

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Jesus' Last Message

Revelation 22:6-21

Introduction:

Last Sunday, Simeon and Anna provided us with a model for waiting for our Lord's Second Advent. Today, I want to build on that idea of waiting by reminding us that our hope in Jesus makes the wait worth it.

People are desperate for something or someone to give them hope, so they know their life matters, that if they live a certain way, it will count for something.

By faith, we believe there is a God, that He has spoken, and that He has given us a record of what He wants us to know about Him and His purpose for us. And an important part of His purpose for us is that He wants us to spend eternity with Him.

In other words, life does not just involve the "here and now," it also involves eternity. And the quality of your experience in eternity is related to what you do here and now.

Your life now will influence how you enjoy the eternity God is preparing for you.

What this means is your life not only can have meaning and purpose now, but it impacts your eternity as well! Such knowledge provides hope, a hope that how I live my life now is worth it.

Open your Bibles to the last book in the Bible – Revelation. Once you find Revelation, turn to the last chapter.

The life that positively impacts your enjoyment of eternity is not something arbitrary or capricious. It is guided by God through His Word, as well as the teaching ministry and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit along with your fellowship with Jesus and His church.

This life God intends for us to live is not a monotone, strait jacket, one-size-fits-all kind of life. It is as diverse and variegated as this congregation. God allows for your individuality while conforming you to the image of His Son in terms of Jesus' character & attitudes.

While there are principles and truth upon which we should be unified, God will take your talents & abilities, your spiritual gift or gifts, your own unique way of doing things, and He will work through each of those in your life along with your weaknesses and your messes and failures bringing glory to Himself through you and your life.

But is it worth it?

That question was certainly in the minds of believers who first read the Apostle John's prophetic letter. Let me take a moment to set the background for you.

The church was still less than a hundred years old. Believers in Israel and then throughout the Roman Empire had been persecuted by the Jews for their blasphemy, by the Romans for either treason or just for wicked pleasure, and now in the last decade of the century, the Roman emperor Domitian, persecuted Jews and Christians as atheists. Why? Because they did not recognize the Roman emperor as divine.

Living life as a Christian in the Roman Empire was not considered good for your health! At the least, Christians were marginalized and at the worst, they were put to death for their faith. The apostle John, himself had been exiled to an island in the Aegean Sea, and that is where he received from the Lord this "revelation."

The book of Revelation contains several important themes, and one of those is the Lord's encouragement to His Church, to believers, to persevere through difficult trials and persecutions.

And after a number of messages given to John, to the seven churches, and to believers in general to encourage them to endure the adversities of the present, Jesus gives His last message to the church.

This message is the "so what" of the revelation John had received. The visions of the events yet to come are finished and the Lord provides John with this final exhortation for the believers of the first century as well as for you and me.

Follow along as I read Jesus' last message, communicated by an angel to John for believers.

REVELATION 22: 6b-21

6 ... 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."

12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone 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.

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 Tree of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. 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.

[Pray]

Imagine yourself as a believer in the latter part of the 1st century. You have heard your parents tell of the apostles who came to visit their village in Galatia. In fact, your parents knew Paul personally plus they knew some of the Gentiles that were at the Temple on the Day of Pentecost as well as having talked with a few who were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

You heard and understood the promises of the Jewish Torah regarding their Messiah and that Messiah was coming to set all captives free – that included Gentiles as well. You understood that God loved all people yet because of His holy, righteous character, sin must be judged. Yet God chose to place the penalty of sin – everyone's sin on Messiah Jesus, Who according to both testimony and His resurrection – was God in the flesh.

You understood Jesus' death on the cross was for your sin. His resurrection was the promise of life overcoming death. You believed this was true and you accepted the truth that Jesus was Savior because He was the Lord Who alone could offer such a gift.

You knew, from the apostles' teaching that you were now a Christian, a believer. You knew that you had eternal life that assured you of spending eternity in Heaven as well as now being able to live life as God intended.

But like the first disciples, there were times of doubt and worry, some confusion on how Jesus was going to fulfill the rest of the Messianic promises. It really wasn't so much IF he would fulfill them or necessarily even HOW he would do it, it was more a matter of WHEN?

But your parents and other believers whom you respected would remind you, "Jesus told us we are not to be concerned about the 'when' but with simply being faithful to His teachings and being witnesses to the villages in which we live and to the world." And then they would add, "Jesus will keep His promise to come again."

From the Jewish Scriptures, you knew that Messiah's ministry not only meant providing salvation, it meant that one day, according to the covenants God made with Israel, that Messiah would rule as the King of kings as David's heir and His rule would ensure that peace, justice righteousness and purity would prevail.

King Jesus will deal with injustice and unrighteousness decisively. King Jesus will restore peace & holiness.

King Jesus will honor all who have been faithful and persevered during their temporal life. Faithfulness in the midst of persecution and suffering will be rewarded. Just and righteous punishment will be the consequence for each one who ***“loves and practices a lie.”***

How you have longed for that day. But until that day, in the joyful anticipation of Jesus fulfilling His promise, you choose to live as if He will come TODAY!

So as God brings to a close the inspired declaration of His purpose and plan for humanity – our Bible – what better message could there be than this for those who long for Jesus to come again?

For two millennia, that promise and that hope has sustained the church. Why? Because it is hope in SOMEONE, not just a principle or ideal – it is hope in the person of Jesus Christ the Lord.

- ❖ Jesus – the One Who fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament prophets regarding the saving work of Messiah;
- ❖ Jesus – the One Who promised those who followed Him, would become fishers of men;
- ❖ Jesus – the One Who promised He would be raised from the dead on the third day;
- ❖ Jesus – the One Who promised the disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit;
- ❖ Jesus – the One Who promised Saul he would be a powerful witness in Jesus’ name to the Gentiles.

And because it is this same Jesus Who has promised to return, we HOPE! And such hope enables us to live in such a way as to impact our world for Jesus’ sake.

But, it has been almost 2,000 years since our Lord’s ascension to Heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Father. And it is not a stretch to say that we might be a bit skeptical or at least entertain doubts about the certainty of His promise.

We look at the world and can become overwhelmed with the injustice, inhumanity, unrighteousness, suffering and hardship we see – and perhaps even experience ourselves.

Jesus’ Last Message then, is just for you. He wants to give you hope. He wants you to know He is coming again.

In fact, as we read Jesus’ Last Message – you can sense the urgency in His assurance. Three times, Jesus says, ***“I am coming quickly.”***¹

Now some of you are saying to yourself, “The Lord sure has a weird sense of what ‘quick’ is.” So let’s deal with that first.

God’s timing is not our timing. Many of you, through life experiences, have figured that out already, but we need to say it. God is not bound by your digitally-shared online calendars synchronized across all your devices.

Nor is God forgetful or confused regarding His promise. He’s not sitting up in Heaven, peering at His celestial integrated event management software calendar trying to come up with the best possible day and time for Jesus to come again.²

But, “hey”, you counter – it’s been almost 2,000 years. How is that “quick”? For whatever reason, when we read “quickly,” we see it as a period of time between when the promise is made and the actual event, as in your promise to your kids – “I promise to treat you to a DQ next week.” (And then the countdown begins.) But that is not what is in view here.

What is in view is this: When the Lord comes again, it will happen quickly and it can happen at any time. It will be a very sudden event. No time to prepare, no time to make changes, no time to adjust life to fit the event.

The City of San Antonio has hosted over the years both Men’s and Women’s NCAA Final Four basketball games. They knew the date of the event several years in advance and put plans into place to be prepared for the event.

But what if the NCAA called Mayor Jones’ office on April 3 and told her, “Mayor, Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis just collapsed. We need a

¹ Revelation 22:7; 12; 20

² See 2 Peter 3 where Peter addresses the believers regarding these concerns.

venue for the Men's Final Four. We will be in town tomorrow to set everything up at the Alamodome. Just thought we'd let you know."

One possible response from Mayor Jones might be, "Well this is very sudden!"

Even more suddenly and quickly will be the return of Jesus!

What if you did know that seven days from now at 11:42 AM, CST, Jesus would come again? What difference would that make in your life? What would you change? What would you stop doing? What would you start doing?

But Jesus doesn't give us a calendar date or a time, He simply says that when He comes, that event will happen suddenly and at any moment.

On one hand that should be a great encouragement. On the other, it might just concern you some. What is really important is that we understand how our Lord wants us to be living while we wait and hope for – His return.

There are admonitions about living for Jesus in anticipation of His return scattered throughout the New Testament. Today, we will just focus on our Jesus' Last Message.

John records for us at least four responsibilities, four guidelines, as to how to live life in anticipation of the King's return.

Attentiveness

REVELATION 22:7

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

After Jesus' first affirmation of "*coming quickly*," He adds that the person who is attentive to the message of Revelation will be blessed.

The certain, sudden coming of Jesus demands our attentiveness to His word so our lives will count for Him until He calls us home to Heaven or He returns. So as we plan for the future we listen to James' counsel . . .

JAMES 4:14-15

...whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

You place your trust in your heavenly Father Who is both sovereign & good and you plan for the future while recognizing that the next breath you take may be your last. And part of that preparation is attentiveness to His Word.

Verse 7 of our text, specifically refers to attentiveness to the truths found in Revelation yet doesn't negate the need to be attentive to the whole of Scripture. Verse 14 promises blessing on those ***"...who do His commandments..."*** which sounds a lot like what Jesus said to His disciples in the Upper Room.

JOHN 15:14

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

It is interesting that the book of Revelation does not have many direct commands to individuals. Rather, it is aimed at churches (Chapters 2-3) and nations (Chapters 6-19) in detailing events before and during what is called the "Great Tribulation."

Yet, we are exhorted to give our attention to what it says, reflecting on its spirit of expectation and on its description of God's Holy character.

One reason God gives us prophecy is to help us better grasp His holy character, His transcendent glory and the beauty of what He has prepared for those who are His. Being confronted with His holy character helps us to better appreciate His grace and mercy.

When you read Revelation, there is a sense of urgency, while describing the seriousness of rejecting Christ as Savior on the one hand and the blessedness of serving Him on the other.

So, the first responsibility is Attentiveness. The second is:

Worship

REVELATION 22:8-9

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."

As John wrote this message, he was so overcome, he was moved to worship. But he was worshipping at the feet of the angel who had brought the message to John, and that was wrong.

Now it should be of some comfort that the apostles from time to time worshiped the wrong thing or person. That can happen when emotions overwhelm understanding. Yet the angel's correction of John serves to remind us, that we need to be on guard and be sure to only worship God and God alone.

Our motive might be pure, but the object of our worship is only, ever to be God. It can be tempting to worship other things, people, movements, organizations. But there is only One truly worthy of our worship: God.

My understanding of worship is that it should encompass our entire being. It is more than just what we do here on Sunday mornings. It is a life lived loving **"...the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."**³ So that all we do is to the glory of our awesome God.

Worship is a key theme of prophecy because it is an activity in which we will be engaged throughout eternity! Our worship of God here and now provides us an opportunity to practice for what we will do during eternity!

When we live life with the perspective Jesus may come at any moment, we will join with John in worshipping God alone.

Attentive to His Word; Worship God alone; and now the third responsibility recorded by John:

Proclamation

REVELATION 22:10-11

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."

In verse 10, John is specifically admonished to not seal up the words of this book. That is, Christ's at-any-moment, sudden return is not a message to be hidden. And if it is not to be hidden then it figures that this message is one that should be proclaimed.

Verse 11 may appear at first glance as fatalistic, or at the least somewhat confusing. What is Jesus saying to John?

My understanding is this: The emphasis in this passage is on the moment Christ comes back. At that moment, a person's eternal destiny is fixed. There is no second chance.

It comes with what use to be the rigidity of a sudden death playoff game in the National Football League. It used to be that when two teams played to a tie at the end of four quarters of a playoff game, they were given overtime periods to play until one team scored. But when that team scored – that was it. The game was over. The team that scored, won. The other team lost. No second chances, no do-overs, no reconsideration. It was settled. But up until that score was made, until points went on the scoreboard, there was a chance.

So it is with the second coming of Jesus Christ – when Jesus comes back, that's it. No second chances, no do-overs. But until then – and this is the emphasis in the passage – until then proclaim, live out, the message of Jesus Christ.

Such a proclamation should reflect what John records in verses 16-17.

REVELATION 22:16-17

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. 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."

As a result of the message of Revelation, the first invitation is for Christ Jesus to return, echoed by the Holy Spirit, the church, and those who heard the message within Revelation.

But while we wait for Christ to return, the second invitation is open to all those who thirst. I understand this to be an invitation to receive the free gift of eternal life offered by Jesus. Once He returns, the offer is no longer available. But until Christ does return, to paraphrase John 1:12,

...as many as receive Him, to them He gives the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...

³ Matthew 22:37 cf 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17

And,

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

The offer of eternal life by faith alone in Christ alone is available.

The Apostle Peter provides perspective for believers regarding Jesus' Second Advent when he writes:

2 PETER 3:8-9

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The longing of our Savior's heart is for those who thirst, to come and take of the water of life freely before it is too late. This is the message we proclaim.

Attentiveness, Worship, Proclamation – Three responsibilities which are all incorporated in the final one:

Service

Revelation 22:12-14

12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone 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.

This is the second time Jesus affirms His return. He adds, ***"And My reward is with Me."***

Jesus makes clear that there is a reward for believers who faithfully serve Him. This affirmation was a great source of encouragement to those believers who first heard these words.

Their experience of persecution and suffering in the name of Jesus would have been in vain were it not for the hope Jesus offered.

That is why Jesus underscores His authority to make such a claim by reminding His readers that,

"I am the Alpha & the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

He is the Lord, from eternity-past to eternity-future. He will reward those who faithfully serve Him here and now.

Conclusion

Jesus is coming! When? At any moment – Suddenly! Maybe today! Maybe tomorrow! We don't know when, but we do know this - He will return.

In response to our Lord's promises, we can live life giving full attention to God's Word, worshiping Him with fervent hearts, proclaiming the Gospel message of Christ with passion – all of this to serve our Savior in a way that reflects our hope in Him.

REVELATION 22:20

He Who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."

And we respond to our Lord's promise:

AMEN. EVEN SO COME, LORD JESUS!