



This morning we come to the last of 20 messages on the book of Revelation. We started our journey back in October. We've walked through the reading of the seven letters to the churches, the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath. We've seen stunning visions of God and the Lamb being worshipped in heaven. We've also seen the worship of the false trinity on earth: the beast, the dragon and the false prophet. We've seen the fall of Babylon the great, and we've seen another city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven to earth.

This is where we left off last week. John must have been exhausted after seeing that final, breathtaking vision of the new heavens and the new earth where there is no more crying, no more pain, no more death. But now he sort of comes back down to earth and he has to get ready to deal with ordinary life.

What's left in this book has been called the "epilogue." The epilogue comes at the end of a piece of literature and it serves to wrap up the loose ends of the story. Sometimes we're tempted to skip the epilogue, like we turn off the movie when the credits start to roll at the end. But this epilogue is important. It starts in 22:6 and ends in 22:21. In it we hear several different voices: an angel speaks, John speaks, but most importantly Jesus speaks. And when Jesus speaks there is one thing on his mind. In this epilogue, Jesus says the same thing over and over and over again. It's like this is what he wants us to remember; this is what he wants us to hang onto.

### Jesus declares, "I am coming quickly" three times

At first we're not sure who is even speaking. In v.7 as the angel is speaking to John we hear words come out of nowhere, "*And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.*" Then in v.12 we hear the same voice cry out, "*Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me...*" We learn a bit more about the speaker in the next verse when he says, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*" We've heard that before so we have an idea who this is. Finally, in v.16 the speaker's face comes into focus. He says in essence, "It's me, Jesus!" Then in v.20 he says for the third time, "*Yes, I am coming quickly.*"

You don't have to be a scholar to figure out when someone says something three times he wants to make sure it leaves an indelible print in your mind. Look at it this way: these are the

last words of Jesus in the Bible. This is what he left us with; his parting words.

It seems to me everything else in the paragraph revolves around this central affirmation. In many ways, the entire book can be summed up with this. And so I want to spend some time unpacking the implications of this truth. What do we do with this? Why should we believe this? How do we live in light of this? There are five things I want you to see. All five of these things reiterate themes from the rest of the book.

### The implications of this declaration

#### You have to believe it!

This may seem obvious to many of you. The conviction that Jesus will return is one of the core truths of our faith. All Christians everywhere have always believed in this. But have you ever stopped to really ask yourself, "Do I **really** believe this? This is pretty bizarre, end-of-the-world kind of stuff. John was a very old man and maybe he'd sort of lost his mind." But this is nothing different than what we see in the rest of the New Testament. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "*Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming*" (Mt 24:42). The levelheaded apostle Paul said, "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...*" (1 Thes 4:16). Peter said, "*The end of all things is near...*" (1 Pt 4:7). And a younger John wrote, "*Children, it is the last hour...*" (1 Jn 2:18).

What's amazing about these statements is not just that he'll come again but that his coming is **near**. Right here in v.10 it says "*for the time is near.*" But here we're over 2,000 years later and we're still waiting. How can this be **near**? Were they just flat out wrong? A couple of things to keep in mind. Keep in mind that God measures time from the perspective of eternity. Peter says, "*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day*" (2 Pt 3:9). So from our perspective **near** can't mean 2,000 years, but to God only about 2 days have passed! Also keep in mind that Jesus said even he didn't know the time of his coming. If you look closely at many of the things he said, he often implied there could be a long period of waiting for his return. For example he told his followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth as a prequel to his return (Mt 24:14). That would take a while. In one of his parables about his return he said it would be like a man going away on a long journey who gave different amounts of money to each of his servants to in-

vest while he was gone. It was only after a long time that the master came back to settle accounts (Mt 25:19).

So we have to ask ourselves the hard question, do I really believe it? And what it comes down to is do we really believe this is the Word of God? Several times in this epilogue that question comes up. In v.6 the angel says to John, *"These words are faithful and true."* In v.7 Jesus says, *"Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."* Five times in this epilogue the words of this book are referred to as prophecy. Prophecy isn't just the fore-telling of the future, but it's the forth-telling of the Word of God. You don't mess with God's word. Look at verses 18-19. *"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."*

That's a serious warning! We can't pick and choose what parts of God's word we like and what parts to ignore. People do that with Revelation. They love to read the parts about heaven or about worship or even Jesus' letters to the churches, but they ignore the hard parts about judgment and hell. So you have to start with a very simple question, do I believe the words of this prophecy? Do I believe this is God's Word and he really will come soon?

### **Worship God!**

John learns a hard lesson about this right here at the end of the book. Look at verses 8-9. *"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, 'Do not do that I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.'"*

John is so impressed by all that the angel has shown him he falls down to worship him. Do you know what I love about this? John is just so human; he's seen a lot of wonderful things, but he's still kind of confused; he still wants to worship the angel. This is encouraging to me. I look at my own life and I think I should be much farther along than I really am. But John must have felt that, too. So the angel says, "Stop! I'm just a fellow-servant. Worship God!"

This has been another theme throughout this book. If anyone asks you what Revelation is about, you could say it's all about worship. In Revelation it's not a question of **whether** you worship, but **who** you worship. Everyone worships. Those who worship right worship the Triune God: God the Father as Creator who sits on the throne, the Lamb as Redeemer who he has installed as King, and the Spirit moves among us to foster true worship. But there are others who worship the false trinity: the dragon, who

is Satan, and the beast who he has installed as king, and the false prophet who deceives people into following him.

This is really the problem of idolatry. This was a problem for the churches of John's day, as it is for our own. The seven letters showed us that. Pergamum had been tolerating the teaching of the Nicolaitans and the teaching of Balaam (2:14-15). Thyatira had been tolerating the false prophetess Jezebel (2:20). The teaching of the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel is the same: misleading God's people into idolatry.

All of us have a propensity towards the worship of that which is false. Our hearts are endless factories of idols. We easily give our affections to things or people that aren't worthy of them. But we've been made for God and our hearts are restless until we find rest in him. Some of us are like John: we want to worship the messenger rather than the One who sent him. We want to bow down to spiritual leaders whom God uses in our lives, but then when we discover they are only human we get disillusioned with the whole thing. Revelation should force all of us to ask the hard question, who or what do I really worship?

Does the affirmation that Jesus will come soon make you long to see his face? Are you eager to add your voices to the heavenly chorus around the throne? You see, the point of the book is not to allow us to fill in our timetables about when the Tribulation will begin. This book should intensify our appetite for God and evoke worship. I hope this study over the past months has done that.

### **Stay faithful until the end!**

It's hard waiting. We're like people waiting for a long lost lover who has gone off to war. Time stretches on and we wonder if he'll ever come back. We start to question if it's really worth it to keep waiting. We may even be tempted to unfaithfulness. In this epilogue, we're encouraged in several ways to hang in there and stay faithful. As we already saw, twice we're told to *"heed (keep) the words of the prophecy" (verses 7,9)*. Then look at verses 10-11. *"And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.'"*

This seems like a strange thing to say, but the idea is simply that the time is so near that soon it will be too late to change; evil-doers may as well continue to do evil, while the holy are called to persevere in holiness. As believers, we've been given the gift of righteousness, not our righteousness, but his. We've been made holy, set apart by him and for him. But we're told here to keep at it. To live out what we are. You who pursue holiness, you who work hard at being obedient to God, you who sometimes wonder if it's still worth it, keep at it! The time is near!

*“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying” (verses 14–15).* Here’s another blessing. Last week we learned all about the new heavens and the new earth. We learned that it would be a holy city, the New Jerusalem, with gates that never closed. There would be constant access. We also learned that it will be a new Eden with the Tree of Life in the middle. In the old Eden after Adam and Eve sinned they were cast out of the garden and the Tree of Life was blocked. John says, “Do you want access to that holy city? Do you want to eat from that tree with twelve kinds of fruit and leaves that heal the nations? Here’s what you need to do. Wash your robes.”

What does that mean? It’s interesting that he uses the present tense for **wash** so the idea is to do this continually. It’s not a one-time thing. It’s a continuous process. How do we do this? Back in 7:14 we read about those *“who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* We wash our robes through the blood of Jesus. If you want access to heaven you have to accept his death on the cross as payment for your sin. You have to let his blood cleanse you. And that’s not a one-time thing. You do that as an ongoing process. The Christian life is a continual process of confession and cleansing. John wrote in one of his letters, *“If we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9).* You and I will not get through today without sinning. How do we handle that? Do we hide our sin? Do we rationalize our sin? Do we accommodate our sin? Or do we just confess our sin? That’s part of staying faithful to the end.

So let me ask you, where in particular are you being challenged to stay faithful to Jesus? Where is the rub for you? Where are you tempted to say, “I’m tired of this. I’m tired of all this holiness stuff. I’m tired of always having to put others first. I’m tired of always having to say no. I’m tired of always being the odd person out. I’m tired of being different. I’m tired of having to serve. I’m tired of trying to be a witness. I’m tired of the church and the same old cast of characters.” Do you ever feel that? Jesus says, “I am coming soon. Stay faithful. It will all be worth it.”

#### **Bear witness!**

*“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 wishes take the water of life without cost” (v.17).* Now at first this sounds like the Spirit and the bride and the ones who hear are all saying “Come, Lord Jesus.” Jesus says, *“I am coming soon”* and now we say back to him “Yes, Come!” But I don’t think that’s what it’s saying. Notice the third use of **come** in this verse is addressed to the one who is thirsty; the one who wants to drink from the water of life without cost. These are unbelievers who

are invited to come to Christ. I think we should interpret the word **come** the same way throughout the verse. That means the Spirit says to those who are thirsty, *“Come.”* And the bride, we who are the church, make the same invitation, *“Come.”* If it’s really true that Jesus is coming soon there is a certain urgency to this invitation. Those of us who have already quenched our thirst on this river of life have the joy of saying to those around us, “Come.” It’s not “come to church” or “come to religion” but “come to a person who loves you, rescues you and wants to be your friend.”

Some of you have been hearing these messages from Revelation but still haven’t crossed over that line and said yes to God’s invitation. I say to you, Come! Don’t keep putting it off. Don’t keep waiting for some kind of lightning to strike you from heaven. The more you put it off the harder it will be to make that choice because the more fixed you’ll become in your resistance. Your soul is like wet cement and the longer you wait the more hardened it becomes. Are you thirsty? I’m guessing that’s why you’re here. You’ve tried all kinds of things to quench your thirst—a job, a relationship, but you’re still not satisfied. Jesus said, *“whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”* Many of us here have found this to be true. We’re not perfect people. Far from it. We’re just people who accepted the invitation to come and drink and we found forgiveness and hope and even joy. Notice it says this water is without cost. That means it’s free. Jesus paid the price so you don’t have to pay for it. You don’t have to do anything but come and drink.

#### **Live expectantly!**

*“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (v.20).* Jesus said, *“I am coming quickly.”* Now we **do** say in response to him, “Amen (Yes!). Come quickly.” I want to encourage you to live with those words in your heart and on your lips. In other places Jesus and others use the analogy of staying awake. Don’t fall asleep, they tell us. Don’t even nod off. Stay alert. Stay ready. Keep watching. Keep waiting.

#### **Conclusion**

Yesterday we attended my son’s graduation from high school. This is our last one. Next year we’ll have our oldest daughter and her family living in Kentucky, our middle daughter in graduate school in Nashville, and our son at school in Chicago. So this was a big deal for us. For 29 years we’ve had kids in our home and soon they’ll all be over 2,000 miles away.

Of course, as I watched our beaming son walk up on that stage and get his diploma after they called his name we were just so proud. But I thought about this promise Jesus makes to us, *“I am coming quickly.”* Four years ago we said to our son, “Your high school years will go quickly. Make the most of your time. Work hard. Have fun. Get good grades.” But they don’t believe

you when you say that because four years seems like an eternity. And it doesn't seem to go quickly when you're going through it. But they do look forward to that time when their name will be called and they walk across the stage and wave their diploma in the air with their family cheering and crying at the same time. Then when it's over and you look back you realize that it **did** go quickly.

Even though it doesn't feel like it, the day will come quickly for us as well. The day will come when our name is called not by the

principle but by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our name will be called and we'll walk up and get our diploma from his scarred hands. And all the waiting and all the working will be worth it. When you hear these words, "***I am coming quickly***" think of that. Think of graduation day. And let the anticipation of that day spur you on to make the most of your short time here on earth.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*