this warning. There is much at stake.

As the angel continues, he wants to make sure that we all remember how urgent it is to keep alive the prophetic words of this book. We cannot afford putting off responding to what God shows and tells us in Revelation. God’s message claims the central place in our lives. And we have to give it that place, now.

That is why the angel instructs John clearly: *Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book*. Here is a remarkable connection with the Old Testament. The prophet Daniel was told the opposite: “close up and seal the words you have heard till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4; see also 12:8–9). Daniel had heard things about a distant future; things that would still be a long time in coming.

But that is different here, since the coming of Jesus Christ. He was worthy to open the scroll and break its seals to unfold God’s plan of salvation (Rev. 5). And therefore, “what you have seen and heard, John, should not be kept secret. It must be proclaimed everywhere.” The message of Revelation is urgent and should be heard by as many people as possible.

Why? Because now *the time is near*. It must soon take place. Yes, even as we are talking, God’s prophecies are being fulfilled. John’s visions are being realized, as we are moving closer to the day of Jesus’ return.

This makes the message of Revelation utterly relevant for the church in these last days, the days between Jesus’ ascension and his promised return,

to be proclaimed, to be studied and explained during the journey to the New Jerusalem.

Everyone needs to know that now is the time to make choices. Now is the time to show your allegiance to God and to commit yourself to following Jesus Christ. Whose side are you on? You can no longer ignore it. Time is running out.

This is serious business. The angel underlines this with v.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.*

Now it almost sounds as if, when you make a choice between listening or not listening to God's Word, you will be stuck with the dramatic consequences. As if in this life no one can repent. You make your bed, you lay in it.

But that is not the point. On the contrary, you can repent. You can turn away from a dead-end road. In fact, these words are an urgent appeal to do just that, to repent from sin and evil, and turn to Jesus Christ when you still have the opportunity. Otherwise things may go from bad to worse in your life.

This is such a stark warning to keep away from evil because there is no standing still on the way of sin. Realize, if you persistently refuse to listen to the message of God's Word, if you continue to ignore it and defile yourself, if that is what you want, you can keep going. No one is going to stop you by force.

But then be aware of this: if hearing God's Word does not make you change the course of your life, it will do the opposite. It will fix you more firmly and deeper in the course you have chosen. And if that continues, then the moment will come that God himself will say, 'let him be.' Then it will indeed be too late. And if you pass that point of no return, there will not be a second chance! So, heed the warning, now!

With what he says about "the righteous" and "the holy", the angel is urging those who believe in Jesus Christ to remain strong and faithful. Under oppression God's children can easily lose heart and be tempted to compromise. But do not be distracted, he warns. Do not give in when the going gets tough. Do not flirt with sin and evil, but persevere in doing what you are

doing by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. Trust in God to give you strength for the journey.

So, yes, heed the warning, and do it now. Your Saviour is coming soon. Do not postpone the choices God wants you to make. In the book of Revelation, he puts these choices right in front of us. What do we do? In a world in which many do not care so much about God's Word, but rather go by what they feel, to this world God says that there are only two ways and two destinations.

And then we hear again the voice of the glorified Christ. He repeats with even more emphasis his urgent message: *Behold, please, pay attention. I am coming soon.* And to confirm the serious warning of the angel, he adds: *bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.*

"Remember," says Jesus, "the whole book of Revelation tells you that my coming is real and close. And when I arrive, I will arrive with my rewards. On that same day, the great day of the last Judgment, these will be distributed right away. Everyone will then receive in accordance with his or her works, eternal punishment or eternal life".

No, that does not mean that you are saved by what you are doing. The Bible is clear on that. Sinners are saved only by God's grace in Jesus Christ. But sinners are not saved in order to continue to live in sin. No, in this life already you may begin to live a holy life in thankfulness. It will not give you a basis for eternal joy, but it does show the genuineness of your faith.

Do you live by grace in gratitude? That is what God is looking for. And in his mercy he is pleased to reward that. And yes, today there will be remaining imperfections and sinful inclinations that make God's children stumble. Turn to Jesus every day, and all this will be covered by his blood.

But the point is that your and my choices today will have eternal consequences. And the day of reckoning is rapidly approaching. Then there will be no more delay. Then justice will be done, and grace will be shown in Jesus Christ.

That is why Jesus wants to convince us: "Do not harden yourself in unbelief," he says. All the promises and punishments you have been confronted

with in Revelation, take them seriously. Heed my warning words. They have eternal significance.

Why is that? “Well,” says Jesus, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*. In Revelation you will find these words also in 1:8 and 21:6, both times as titles of God Almighty. But here Jesus assures us with his claims that “I have the same power, the same glory, the same majesty and authority. I am God Almighty!”

Indeed, that’s your Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the beginning and the final goal of everything. He was before everything and he will be there when everything is gone. He survives everything and everyone. “And I will see you soon,” he says.

Therefore, heed the warning! Do not ignore him who is on his way, with his rewards with him. Your access to the New Jerusalem is at stake.

And the apostle John, the third witness, who responds again to the voice of Christ (v.14, 15), can only reinforce this. “Always remember,” he says, “there are only two ways and only two destinations.”

Here is the one (v14): *Blessed are those who wash their robes*. “Robes” stands for your life as it is affected by what you think, say, and do. Now your “robe” is naturally dirty, filthy, stained by sin. You will find the same image in the Old Testament (Zechariah 3:3).

And in this world nothing can clean it, absolutely nothing.

Only God provides the remedy. “Washing your robe” means turning to Jesus Christ, and the cleansing power of his blood. Only his sacrifice removes all my sin and guilt.

Note here that John does not talk about those “who *have* washed...”, but “those who *wash*...” – present tense! Let it be an ongoing action-item in your life. Tap into God’s forgiving grace in Jesus, day after day as we journey to the new Promised Land. And you will be blessed when you enter God’s New Jerusalem by the open gates.

And here is the other one (v.15): But *outside are the dogs...* For us dogs are popular pets; ‘Man’s best friend’. But in the ancient Middle East the many

stray dogs were not only a nuisance, they were also filthy carrion-eaters that live at the garbage-dump. Do not touch them, they carry diseases.

And so in the Bible the word ‘dog’ became an abusive characteristic for wicked folk who reject God, and who show utter disdain for his word. And then John gives a list of people who do just that. They refuse to heed Christ’s urgent warning, and they live as if his impending coming is nothing but a fairy-tale.

S PREAD THE WORD

What do we do with all these things, this urgent message of Christ: *I am coming soon?* What does God want us to do with it?

In v.16 the glorified Christ speaks again, this time to remind us of his intention with all this: *I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.*

Here is the goal, the purpose: Jesus had the churches in mind when he showed John all these visions, had them explained by an angel, and then recorded in a book.

Revelation is a testimony for the churches.

When we hear this, we immediately think of the seven churches in Asia Minor. They are listed in Rev. 1 and are separately addressed in Rev. 2 and 3. They were the first recipients.

But that is not where it stops. All the churches of Christ, of all places and all times, need to hear this grand news of Jesus’ final victory, and his urgent message *I am coming soon.* And so it comes to us today.

Isn’t it amazing when you think of that? Jesus says to you and to me: “my dear friends in..... [fill in where you live], in all the things you have seen and heard in this book of Revelation, I was thinking of you and of your future. And I am coming soon to be with you!”

“Trust me, for I am the promised King from the ancient royal house of David. *I am the bright morning star*”. When the light of other stars is fading at the break of dawn, the morning star is the last one to shine brightly.

When you see it, you know the night is almost over, a new day is near.

The world as we know it, is coming to its end. But in Jesus a new era is arriving. The day of his complete victory and full salvation is near. This makes it such an urgent message, not just for the church, but for this whole world: *Behold, I am coming soon!*

All this makes it urgent for the churches that have been given these prophetic words of Revelation, to spread the Word that Jesus is coming.

Indeed, as church of Jesus Christ, driven by the Holy Spirit, together with everyone who hears this grand message, we must never stop issuing this call: “Come.”

In v.17 the Bride (which is the well-known image of the Church), and the Spirit (which is the Holy Spirit, who dwells **in** the Church), together with those who heard the message, are pictured as calling out with one voice, “Come.”

Quite often this is seen as a prayer for Jesus’ return. And that is not impossible of course. But then we have a surprise twist in the second part of v.17: *let the one who is thirsty come*. This third “come” is clearly a call to come to Jesus and be saved. However, nowhere does v.17 indicate this as a switch from calling for Jesus to come again to calling people to come to faith.

And so it makes more sense to read ‘come’ all three times in the same way. Driven by the Holy Spirit, the church of Jesus Christ has this message for the world: ‘Come! Come to faith and follow Jesus. Come and join us on our journey to the new Promised Land. Break with Satan and his evil henchmen. Break with the culture of the day that ignores or hates God’s prophetic words. Trust his promise, the promise of a bright future in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. He is coming soon to usher in his new heaven and new earth, his New Jerusalem.’

As long as you have the opportunity, let people know that everyone who is thirsty for hope and longing for salvation may come and take and drink *the*

water of life without price. We have read about the ‘water of life’ before. It stands for the abundance of God’s grace and love in Jesus. The New Jerusalem is filled with it (Rev. 22:1).

And yes, it is for free (compare Isaiah 55:1–2). It costs you nothing because Jesus Christ paid for it. In him you will find your joy, your happiness, your life and salvation by grace alone. Do you hear the deep and tender love of your God calling? “Are you thirsty for this? Come, do not hesitate.” Do you meet people who are thirsty for this? Bring them to the water of life.

If it is so important to spread this Word, if it is so important to let people know about God’s glorious future in Jesus, if it is so urgent to get the message of Revelation out that Jesus is winning and that he is coming soon, then you also understand the warning in v.18 and 19 to leave the words of this book intact as it was given.

Tampering with the things God has made known to us will make the message powerless. So, let no one add to it or take away from it. God’s Word does not need to be updated or improved. Do not believe people who claim to have received new revelations. Do not trust folks who question or deny the trustworthiness of this book, or those who distort or twist its message, because they do not like what it says.

The consequences for people who do this will be disastrous. You will not share in the promised blessings, but you will experience the promised punishments.

So yes, spread the Word as it has been given to us. And let us remind each other of the urgent Biblical message as it finds its culmination point in Revelation: “Jesus is coming. And he is coming soon!”

Christ himself assures us of this for the third and now the very last time (v.20): *Surely, I am coming soon.* I promise to make haste to come and get here.

We are coming to the end of Revelation, which is the end of the Bible. When you close the book let it ring in your ears and echo in your heart, loud and clear: “Jesus my Lord is coming soon. And I will see him, face to face”

Then you will also join John in his response on behalf of the churches, on behalf of everyone who hears these words, who reads this book, on behalf of you and me, a response filled with joy, hope and longing: *Amen! Come, Lord Jesus...*

“We are on our way to your wedding banquet, Lord; on our way to your holy city.

And we cannot wait to get there and see you in your glory on the day that you will rent the sky asunder, appearing on the clouds of heaven”.

Is this your deep longing today? Or is it often fading in the background because of everything else you are so busy with?

Keep it alive. March on from day to day, carried by the grace of the Lord Jesus, with the prayer in your heart and on your lips: *Maranatha – Come, Lord Jesus.*



4. How can you be sure that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, so that you will not be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur (21:8 and 27, see also Rev. 20:15)?

Chapter 34 – Revelation 22:6-21

1. This last section of Revelation mentions seven times “this book”, and stresses the reliability, the trustworthiness of this book, and therefore the urgent need to “keep this book” or “the prophecy of this book”. Why is this so important and how do you do that?
2. In this closing section of Revelation the glorified Christ stresses three times: *I am coming soon*. Does that strengthen you in your faith? How? Compare 2 Peter 3:1-9 and 1 Corinthians 15:58. And what does this mean for the task of the church in this world? See the whole of v.7 and v.12.
3. What does it mean to be “thirsty for the water of life”?
4. How does it show in the way you live your life, and how should it show in the life of the church, that we are longing for the return of the Lord Jesus?