

SESSION 14

REVELATION 22:6–21

The Epilogue to the Book

I. INTRODUCTION

Chapters 4–20 of the book depict the ultimate triumph of Christ in history. The way in which this is finalized is certainly an encouragement to believers. Christ triumphs! We are on the winning side!

Even though the tribulation saints must suffer much persecution, their testimony is an example to believers of every generation who face hardship (perhaps even martyrdom) and who must respond by enduring faithfully for Christ. To endure must involve maintaining our testimony to Christ and clinging tightly to the Word of God.

In 21:1–22:5, a further encouragement of a different sort is held out to believers . . . sharing the New Jerusalem with Christ.

Our commission is to *overcome*, our example is the saints of the tribulation, and our hope is the opportunity to reign with Christ in the millennium and share the New Jerusalem with Him. The remaining portion of the book (22:6-21) forms a fitting epilogue to this great book of the Bible.

II. PERSONAL CHALLENGE TO THE READERS (22:6-7)

A. Verse Six

1. The speaker: "And he said to me"

This looks back to 21:9. The one speaking to John is one of the seven angels who had the seven bowl judgments (see 15:1).

2. Observation: This verse reflects Rev 1:1 (see notes on Rev 1:1-3)

After reminding us that "These words are faithful and true" (repeated from 21:5), we are once again told that the things revealed in this book "must shortly take place." As stated earlier (see notes, page 1.2), this implies the "imminency" of the events, i.e., they are possible any day. From God's viewpoint, they will occur soon.

The duplication of these words at the beginning (Rev 1:1) and at the end (22:6) makes a nice *inclusio* to the book.

B. Verse Seven

1. Reminder: Christ is "coming quickly"

Notice that this is repeated three times in the epilogue (22:7, 12, 20; cf. 2:16; 3:11; 16:15).

LESSON: The imminency of Christ's return is a key concept in this section. We must be ready for the return of our Savior at any time. Every day, we

should remind ourselves about the parables of our Lord which taught about His sudden return to evaluate His servants. What a tragedy it would be if Christ suddenly returned, and we were wasting our lives or caught up in some shameful sin. This is such an evil day we live in, and sin can so easily engulf us. Let's remember John's words from another book:

"And now, little children, abide in Him, so that if He should appear, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 Jn 2:28).

2. A Beatitude: "Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."
- a. This is the sixth beatitude in the book, the next to last (see 22:14). This beatitude is obviously parallel to the first one in Rev 1:3:

Rev 1:3 *"Blessed is he who reads and **those who hear** the words of the prophecy, **and heed** the things which are written in it; for the time is near."*

Rev 22:7 *"Blessed is **he who heeds** the words of the prophecy of this book."*

- b. Observation: Rev 1:3 stressed hearing and heeding, whereas Rev 22:7 only stressed heeding. The latter assumes that one has now heard the contents of the book. The challenge is to heed what has been written in it.
- c. *"Heed the things"*

LESSON: Unbelievers obviously need to see who the ultimate victor is and get on the winning side by putting their faith in Christ. Believers need to listen carefully to the messages to the seven churches and prayerfully seek to be an "overcomer" so as to reign with Christ. The book of Revelation is to help us obey and have an "overcomer" mentality, not to tickle our prophetic fantasy!

III. JOHN'S REACTION: CONFIRMATION AS GENUINE PROPHECY (22:8-9)

- A. Verses 8 and 9 depict John's personal response to receiving this vision. He heard and saw from one called "His angel." This is not Jesus Himself, for in 22:9 we are told that he refuses worship and instructs John to only worship God (comp. 1:1).

LESSON: We should not be involved in worshipping angels. By implication, we should not worship humans either, since God alone is to be worshipped. Believers should be instructed not to worship Mary or any other "saints."

IV. A SECOND CHALLENGE TO THE READERS (22:10-15)

Verses 6-7 of Rev 22 were a challenge that Jesus was coming quickly, and we need to heed the things of this book. In this section, the challenge will become more pointed: rewards are at stake which may be forfeited if one does not "overcome."

A. Don't seal it up! (22:10)

This is an obvious contrast to Dan 12:4,9 in which Daniel was instructed to seal up the vision of the prophecy. In the case of Dan 12:9, sealing meant "not granting understanding." Revelation explains the events and visions of Daniel, and hence these prophetic details are no longer sealed up!

B. The *filthy* and the *holy* (22:11)

Note the contrast

Negative: do wrong / be filthy

Positive: practice righteousness / keep oneself holy

"Be filthy" is used only one other time in the NT, namely James 2:2. There it has the idea of "filthy clothes." Could this have anything to do with the "clean garment" motif in Revelation? Note Rev 3:4 — "*But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.*" Could this refer to believers? (i.e., unfaithful believers?)

Walvoord writes,

"By this he does not mean that men should remain unmoved by the prophecies of this book, but rather that if the prophecies are rejected, there is no other message that will work. If the warnings of the book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say" (Commentary, 334).

There is some similarity between Rev 22:11 and Dan 12:10. The latter states, "the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand." That there might be some relation between these verses is suggested by the fact that both are preceded by a reference to the sealing up of the book.

Dan 12:9

"Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time."

Rev 22:10

"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."

C. The reader is alerted that Christ is returning with *rewards* (22:12)

1. The placement of verse 12 with the reminder of *rewards* may suggest that the previous verse (v 11) is dealing with faithful and unfaithful believers (rather than believers and unbelievers). In any case, believers are going to be rewarded according to what they have done.

"according to what he has done" = ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ

ἔργον = work, deed (noun)

2. This looks back to what was anticipated in Rev 11:18, as well as the numerous references to our "deeds" in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2–3).
3. A brief review of "rewards"
 - a. We will be rewarded for our persecution and verbal abuse received for our

stance for Jesus. When men ostracize you! (Matt 5:12; Lk 6:22-23)

- b. Love brings our greatest reward (Matt 5:46; Lk 6:35)
(loving our enemies by faith)
- c. Motive is crucial! Deeds done for the notice or applause of men nullify our reward (Matt 6:1). This also applies to giving, praying and fasting.
- d. Even small acts will be rewarded (Matt 10:42).
- e. We will receive differing rewards according to our labor (1 Cor 3:8).
- f. Our work must first pass through God's examination before being rewarded (1 Cor 3:13,14). Test the quality!

D. The Rewarder (22:13)

The One who will come quickly and reward us is none other than the Alpha and the Omega. See 1:8 where this is a clear title for the Lord God. This is a good defense of the deity of Christ.

E. Special Rewards for Faithful Believers (22:14)

1. Two things are promised for "those who wash their robes": (1) the right to the tree of life and (2) the right to enter by the gates into the city. There is some uncertainty whether the condition and the promises pertain to all genuine believers or to those who have been judged faithful.¹ Part of the solution must involve a determination of what is meant by "wash their robes," if indeed that is the correct textual reading. Some manuscripts have "those who do his commandments" rather than "those who wash their robes."² If the correct reading is "wash their robes," there is still some question as to what this might infer. In the context of Revelation, clean robes can mean something more than simply possessing eternal salvation (recall, for instance, Rev 3:4). In Rev 7:14, we are reminded of the Tribulation martyrs who had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." This might mean that they had clean robes because they had resorted to the salvation offered by Christ.

¹Some think that these rewards are for all believers (e.g., Walvoord, 336). But this position does face some problems: (1) if the reading of the M and TR is accepted (see next footnote), obedience is the basis of the reward, not justification by faith (even if this reading is not accepted, one must still establish that "wash robes" is the same as *salvation*; and (2) the warning in Rev 22:18-19 must be taken into account—one can lose their part!

²There is a textual problem with verse 14:

- (1) "Blessed are those who wash their robes" (*NASB, NIV*) οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν

Evidence: ⋈, A, Latin Vulgate, 1006 (XI), 2020 (XV), 2053 (XIII) and other minor mss.

- (2) "Blessed are those who do his commandments" (*NKJV*) οἱ ποιῶντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ

Evidence: M (Byz. mss), Tertullian, syr^{ph} (Philoxenian), syr^h (Harclean), and other mss

Mounce, however, says that these are "those who remain undefiled by their steadfast refusal to comply with the demands of the beast" (393).

a. The right to the tree of life

This is the right to eat of the tree's fruits. Remember the promise to "overcomers" in Rev 2:7, "*To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life.*" If this is a special reward for the faithful, then the fruit is not merely eternal life (all believers have eternal life). This may indicate that there is something else to be gained by eating this fruit (a special abundance of life?). Obviously, this verse is in contrast to Genesis 1–3 where man originally had access to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Because of man's disobedience, he lost his privilege of having access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Now, at the end of the Bible, this privilege is regained. It is difficult to know what all this involves, but apparently it is something very special for those who "wash their robes."

b. The right to enter into the New Jerusalem through its gates.

Perhaps we should not assume that all the redeemed in the New Creation will live in the New Jerusalem. According to Rev 21:24, the new earth will contain many nations and the kings of those nations will travel to the New Jerusalem to take tribute to the King of kings. Is this reward a *greater access* to the New Jerusalem?

F. Exclusion for all unbelievers (22:15)

Who are these that must remain "outside the city"? The similarity of this verse with 21:8 suggests that these are unbelievers, those who have been sent to the "lake of fire." According to Rev 21:27, only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter. Some believers may have greater access or special privilege in the New Jerusalem, but unbelievers will never have any part whatsoever with the New Jerusalem. The reference to "dogs" was used in Phil 3:2 of the "false circumcision" (i.e., Jewish legalists who had not partaken of the New Covenant and the ministry of the Spirit).

V. CONCLUSION

I have stated that the purpose of the book of Revelation is to encourage and exhort believers to perseverance and faithfulness by an unveiling of Christ in His final role in world history. Although the content of the book focuses upon the period of Tribulation (the latter part of Daniel's 70th *week*), the message is timeless. Christ shall triumph, and this is the great hope of every true believer. In this present life, Satan seeks to distort God's plan and wage war against the effectiveness of the local churches by diluting and crippling those believers within them. Ultimately, he shall set up a master plan for drawing all the world after him by the creation of Babylon the great. As the saints in the tribulation resist this strategy, even so must believers in every generation stand true to Christ and faithfully endure with Him (even to the point of sacrificing one's own life, if need be). Yet we have great encouragement: our Leader shall triumph and we shall have the privilege of the New Jerusalem when every obstacle to God's will is removed. God bless you as you continue to read and study this book, and most importantly as you heed what it says.

"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Rev 2:10

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me."

Rev 22:12