

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE END

The Finale
Revelation 22

Mark Vroegop

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. 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." "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." 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, 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." And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 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. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. "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." 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. 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, 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. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen (Rev. 22, ESV).

At my previous church, our worship team was leading us in worship through a Christmas cantata on a Sunday morning. There were choir numbers, congregational singing, and some dramatic readings. It was an excellent program. While I can't remember the title of the cantata or the specific songs, I do remember one of our pastors telling me what one of his kids said. It made me laugh.

Apparently, this particular child was growing restless with the service, and he was ready for it to be over. He kept asking his mom if the service was almost done. She told him that he needed to be quiet and that it was almost finished.

Just before the last song started, a slide appeared announcing that the program was drawing to a close. It said: Finale. And this restless child said out loud, “FINALLY.” He was desperate for the program to be over.

Revelation 22 is the finale of our journey in this book, but I’m not desperate for it to be over. Rather, I have found this hopeful, complicated, and future-oriented book to be incredibly helpful to my soul. I hope the same is true for you.

You might wonder where we are going next. Well, on April 23rd we will begin a sermon series on the book of Ephesians that will take us up to Advent. Over twenty-six sermons we are going learn about Christian identity under the title: “Becoming Who We Are.” It’s going to be a great series, and I think we will love both the theological heights of the book along with its practical application to where we really live.

Next week we have a special service planned for us to look back and review the entire book of Revelation. So, while this sermon is entitled “Finale,” we have one more week together.

At the same time, this is the final chapter of the book and it leaves us with an urgent message that is central to the book’s message: **Jesus is coming soon.**

Hopefully, you are more aligned with that message today than you were eight months ago when we started. Revelation is written not just so that you will know what’s going to happen, but so that you’ll have a greater longing for Jesus’s return.

Four Effects of Jesus’s Return

As we look at this last chapter, let’s look at it through the lens of four effects of Jesus’s return. These attempt to take the statement “Jesus is coming soon” and answer the question “So, what?” or “Why does this matter?” Here’s an overview: (1) to satisfy our deepest longings, (2) to bless the faithful, (3) to bring judgment, and (4) to complete God’s plan.

1. To satisfy our deepest longings (vv. 1-5)

The first effect that we see in this text is the way that Jesus’s return results in the satisfying of our deepest longings. In other words, it makes the world right and Christians complete. It shows us what we are really longing for.

Chapter 22 picks up where chapter 21 left off. In fact, you could consider the first five verses to be a continuation of what we looked at last week. Remember that the previous chapter ended with a long description of New Jerusalem. It was a city. It was a perfect cube, like the Holy of Holies. There’s no

temple there. It was filled with the “nations.” And only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life live there.

In verse 1, the angel takes John to see something central to the meaning of the city: the river of water of life. The city has a life-giving river running through it. Perhaps you remember from last week that I highlighted that the living place of God’s people is described as a city and not a garden. Babylon has been replaced with the New Jerusalem. God loves to redeem wicked symbols, like the cross.

But what’s fascinating about this city is that it has some of the features of the garden. New Jerusalem is like a new garden. Much of this imagery comes from the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 47 a river flows into the temple and renews everything it touches.¹ In Zechariah 14:8-9 we read this:

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one (Zech. 14:8-9).

Instead of the life-giving river flowing from the temple, however, it’s now flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. In our modern era of city water or residential wells, we can take water for granted. A body of water, like a river, was what cities were built around. Without the White River, Indianapolis wouldn’t be in central Indiana.

In the middle of the city and in center of “main street” is this nourishing river whose source is God himself. Just think about that for a moment. It’s a power symbol. It identifies that the source and sustenance of life comes directly from God himself. The centering of God is how creation was meant to work and function. I’d like you to remember the phrase “centering God” because it’s important.

In verse 2 we also see the Tree of Life with monthly fruit. This is a symbolic throwback to the garden of Eden. It’s a glorious image as the tree provides healing for the nations. This means that the city is a place of restoration. The wounds, scars, pain, and sorrow of the past are not completely healed.

Verse 3 reinforces that this healing is possible because the curse is gone. There’s nothing accursed. Instead, the presence of God and worship will be the defining reality of this world. We need Jesus to return, not just to defeat the Devil and bring us home with him. We need him to return so that the worship of God can be central again in creation. Just think about what this will be like. In the same way that evil marks the world in every way, the new creation will be marked by the centrality of God and the worship of him.

Finally, this text closes with a relationship context. Verses 4-5 are worth me reading aloud to you:

¹ Grant R. Osborne, [*Revelation*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 769.

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:4-5).

God's people will see his face—something never allowed while the presence of sin remained in the world. And in this perfect world, they will reign with him forever and ever.

The final chapter in creation is not the centering of ourselves, but of God. I've been thinking a lot about this recently, and it seems radically different than the spirit of our present age where we tend to center ourselves and especially our feelings in nearly everything. Don't get me wrong, feelings are extremely important. But when we make our thinking or our feeling primary, we get into trouble. It seems that our modern culture believes that heaven is everyone being what they feel they should be, that our deepest longing is just to be who we feel like we need to be. But that's not what heaven is like.

The glory of heaven is that we aren't the center. God is the center.

Can I just remind you, Christian, that the customizing of our lives to our likes and the centering of ourselves in everything is not what we really, truly want? It may seem like it. We may feel like it. Just remember that our therapeutic culture (the centering of our feelings) has a theology to it. And it's not how our deepest longings are met.

The deepest need in our life is to be known and loved by God as we worship him. We need Jesus to return to center himself so that our deepest longings can be satisfied.

Augustine (354–430 AD) famously said, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

2. To bless the faithful (vv. 6-9)

The second reason we need Jesus to come back is to bless the faithful. This is designed to be an exhortation as the book of Revelation concludes. The apocalyptic vision is not only designed to help us know what the future will look like but to also encourage and inspire perseverance.

In verse 6 the angel speaks again. This serves as a reinforcement of the book and the call for perseverance. The words in verse 6 probably sound familiar because we heard the phrase "these words are trustworthy and true" before in 21:5. But we also read the phrase "what must soon take place" in the very first verse in August of last year.

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 (Rev. 1:1).

Hopefully, by now, you know that Revelation is not merely a book that is designed to inform you. It's written to help Christians be faithful as the world falls apart. That's why verse 7 is so important. Jesus is speaking.

“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7).

This is a stunning statement, and we see John’s response in verses 8-9. He fell down at the feet of the angelic messenger. He was “blown away” by hearing the voice and exhortation from Jesus. But the angel not only tells John to come to his senses, but he also reiterates the exhortation regarding those who “keep the words of this book” (v. 9).

What does “blessed is one who keeps the words of prophecy” mean? When you understand this vision, it is designed to do so much more than just fulfill your curiosity about the future. It’s an inspiring vision designed to help Christians be faithful. It’s a clarion call for obedience.

The word “keep” is used throughout Revelation (see 1:3; 2:26; 3:3,8; 12:17; 14:12; 16:15). It refers to faithful obedience while facing hardship and persecution. It probably doesn’t surprise you that the Bible calls Christians to obedience. However, this particular exhortation is forward looking. It’s an exhortation to keep being faithful because Jesus is going to come soon, and those who endure will be blessed.

This becomes a critical motivation. In other words, as you think about the return of Jesus and this apocalyptic book, it should motivate Christians to continue in faithfulness. We aren’t told about the second coming primarily as a motivation to push the eject button. The vision of Revelation strengthens our resolve to be godly. Jesus is coming to bless the faithful.

3. To bring judgment (vv. 10-15)

The second coming also provides the assurance of future judgment. One of the purposes of Revelation is to highlight the second coming of Jesus as a warning to those who are on the wrong side of God with their sin.

That’s why verse 10 provides the exhortation to “not seal up the words of the prophesy of this book.” The book of Revelation should not be hidden or concealed from people. It is a book that should be read by Christians and non-Christians. That’s what verse 11 is saying. Revelation creates a dividing line.

Verses 13-14 provide a warning that Jesus is coming soon and that, when he does, he will bring judgment with him. And his judgment will have the authority of the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. In other words, he is God.

The lines will be clear. There are only two kinds of people: believers and unbelievers. There are only two destinies: heaven and hell. According to verses 14-15, there are those who (1) wash their robes, a symbol of the righteousness that comes from Jesus, and (2) those whose evil practices verify that they are not part of God’s people.

I’ve heard from some of you that, as we’ve walked through this series, you’ve invited people who are not Christians to listen. Maybe some of you are listening today or maybe you’ve been tracking with this series, trying to figure out what you believe. What a great book to take some of those steps. You probably started listening because you were curious. My hope (and I’m sure the hope of the person who

invited you) would be that you move from curious to convicted to compelled to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

The book of Revelation and the second coming of Jesus are both designed for us to ask a very important question: Do you know Jesus? Have you looked to him for the forgiveness of your sins and for eternal life? Have you come to the right conclusion about yourself and your sin—that you desperately need a savior to rescue you?

Jesus is coming soon to bring judgment. I pray that you are ready.

4. To complete God's plan (vv. 16-21)

The final verses in this glorious book are a reminder that the content of Revelation shows us the completion of God's plan. Jesus is coming soon to bring to an end the redemption of the world.

Verse 16 is another statement from Jesus. Don't miss the particular message about churches. Remember the seven letters where this book began? They were real churches with real people facing real challenges that were unique to every one of them. And this book is meant to help them make it. That's why we read words like "I am the root and descendent of David, the bright morning star" (v. 16). These titles are connected to Jesus and his messianic office and his power as King.

I hope that you feel strengthened by our study of this book. You probably understand some of the symbols better. You likely have an even greater desire to know more about this book and explore it even further. But my main goal has been for you to see God's plan for redemption so that you'll join the long line of Christians who persevered as they faced an evil world.

What's more, I pray that this book has created an even deeper passion for Jesus to return. That's what we read in verse 17. It's a verse full of longing and desire, a yearning for the plan of God to be completed. Come, Lord Jesus! Come!

This longing also creates an even greater urgency for an invitation to others. As we long for Jesus's return, it also makes us more passionate to invite others to receive the water of life.

The plan of redemption is so critical that adding or taking away from this prophecy is spiritually dangerous (vv. 18-19). Do not neglect this book. Do not add to this book. Do not take away from this book. Its message is vital. Its message is sacred. Its message is important because it is the record of the completion of God's plan for redemption. Revelation shows us what is going to happen so that Christians can be faithful all the way to the end of the age.

And then we come to the final two verses of this glorious book. They are full of desire and longing.

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen (Rev. 22:20-21).

There's a call and response. Jesus says, "Surely, I am coming soon!" And his people say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." What a moment and what a statement! The book of Revelation causes us to long for his second coming.

And this book concludes with the completion of God's plan and a benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

This glorious book ends expectantly. It concludes with the central truth of the Revelation of Jesus Christ: He's coming back. And in the meantime, knowing the plan of God for the future helps us know how to live right now.

Jesus is coming soon to (1) satisfy our deepest longings, (2) bless the faithful, (3) bring judgment, and (4) complete God's plan.

We've come to the finale—a moment where we long for Jesus to return. And when he does, our hearts will rejoice because we are finally home.

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