

Sermon 61: Revelation 22:6-21: Epilogue

OUTLINE

- 1st exhortation
- 2nd exhortation
- 3rd exhortation
- 4th exhortation
- 5th exhortation

Introduction

We have finally come to the end of this most marvellous book of Revelation. We are not left with a number of pictures but rather a number of exhortations. The book began as an epistle, and will end as a traditional letter as well, v21. You may come to the end of this book and your head is spinning with pictures and symbols and a hundred more questions than you began with, the letter ends with clear instructions and applications. Here you are given a summary of the concrete things you can take away from this amazing book. I will be following Beale as he arranges these closing verses under 5 exhortations.

1st exhortation

V6-7, 'And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'" The exhortation is in the form of a benediction and is a call to keep the words of this prophecy. One commentator reckons that 8 of these 15 verses have to do with our acting in light of the truths of this book.

The first thing we need to notice is God giving us assurances about the certainty of what the book has revealed. We have a declaration that the words are trustworthy and true; we have it spelled out that God has sent the angel to give this message; we are reminded that God is the one who inspires the prophets. In v8 John reminds us that he is the one who heard and saw what is recorded, and responds to the realities, even though wrongly by worshipping the messenger. The book of Revelation and the message that Jesus is coming again might seem unbelievable, but we are called to believe and to keep the words of the book. The book calls us to perseverance and faithfulness in witness in a war torn situation. We are warned of the apparent hopelessness and powerful temptations coming, but we must keep to the path.

Secondly, we must remind ourselves of what the book means by soon. There are two important things we need to remember when we read this word. Firstly, when it talks about what must soon take place, this is referring to the chain of events revealed in the 7 seals, and the arising of the enemies of the church. John is warning his readers that they are the ones who will have to apply these teachings, they are not reserved for this century but the enemy satan is thrown from heaven at the ascension and is waging war on the church even in the first century. And though the events must begin soon, there are things prophesied which cover the entire church age and will only be completed at the second coming. So a sudden start does not mean a sudden end. Secondly, when we look at Christ's words of coming soon there are several things we have to keep in mind. Firstly, the book of revelation does talk about various types of coming to judge not only the climactic one at the second coming, e.g., Rev. 3:10-11, 'Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no

one may seize your crown.' Secondly, the word soon can mean imminently, but also next in line. This is often what Christ means. All the various promises that have to be done before the second coming have been done and all that awaits to be done is Christ's coming. The war is afoot, we have entered into the last phase of battle. The varieties of battlefields and opponents must not make us lose sight of the fact that the next major event is the second coming.

2nd exhortation

V8-10, 'I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.'

As in 19:10 John again falls down to worship at the angels feet and is rebuked. In many ways John is a microcosm for the church. He is a witness, he is persecuted, he stands amazed at the beauty of the harlot and is tempted to worship the messenger of such good news. He typifies our situation. We are all to be witnesses, if we are godly we will be persecuted, we are often distracted by Babylon and must be called out of our stupor, and we tend to either shoot or hero worship the messenger. Idolatry was the real temptation of John's time and if as discerning an apostle as John is prone to error, the second pithy exhortation of worshipping God is a fitting one for all times.

Notice in v10 that John is told not to seal up the book. This should remind you of Daniel who was given a vision and then told to seal it up because the time was not yet, Dan. 12. This is another argument for why we should not reserve the book of Revelation for the last generation before the rapture whose clock started ticking at the return of Israel to the land in 1948.

3rd exhortation

V11-12, 'Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.'

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.'

The onset of this final phase of history will divide the world into two types. Those who are holy and those who are not. As the devil increases his activity and takes more and more casualties, the Christians are those who are pure, persevere and hold out until death. This reality is stated in the form of a command to mark its inevitability. There are many connections with this chapter and the last in Daniel, 12:10 has its ideas repeated here, 'Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.'

Next notice that we have another reference to Christ's coming the second of three in this section. Christ will come and deal with those who have been holy or unholy. He will come to reward or to punish.

4th exhortation

V13-17, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

¹⁷ 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 desires take the water of life without price.' The key exhortation in this section is 'come'. Jesus is coming again to recompense the planet, v14 has a benediction alerting us to the outcome and why. When we are saved it is not because we are so good at washing our own clothes but because Christ washes us, and this is what gives us right of access to the tree of life. Rev. 7:13-14, 'Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Entrance and eating of the tree of life are theirs. But outside the city we have various types of sinners. Now we need to remember that this is an OT type of picture using themes of inside and outside. In Eden and out of it, in the temple and out of it, in Israel and cut off from it. We have a picture of a city and the unclean refuse in the garbage dump. But this is merely a picture to make the point, not that there will be unbelievers in the new creation who don't get into the city, but rather this is OT imagery to make the point that the unbeliever is excluded and in punishment.

There are several pointers to Christ's identity in this section, all four of them are inclusive pairs, Alpha and Omega, first and last, beginning and end, root and offspring of David. All speak of Christ's eternity and substantiate the threats of this section.

Despite the picture of those who are outside we then hear the word 'come'. Who does this refer to, is it a prayer to Christ? Or is it the Church and the Spirit calling sinners to repentance, I favour the second option. The flow of thought goes like this. Unbelievers will be punished, believe it because of who Christ is who says it, but don't be one of those who is punished, come to Christ, come to life, come to joy. Even though you are evil now, you need not always be, there is hope, flee sin, turn to Christ. The offer of life is free.

5th exhortation

V18-21, 'I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.'

Christ gives a final warning not to add or to take away from these words. They are the truth and no other telling will be allowed. These are the words that tell the truth of our situation and identity, they are the words that send people to one eternity or another, they are the words that outline the will of God for worship and holy living. They must not be tampered with. Some people have stumbled over the fact that it appears as if people can have a right to the tree of life and then lose it. This is to misread the text. The pair of adding to or taking away is a rhetorical device known as a hendiadys. It is the expression of a single idea by two words. The point is one of an eye for eye justice being administered to those who tamper with the truth. There will be those who are in the church who are false

teachers or who claim to be believers who mock these words. There are all sorts of variations of changing the truth of God even in the church by so called believers. Any loss of right to the tree of life will not be on the part of those who are truly believers but those who are pretend believers. How do you know which one you are? Do you receive these words as God's word and seek to obey them, then you do not have the spirit of satan at work in your heart to undo the truth.

The book ends with a most important benediction. We need the grace of God to hear and understand, and especially to put into practice all that we have heard. There are many impossible things that Christians will have to do in the face of terrible persecution, God's grace is sufficient and will be with us. He has supplied where He has commanded, this benediction is more a statement than a prayer, more promise than request in keeping with Christ's presence with us till the end of the age.

Keep the words, worship God, be holy, Come and don't add or take away. These are the closing exhortations to the church.

So how then do we use this book?

Four things:

Know God. This is a book that reveals our God, Father, Son and Spirit who have created, saved and now sustain the universe by an irresistible providence for our good and the destruction of all evil.

Know your enemies. We know from this book the three pronged attack of seduction, persecution and deception that are driven by demonic forces in the world.

Know the times. We know that we are in a war, but the victory is inevitable, that we are allowed to be trampled but will be preserved and conquer in death. And that this is the closing act of history before the great new day breaks in.

Know your duty. Faithful witness in an unmixed message and a brace willingness to die for the truth. Purity in the face of spiritual and carnal pollution. Faith-filled worship as we trust our souls to God as Christ did walking by faith and not by sight.

This is the book given to explain history, your duty, your enemies, and portray that God who has saved us. God did not see fit to give us a systematic theology but this profound drama of visions and paradoxes. I trust it is a little better understood, that you have gained some skills in how to treat this book in your own reading, but most importantly that you have picked up on these four things. Know God, know your enemies and his strategies, know the times, and know your duty.