

Lecture 29
"I Am Coming Soon"
Revelation 22:1-21
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When we started our study together last fall, we laid out a broad panorama of prophecy for you in our first eleven lessons prior to the Christmas break. We looked at conditions in the world that would make it accepting of the antichrist; Daniel's prophecy of the seven-year Tribulation period; how the church would be raptured and, in my opinion, not go through the Tribulation; that Jesus would come with His saints and defeat the antichrist, judge the nations (separating the sheep and the goats) and take tribulation believers into a thousand-year millennial period where Jesus would reign on earth.

At the end of that time, Satan, who was bound for the thousand years, was let loose for a time before his final defeat that throws him into Hell for eternity. At the end of the millennium there is a Great White Throne judgment that examines the Book of Life and the Lamb's Book of Life. Those not found in the Lamb's book are cast into hell with Satan. God will create a new heaven and a new earth, and a New Jerusalem will come down from heaven where citizens of heaven live with, and fellowship with, their God and see Him face to face.

Then as we studied the Book of Revelation this year, we began to see even more details through the visions given to John – the advice of Jesus to the seven churches; the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments of the Tribulation; the battle of Armageddon; the glorious return of Jesus Christ and His millennial reign and then last week, the description of the New Jerusalem

The beautiful description of the New Jerusalem captures our imagination with both a desire to be there and dismay at its beauty.

In vs. 1-5 of chapter 22 we move from a description of the exterior of the city to scenes of the interior as John continues the amazing vision of the New Jerusalem by telling us of *a river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb flowing down the great street of the city.* (Rev. 22:1)

As we studied about the temple in Ezekiel 47:1-12 remember he prophesied in verse 12, "*Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not whither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.*" Now here in Revelation 22:2 we read, "*On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the trees are for healing of the nations.*"

Every great city has its main street, avenue or boulevard. In the holy city it's marked by the flowing river of the water of life and flanked by trees. The precious commodity of water, especially to an Eastern culture, is a picture of abounding fertility, and eternal satisfaction of thirst.

We first encountered the tree of life back in Genesis 2:9 – the Garden of Eden. Remember? There was the tree of life, (we weren't told in Genesis if that tree bore twelve crops a year, but it's possible) and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree forbidden to Adam and Eve was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You know the story . . . they disobeyed God, ate its fruit, and were banned from the Garden and God placed an angel with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

Here in the New Jerusalem access to the tree of life is available to all. Some may wonder if we will eat in eternity? It will certainly not be necessary for us to eat to live, but it will not be impossible for our glorified bodies to eat. We know Jesus, in His glorified body, ate with the disciples for pleasure not sustenance.

Vs. 2 says, "*and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*" That doesn't mean that there will be sickness that needs healing, but "healing" is the word from which we derive our word "therapy." So they will yield continuous well-being to the occupants of the New Jerusalem.

Just as the place prepared for us to inhabit for eternity is magnificent, so our purpose in eternity is thrilling – we will be joyfully serving the God of our salvation; we will see His face and bear His name as a bride bears her husband's name and cherishes his face; and we will reign for ever and ever in the constant light of His glory and grace.

Vs. 5 says, "*There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.*" King David struggled with times of darkness in his life, as perhaps some of us have, yet he wrote in 2 Samuel 22:29 "*You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light.*" God has done that for us by His Spirit leading us out of spiritual darkness. 1 Peter 2:9 "*But you are a chosen people, a chosen priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.*" How wonderful it will be to behold the perpetual light of His glory for eternity!

The chapter ends with a verification, an invitation and a warning.

Sin entered this world when Satan questioned the Word of God and when Eve, entertaining the question, was led to doubt the accuracy and the authority of God's Word. Here in Revelation God concludes the Scriptures with a fresh emphasis on both – a verification.

Vs. 6 "*these words are trustworthy and true.*" That applies not only to what we've read in Revelation, but to all the Scriptures. God does not lie. What He has said He will do – He will do!

Then the Lord Himself breaks in as the angel was speaking and says to John, "*Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.*" (Rev. 22:7) The Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God pays great honor to the written Word of God. In every phase of His ministry, He was careful to honor the written Word and submit Himself to it. Remember He made it abundantly clear that by His coming He did not intend to destroy or even loosen up the Word of God, but to fulfill it to every "jot and tittle" as the KJV termed it, or as the NIV says in Matthew 5:18, "*until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will be any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*"

Jesus says, "I am coming soon." How can that be? It's been 2000 plus years. In Acts 13:36 it says, "*For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; . . .*" God does not measure time as we do. And properly understood, the final destiny of each one of us, whether lost or saved, begins the instant we die. When you have served God's purpose in your generation, you too will die. Eternity is never more than a heartbeat away . . . never further in the future than one's own death.

When we step out into eternity and the saints who have preceded us in death by a hundred – or a thousand – or many thousand years won't say, "What took you so long?" They'll be like us, new arrivals in eternity, staring in goggle-eyed amazement at the unguessed-at wonders God has prepared for us. Even if the events of Revelation do not take place for another thousand years (though I don't think that's likely) . . . it's still true, Jesus **is** coming soon. So, we ask, am I ready?

One thing we've learned for sure throughout our study of the book of Revelation is that angels are not to be worshipped. We've learned a lot about how numerous they are, how some of them look and how powerful they are. But, like us, they are servants of a Holy God – and always direct all worship to Him.

Recall that Daniel was given a preview of end times in chapters 9-12 of his book. Yet in Daniel 12:4 he was instructed, "*close up and seal the words of this scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.*"

Now, John is given this instruction, "*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.*" When we started back in September, I told you that prophecy is not only foretelling (predicting the future events), but forth-telling (sharing what God's Word has already revealed about the future). God, through the Scriptures, has foretold what was, what is, and what is to come . . . and we have been given the responsibility to share that with a world that is lost and dying. As we've

studied prophecy, we've equipped ourselves to do just that . . . share with others what God has already determined is going to happen.

The study of "last things" (Eschatology) is not optional for people who take the Bible seriously: it is not an epilogue to Christian theology (something just tacked on to intrigue us) but it is a central thrust, a theme that permeates everything, that makes the gospel apply to everything, that makes sense of everything. Haven't you found that to be true?

Revelation was written not only to inform believers of events which close the history of time and open the history of eternity, but also written to warn those who are lost of their eternal doom and to bid them to seek the Savior, Who alone can deliver them from a godless eternity in hell. The words are open to all who will read and heed.

Vs. 11 says, *"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."*

Does that suggest that God doesn't want people to change?

No, of course not. The fact is He is coming quickly and people won't have a chance to change their hearts/character. There is no last-minute transformation. No second chance after death. It's a warning that decisions made here and now determine your character and your destiny. It's a reminder that each day of our lives we're growing closer to God, walking with Him, obeying Him, learning from Him, experiencing fellowship and friendship with Him, or perhaps we are retreating from God and from heaven. It's a sobering truth.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones made this observation: "Present-day religion far too often soothes the conscience instead of awakening it; and produces a sense of self-satisfaction and eternal safety rather than a sense of our unworthiness and need."

We must all examine ourselves in the light of the prophecy of this book because the time is near. Are you moving closer to God anticipating the Second Coming of Jesus Christ - or are you rejecting His love and sacrifice and grace?

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Rev. 22:13) "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6) Jesus Christ is the only door to heaven.

Those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb; those who have accepted His sacrifice on the cross as full payment for their sins are the ones who will enter the gates of the city. Outside are the lost – those eternally separated from God. Three times in these final two chapters we find reference to what will *not* be in the holy city. Specifically, they will be in the lake of fire.

Vs. 16 leaves no room for mistake. "*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*" As the Root of David, Jesus brought David into existence. He is the Creator of life.

As the Offspring of David, Jesus came into the world, born a Jew from David's line. Both the deity and humanity of Jesus are evident here. The bright Morning Star refers back to the prophecy in Numbers 24:17, "*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.*" It heralds the end of the long night of tribulation and the dawn of a new day of eternal joy. Jesus: He is the Messiah, the promised King, the Blessed Hope. He is the fulfillment of all Scripture, all prophecy. There is nothing yet to be revealed. God's Word is complete.

Revelation closes out with 1) a last welcome, 2) a last warning, and 3) a last word.

The **last welcome** reaffirms the open arms of God. "The spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (vs. 17)

The church . . . we are the bride. The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people to draw them to God and Christians issue the invitation. "Come!" You've heard the Dwight L. Moody quip, "Some people are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." Just because He is coming soon doesn't mean we quit our jobs, sit on a hilltop and wait. We work and witness like crazy because the time is near. Evangelism is our mission . . . to snatch from the jaws of hell those who are destined to go there without the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. I've always liked what C. T. Studd once wrote:

Some people like to live within
the sound of church or chapel bell.
I'd rather run a rescue shop
within a yard of hell.

The welcome mat is still out. It's still the day of grace. The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."

The **last warning** has to do with the prophecy. It was customary in John's time for writers to put a warning against tampering at the end of writings because people copied them by hand. But this warning was not to a writer, but to the hearer. It applies to us today.

Revelation is God's truth. Don't add to it. Don't subtract from it. Certainly, a book so rich in symbolism must be interpreted carefully in light of all the Scriptures. But we must not take away its meaning by emphasizing the symbolic at the expense of the literal. And we don't destroy its intent by literalizing everything in it and ignoring the

meaning of its symbols. What is most important is that we believe it. If you ignore, reject or distort God's truth, you risk missing out on God's plan; risk enduring the terrors described in this book; risk losing out on your portion of the tree of life and the beautiful holy city.

Finally, the **last word**, affirms, "*Yes, I am coming soon.*" Our prayer like John's is . . . Amen! Come Lord Jesus. Maranatha!

This study of Revelation shows us that no Christian can escape from the demands of present day to day living into a purely "spiritual" realm of the future. This book presented to the seven churches of Revelation is a call to live and work for the Kingdom in the present, as well as anticipate the future.

Their members were to be ready to meet the risen Jesus here and now, as well as in the new Jerusalem. Repentance and faith were essential in the first century Asia Minor, just as they are for Christians at any time.

Revelation bids us take seriously the expectation of resurrection, and the promise of God's final victory in Jesus: over evil, over sin, and over death. It holds out to every believer the assurance that now, as well as at the end, God dwells with His people, and they with Him. It is a standing reminder to us, as it was to the churches in John's day, that life is stronger than death; that hope is stronger than despair; and that in the end the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and that He will reign forever and ever.

The churches of John's day were required to listen to the voices of the Spirit of God, and the exalted Jesus. That is still true. Jesus has affirmed that, in the end, the peals of divine thundering judgment will die away – and all that will be heard in the eternal city will be sounds of the living water of God's love.

I want to close with just a couple of quick thoughts. The book of James tells us that teachers will face a stricter judgment and, knowing that, we who have lectured and taught this year have done so with great reverence for God's Word and the best scholarship we have. As we've told you many times, we've presented the basic premillennial position which sees the world made up of three kinds of people – the Jews (God's chosen), the Gentiles (the unsaved), and the church of God (the saved Jew and Gentile). We believe Christ will come to earth again literally and He Himself, not the church, will usher in the millennial kingdom. He will actually reign on earth as King, and during that time the Jewish people will experience the full blessing of the promises made to Abraham and David. After the thousand years, there will be a resurrection of the dead and final judgment before creation of a new heaven and a new earth. As Matthew Henry said, "The Scriptures were written, not to make us astronomers, but to make us saints." We tried to put our focus not on the Antichrist, but on Jesus Christ.

Now that you've studied prophecy and Revelation, we remind you again briefly that there are two other major positions concerning prophecy – the postmillennial and the amillennial. We've covered them several times, so I'm not going to revisit them unless you want me to. There are copies of a chart of the various millennial positions that we handed out earlier at the back table if you want one.

As to the rapture of the church, the catching away in mid-air spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, *"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."*

I believe the rapture will come before the seven-year tribulation period. 1 Thessalonians 5:9, *"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."* The church will be in heaven during this terrible time. However, what if the rapture comes at the end of the tribulation? What if the church does go through this period? Are you ready to stand fast? Ready to refuse the mark of the beast? Ready to die in martyrdom for your faith?

We encourage you to examine the Scriptures for yourself. We need to be FAT people . . . Faithful, Available and Teachable. And the very best teacher is the Holy Spirit through God's Word.

One of the most important things about Bible prophecy is that it is meant to have an impact on the present. As it had meaning for those alive when it was written, so it continues to have a message to every generation until it is completely fulfilled. It should penetrate our lives and values now. It should cause us to do something.

2 Peter 3:11 speaks of the elements being destroyed by heat; THEREFORE, "what sort of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."

1 Thessalonians 4:18 speaks of living believers caught up with dead believers in the clouds to meet the Lord; THEREFORE, "encourage and comfort one another."

1 John 3:2,3 speaks of Christ's return; THEREFORE, "realize that one day we shall be like Him."

As I've said before, the purpose of this study of prophecy and the book of Revelation has not been to entertain the curious, but to encourage the consecrated. Peter warned about scoffers in the last days. I don't know what you've thought about this study in Revelation. (But I'm going to ask you in a minute.) The important thing is

now you know what God's Word says . . . we hope you've enjoyed the study and when you see these things begin to come to pass, "lift up your head for your redemption draweth nigh."

Let's pray. Lord, your powerful Word has touched us and taught us. Lead us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. Our heart's desire is to bring glory to you. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

(The Postmillennial position teaches that the Second Coming of Christ will occur after (post) the millennium. They look for a utopian state on earth to be brought about through the noble efforts of the church as the world is evangelized. During this "golden age" the church, not Israel will receive the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and David. The kingdom will be on earth, but it will be a church kingdom, not a Jewish one, and the King (Christ) will be absent from the earth, not present on it; He rules in the hearts of His people. The Lord will return to earth at the end of the millennium.

The Amillennial position interprets the millennium spiritually (A meaning "no"). They deny there will be any earthly millennial kingdom. The kingdom is now; it is heaven's rule over the church. They also feel the promises concerning the possession of Palestine by Abraham's descendants need not be fulfilled because the Jewish people broke the covenant by their disobedience to God. The only millennium we can expect, according to their viewpoint, is the rule of Christ, now in heaven, where He is seated on the throne of David. He will never step foot on this earth again.