



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*The End of Time*  
Revelation 22:6–21  
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*series: The Story*

Last September we started on a journey together as a church. Our goal has been to discover the big story of the Bible from the beginning to the end. Today we cross the finish line. We come to the final chapter of The Story. I hope you've found this journey worthwhile. Our goal has been to become more biblically literate people, not just so we could fill our heads with facts but so we could know the God of the Bible better and serve him more effectively. We believe getting the word of God into our life changes us. Our vision as a church is to make and mature more followers of Christ, and we can't do that apart from God's word.

We started with Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* Today we conclude in the book of Revelation. Most people, when they think of Revelation, think of how things will end. And there's always a lot of disagreement about when that will happen and what that will look like. But, the fact is, this book isn't really about the end; it's a book about a new beginning.

This month thousands of high school and college graduates will walk across a stage and receive their diplomas. We call it commencement. These students have finished their studies; something is coming to an end. But we also know this end also marks the beginning of something new. For many high school students it means going off to college. For many college grads it means beginning a career or maybe moving back home with mom and dad.

Revelation is like a commencement: the description of the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. The book of Revelation shouldn't confuse us, it should excite us. God is bringing this world to an end with all its hassles, headaches and heartaches. And God is creating a new world and a new life for his people that will last forever.

It was early January 1977 before Ronald Reagan became President, and he was spending an afternoon with Richard Allen, who went on to become his National Security Advisor. They were talking about foreign relations and defense strategy. Reagan asked Allen, "Would you like to hear my theory about the Cold War and the Soviet Union?" Allen said, "I sure would." Reagan said, "Some people think I'm simplistic, but there's a difference between being simplistic and being simple. My theory on the Cold War is this: 'We win and they lose.' What do you think about that?"

This is the promise of the book of Revelation. Really, what it is is a promise that in the end, God and all those who align with his Son, wins. It's tough now, it's hard now, there are challenges now. It doesn't look like we're winning now. There's injustice now, loneliness now, immorality now, there's sin now. But in the end, God wins and inaugurates a new beginning where none of that exists. That's the promise of Revelation.

Can you imagine how this promise must have encouraged the original readers and listeners of this book? John was encouraging the Christians of the first century. They knew first hand what it was like to be persecuted. They'd seen crucifixions, beheadings, loved ones put into the ring with wild animals; all because of their faith. They were always under the threat of persecution. The Apostle John, who wrote this book, had been exiled to the island of Patmos. It seemed like the devil was winning the war. It seemed like they were about to be defeated, but the big message of this book is things aren't what they seem. God is on his throne. He'll bring an end to the old order and usher in the new.

The one event Revelation looks forward to is the return of Jesus Christ. In fact, this book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. He's the one who's revealed its pages. He's called *"the Alpha and there Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end"* (22:13). The first time he came he came in love and humility. The second time he'll come in power and in judgment. The question we all wonder about is when will it happen? How long must we wait? The answer comes at the end of this book in what's called the "epilogue." It starts in 22:6 and ends in 22:21.

**The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."**

**"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."**

**I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!"**

**Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong;**

let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy."

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have 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, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

"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."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

### Jesus Declares, "I am coming soon" Three Times

We hear several different voices: an angel speaks, John speaks, but most importantly Jesus speaks. And when he speaks there's one thing on his mind. He says it over and over again. This is what he wants us to remember, to hang on to. At first we're not sure who is even saying it. In v. 7 as the angel is speaking to John we hear words come out of nowhere, "*Look, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.*" Then in v. 12 we hear the same voice cry out, "*Look, I am coming soon. My reward is with me...*" 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 a third time, "*Yes, I am coming soon.*"

You don't have to be a scholar to know when someone says something three times he wants to make sure it leaves an imprint 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. Everything else in the paragraph revolves around this central affirmation. In fact, the entire book can be summed up with this.

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 several things I want you to see. All of them reiterate themes from the rest of the book.

#### Believe it!

This may seem obvious. The conviction that Jesus will return is one of the core truths of our faith. All Christians everywhere have always believed this. But have you ever stopped and asked, "Do I really believe it?" This is pretty bizarre, end-of-the-world stuff. John was an old man; maybe he'd lost his mind. But this is nothing different than what we see in the rest of the New Testament. In Matthew, Jesus says, "*Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming*" (Mt 24:42). The writer of Hebrews said, "*In just a little while he who is coming will come and will not delay*" (Heb 12:37). Peter said, "*The end of all things is near...*" (1 Pt 4:7).

What's amazing about these statements isn't 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 are over 2,000 years later and we're still waiting. How can it be near? Were they just flat out wrong? Keep in mind God measures time from the perspective of eternity. Peter said, "*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day*" (2 Pt 3:9). From our perspective "near" can't mean 2,000 years, but to God only about two days have passed! Also, if you look closely at many of the things Jesus said, he often implied there'd be a long period of waiting for his return. 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.

So we have to ask ourselves the hard question, Do I really believe it? I think some of us believe it in our hearts but we don't believe it enough to let it change our lives. And what it comes down to is do we really believe this is God's word? Several times in this epilogue that question comes up. Five times the words of this book are referred to as prophecy. Prophecy isn't just the foretelling of the future, but it's the forth-telling of the Word of God. You don't mess with God's word. John even issues a warning in verses 18–19, "*If you add to this book God will add the plagues in this book to your life. If you subtract from it God will take away your part in the tree of life and the Holy City.*" That's a serious warning! We can't pick and choose what parts of God's word we like and what parts to ignore. So ask yourself a very simple question, Do I believe the words of this prophecy? Do I believe him when he says, "I am coming soon"?

#### Worship God!

John learns a hard lesson about this right here at the end of the book. In verses 8–9 John falls down at the feet of an angel. He's so impressed by all that the angel has shown him he falls down

to worship him. The angel rebukes him and says, "Don't do that. I'm just a fellow servant. Worship God!"

I love that 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 see how often I worship that which I should not. This is a theme throughout this book. If anyone asks you what Revelation is about, say it's all about worship. It's never a question of whether you worship, but who you worship. Everyone worships. In Revelation, those who worship properly worship the Triune God: God the Father as Creator who sits on the throne, the Lamb as Redeemer who he's installed as King, and the Spirit who moves among us. But there are others who worship the false trinity: the dragon, who is Satan, the beast who he's installed as king, and the false prophet who deceives people into following him.

This is really the problem of idolatry. All of us have a propensity towards false worship. Our hearts are 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're only human we get disillusioned with the whole business. Revelation should force all of us to ask the hard question, Who do I worship?

I was at a pastor's conference this past week and someone mentioned a statistic that the most committed believers now attend church an average of 1.8 times a month. I guess it doesn't take a whole lot to keep us from corporate worship these days. We've got sporting events to attend. We've got our vacation homes to visit. We've got our reservations for brunch. I remind you this entire book started with John saying, "*On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit...*" (1:10). The Lord's Day is Sunday and even though John was in exile he wasn't going to miss an opportunity to worship. Does the affirmation that Jesus will come soon make you long to see his face and worship him? Are you eager to add your voice to the heavenly chorus around the throne? This promise should intensify our appetite for God and evoke worship.

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

It's hard waiting. We're like people waiting for a long lost lover who's 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. Look at verses 10–11. John says, "*...the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; and the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.*"

This seems like a strange thing to say, but the idea is the time is so near that soon it will be too late to change; evildoers may as well continue to do evil, while the holy are called to persevere in holiness. 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! In v. 12 he adds, "*My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.*" There is a judgment, even for believers. It won't determine where we spend eternity, but it will determine our reward.

Where we spend eternity is determined by something he says down in v. 14, "*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may go through the gates into the city.*" God is creating a new heaven and a new earth, with a tree of eternal life in a Holy City called the New Jerusalem. John says, "Do you want access to all that? Here's what you need to do. Wash your robes. If you don't wash your robes you will be left out."

What does that mean? It's interesting 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 chapter 7 John spoke of those "*who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (Rev. 7:14). We wash our robes through the blood of Jesus. If you want access to an eternity with Christ you have to accept his bloody death on the cross as payment for your sin. You have to let his blood wash 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 just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (1 Jn 1:9). You and I will not get through today without sinning in thought, word or deed. 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's 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 like that? Jesus says, "I am coming soon. Stay faithful. It will all be worth it."

### **Bear witness!**

Look at v. 17, "*The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.*" Now at first this sounds like the Spirit and the bride and the ones who are thirsty who 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 he says, "Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life." These are unbelievers who are invited to come to Christ. 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—that's us the church—makes the same invitation, "Come." If it's really true Jesus is coming soon there's an urgency to this invitation. Those of us who've 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 Jesus, who loves you, died for you, and wants to be your Savior."

Some of you have been hearing these messages from The Story 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 wait for 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 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. We found forgiveness, hope

and joy. Notice it says this water is without cost; 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. Here's a prayer for you to pray:

*Jesus, I believe you're the Son of God, that you died on the cross to rescue me from sin and death and to restore me to the Father. I choose now to turn from my sins, my self-centeredness, and every part of my life that doesn't please you. I receive your forgiveness and ask you to take your rightful place in my life as my Savior and Lord. Come rule in my heart, fill me with your love and your life, and help me to become the person you want me to be—a person like you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

If you prayed that prayer I encourage you to tell someone. You can tell someone you came with or come up front after our service ends at whatever campus you're on and someone would love to meet you and make sure you get a new Bible.

The chapter ends with this, "**He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus**" (v. 20). Jesus says, "Yes, I'm coming soon." Now we who have put our faith in him say in response, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." I want to encourage you to live with those words in your heart and on your lips. When things get hard, when you feel the ugliness of this world bearing down on you, remember to pray these three words, "Amen. Come soon" and remember that in the end, God wins.

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