

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent

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Please open your Bible to the book of Revelation and chapter 22, or turn to page \_\_\_\_\_ in the Bible under the chair in front of you. It's the very last chapter of the book of Revelation and the Bible as a whole. Sometimes, it's called revelations with an 's', but that's not quite right. It's the book of Revelation because it's about the revealing of Jesus. He is the focus of the book.

We spend a lot of time thinking about the first advent, but perhaps not as much time as we should thinking about and living in light of the second advent or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ. And that's our focus today.

Here in Revelation, John is writing to people just like us. People with problems like ours. People who were facing a culture which was opposed to their values. People who sometimes gave in to temptation and who battled their own flesh and the devil. They needed their passion to be re-kindled, just like us.

And so the glory of Christ's return – his exaltation – is being set before them. We've been thinking about His incarnation and the humility of Christ being born in a manger. But we also need to have a vision of His exaltation, the glory which is His and which will be seen by all one day. And that's what the book of Revelation provides for us.

And in these final words, we will see Jesus in His exaltation giving instructions for faithfulness, an invitation to all who thirst, and a promise that He is coming soon. So let's read what has been recorded for us...

Read **Revelation 22:6-21**

### **Intro**

Richard Baxter was an English, Non-conformist pastor who lived in the 1600's. It's said that he disciplined his whole village, the town of Kidderminster. I know him because he wrote a book called *The Reformed Pastor* in 1656. It sets a really high bar for pastors who want to shepherd and care for their flocks. In addition to that book, he wrote several others, and many articles and sermons on Scripture.

And all the while, he dealt with chronic pain, spent time in prison for his faith, had his possessions and home taken from him, and suffered with many physical ailments throughout his life.

Someone once asked him – “Given all of your suffering and problems, how have you managed to be so productive and so faithful to the Lord?”

(He ministered until he was 76.)

And Richard Baxter replied, “I think about heaven for thirty minutes every day.”

Friends, the book of Revelation gives us a glorious vision of heaven, on which we can meditate ourselves. And that’s what I hope for us to do this morning. And this vision of the future is meant to inspire us to greater faithfulness today in the midst of hardship.

In fact, G.K. Beale says in his commentary that the main point of the whole book of Revelation is that faithful endurance and obedience to the end will result in eternal blessing and reward with the ultimate end of glorifying God in Christ. That’s what the book is about. So however you read and understand and put together the pieces here, this book is intended to inspire us to faithfulness.

The book of Revelation doesn’t end with a bunch of pyrotechnics and explosive shouts. It gives us this rather tranquil picture of peace and joy and life in God’s kingdom. There are some reminders here about some of the basic elements of the Christian life. And we are to pursue these in light of the return of Christ.

Now, the chapter before us is rather difficult to break down structurally. So my points are taken from this passage at different points, some backed up by truths we find in other places in Scripture. But the main point is repeated here a few times and it’s rather easy to identify. Look at verse 7, verse 12, and verse 20...

**Revelation 22:7**

And behold, I am coming soon...

**Revelation 22:12**

“Behold, I am coming soon...

**Revelation 22:20**

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”

So the main point is that Jesus says, I am coming soon. And that's what the word 'advent' means, if you remember, "coming." So Jesus is going to come back, and He wants to make sure that we get that. In the end, Jesus is going to win, so therefore, be faithful. There's a lot of debate about how to understand this book, but that is the main point.

If you were to take stock of your spiritual fervor this past year (I know this week may feel like sort of an outlier, depending on your job.) But taken as a whole, how would you describe your spiritual passion for God in 2025? Would you be in this category: passionate, devoted, sacrificial? Or would you have to say that I'm more in this category: sluggish, inconsistent? Or maybe you'd have to say it's more accurately described as non-existent or compromised?

And so the question for you for this coming year may be, "How do I re-ignite a passion for faithfulness? How do I stay devoted to Christ over the long haul?"

Well, we find at least one line of motivation here in Revelation 22. One way to re-ignite our passion for Jesus is to be regularly thinking about and bringing to our conscious awareness the fact that the King is coming.

The certainty of His coming and the nearness of His coming should create in us an urgency about our spiritual lives. That's the point of eschatology (the study of last things). Our eschatology shouldn't make us fanatical, but faithful. The purpose of Christ's return isn't to provoke wild speculation, but rather personal sanctification. It has a very practical purpose.

Let me just quickly show that to you from a few places.

Paul says in **Titus 2:11-13**

For the grace of God has appeared [the first advent], bringing salvation for all people, **12** training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **13** waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

So the first coming of Jesus brings salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. And that has a practical effect as we renounce ungodliness and seek to live godly lives in this present age as we await our blessed hope. And notice that the blessed hope of the New Testament church is not the rapture, per se, it's the appearing or the return of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies to live with Him forever in His kingdom.

Now, I believe that there is a future kingdom that awaits us as believers. I read Revelation 20 as indicating that there is yet a future resurrection of the saints, followed by the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, followed by the second resurrection of the rest of mankind to be judged by Jesus before those who have trusted in Christ follow Him in His eternal kingdom and those who have rejected Him to the lake of fire. But this is not a message about the nuts and bolts of when exactly things will happen and in what order and what things are symbolic and what are not.

No, my primary concern (and frankly, the concern of the NT writers) is much more focused on the revelation of Jesus and what He will do, and then what that means for our lives today. Again, this is the purpose of studying the last things. Listen to...

**2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:10-13**

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.**11** Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, **12** waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! **13** But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

What sort of people ought we to be in holiness and godliness – that's how we should be.

So the second advent should cause us to evaluate our daily lives. We should make choices in light of the return of Christ. The book of Revelation should be in our functional canon – the criteria we actually use that changes how we go about our lives. Our King is coming, so don't waste your life. Our King is coming, so we've got work to do. Our King is coming, so let's be faithful.

In the spirit of the book of Revelation, I have for us seven reminders about faithfulness in light of the Return of Christ. Seven ways we are to be faithful because the King is coming back.

## **1. Be Faithful to His Word**

Let's start in verse 6...

### **Revelation 22:6**

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."

John is saying here that the words of this book, just like the rest of the Bible, are to be trusted and embraced as true. They are to be believed.

Now, it may have been a while since you've read the book of Revelation. So as a reminder, in this book the apostle John has received a series of visions outlining the opposition to God's people and the judgement of God on the earth, throughout history and particularly during the final days. And these visions include world-wide and cosmic plagues and signs (seals, trumpets, bowls) and the great battle between good and evil. And that goes all the way through the book of Revelation until chapter 22 verse 5. And then we get this sort of epilogue beginning in verse 6.

So if you're John and you've seen all of these things, you may be wondering – is all of this real? Can it really be true that all of this is going to happen? And so he is told right after all of those visions, "Yes, these words are true."

And this is true not just of the book of Revelation, but of the whole of Scripture. We believe what Psalm 119:160 says, "The sum of your word is truth." And we should let the Word of God have its way in our lives as our authority.

To quote Alfred from Batman, he says, "I am using the truth, Master Wayne. Maybe it's time we all stop trying to outsmart the truth and let it have its way."

Many are trying to outsmart the truth, rather than submitting to it and letting it have its way.

And notice the chain of inspiration here in the second half of the verse. The Lord, the God of the Spirits of the prophets, has sent His angel to show the servants what must soon take place.” So it’s from God, through an angel, to John, for God’s people. And God is overseeing it all. It’s God’s angel. He is God of the spirits of the prophets. And it’s for His servants. God is super-intending it all, preserving the purity of His Word.

And then God says, in verse 7...

**Revelation 22:7**

And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

So Jesus says, I am coming soon. And blessed, happy, flourishing is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. So we’ve been told to believe the words of God, and now we’re told to keep them, to obey them.

We are to walk in obedience and faithfulness to Word of God as we await the coming of Jesus. And we will be blessed if we are hearers and doers. And he says it again in verses 18-19...

**Revelation 22:18-19**

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.

I take this to be Jesus speaking again, and He warns that we must not add to or take away from the words of this book. So don’t add to the book of Revelation (or by extension, the whole Bible) or take away from it. But rather, take it as it is. Trust that God has given us what we need to know.

And so the application is simple – in 2026, get into the Word. Or probably better – let the Word get into you. The Bible is not just a book to read through. It’s not just about starting a reading plan so that you can check it off your list. And I’m not against that; I’m trying to read through the Bible myself. But the point is not just to skim and get through it, the point is that the Word would get *through you*. And maybe some of you should read less and meditate longer.

Many of us struggle to give attention to 'deep work.' Have you found that to be true? In our lives with phones and screens and other distractions, it can be difficult to sustain the kind of attention that the Bible rewards.

I can tell you for myself, I often find it difficult to begin the process of studying the Scriptures. To really get started is the hardest part. But once I'm in it, and it's been ten or twenty minutes or so, then I don't want to stop. But to do that, I have to sit without my phone open. I need to be in a quiet place. I know that's not always possible or convenient. But at some point in your day, you should stop scrolling and start feasting on the Word. Be faithful to His Word.

## **2. Be Faithful in worship**

Look again at verses 8-9...

### **Revelation 22:8-9**

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."

John had done something similar earlier in chapter 9, where the angel also had to tell him not to worship at his feet but worship God. This apostle who was taught by Jesus and has now lived decades as a Christian pastor and disciple...he is tempted to worship an angel. And I think that should tell us something about the inclination of the human heart to worship lesser things. Our hearts are idol factories, prone to worship created things. But John is not to worship the created angel, but the Creator, God alone. And we see in this a reminder that we must also worship God alone. The glory of angels, as marvelous as they are, fall way short of the glory and majesty and beauty of God.

As John is writing, his readers would have been surrounded by pagan idols. And so are we in our culture today. There are all kinds of things that would demand you to make sacrifices and prioritize them over worshipping God.

Maybe a good New Year's resolution for you would be to commit to being in church every week that you can this coming year? For the sake of your soul, you need to gather with others to put God first.

Like the angel tells John, worship God. He is deserving of all honor and praise. Jesus is so glorious and beautiful that nothing compares to Him. We see in other places that the worship of Jesus is a central part of His return.

### **2 Thessalonians 1:10**

...[Jesus] comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed...

On that day we will marvel at Jesus. So do you marvel at Jesus now? Are you amazed at His power and holiness as well as His incredible mercy and love? We should worship Jesus until we see Him.

### **3. Be faithful in the present.**

In verse 10, John is told...

### **Revelation 22:10**

**10** And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

This is a phrase that we hear throughout the New Testament, the time is near. The day of the Lord is at hand. So don't seal up the words. This phrase comes from Daniel 12:4, where Daniel is told, seal up the words of this prophecy because it's not yet time. But here John is told the opposite. Don't seal them, the time is near.

We're in the last days, as the NT writers say. When Jesus rose from the dead, He inaugurated the last days, and when He returns, He will consummate and bring to completion all that He began in His first coming.

The idea here is that these things are near. So this is so close it's almost as if you have no time to respond. I think that's what's being communicated in verse 11, which is a fascinating verse to consider.

### **Revelation 22:11**

Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

Every time I read those words, I hear the voice of Johnny Cash in my head singing, "When the Man Comes Around."

What's he saying? I don't think John is encouraging you to be evil. He's using language here that's provocative so that we might see how little time we have. So I think he's saying, "Listen, the day is coming when you won't have an opportunity to repent." And on that day, God will turn you over to the sins that you clamor after as Paul says in Romans 1. Repentance will no longer be possible. The way that you respond to Jesus in this life matters for your eternal destiny.

The unrighteous will still be filthy. The righteous will still do right, and the holy will be holy. Our character will be forever fixed in a final condition. I think that's the idea.

If you don't love Jesus now, you won't love Him then. Those under God's wrath, won't turn in belief and treasure Jesus as their Savior. So the word for us is – if you're going to believe, you need to do it now while there's still time.

Don't wait, young people, until you're sixty-five to turn to Jesus. You don't know what tomorrow brings. And following Jesus is better! It's worth it! So right now, follow Him. Right now, obey Him.

I went to our 20<sup>th</sup> high school class reunion this past year, and one of the conversations that we had was about how several of our classmates had already passed away in those twenty years. Friends, you just aren't guaranteed tomorrow. Don't presume that there will always be time.

Let the reality of the second coming shape your life now in the present. Be faithful now.

#### **4. Be Faithful before Jesus**

Jesus is coming soon so we should see Him. Notice how Jesus is glorious and exalted in these verses. We see a description of who He is and what He is going to do.

Look at verse 12...

#### **Revelation 22:12**

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

Jesus is going to judge the whole human race. He says, "I am coming soon..." This isn't some crazy cult leader or some televangelist who wants your money. This is Jesus.

And He says, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me. That is, he's going to repay each one for what he has done.

That includes us, doesn't it? Each one for what he has done. Human history will not go on forever. Injustice will not go on forever. The just King will return one day and say, "Enough." Don't you long for that day?

And how comprehensive will this be? It will include all people and all that we have done. Everything covered and hidden will on that day be brought to light and exposed. And it will all be laid bare before the impartial and righteous Judge.

On judgment day, our faith will be proven to be either false or true. We will not be saved by our works, but our works will show the reality of our faith.

You won't be judged on the basis of your family or your spouse, but on what you have done with Jesus.

Maybe you've heard the old story of the lady who sought to outlive three husbands so she could marry a fourth. She wanted to marry a banker, a movie star, a pastor, and a funeral director. One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go. That's one way of thinking.

But it won't help you before Jesus. It won't matter who you're married to, who your mom is, or who your dad is. All that will matter is what you have done with Jesus.

The next verses go on to describe who the faithful are.

**Revelation 22:14**

Blessed 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.

The washing of robes is a picture here of salvation. Those who have washed their robes are those who first have understood that they need washing because of the filth of sin. That is, they have acknowledged their sin and turned from it and put their hope in the blood of Jesus to cleanse them. There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lost all their guilty stains.

If you've never put your hope in Jesus, I urge you to do that today. He alone can remove your guilty stains.

And then, notice, those who have washed their robes will have the right to the tree of life. Earlier in chapter 22, John saw the tree of life, which is actually multiple trees on either side of the river. It's a reference to immortality. And they are able to enter into the city, the New Jerusalem. They will be God's people forever.

But there's also a picture of those who have rejected Christ. Verse 15...

**Revelation 22:15**

Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

So evidently, Jesus is a cat person. No dogs in the city. Well, no, I don't think the word 'dogs' here is speaking of literal dogs; it's an Old Testament image of those who are outside of the promises of God. And John gives some sins here that characterize falsehood – sorcery and sexual immorality and murderers and idolaters. Those who have not trusted in Christ and have followed the beast and the harlot and the anti-Christ will be outside the realm of God's blessing for eternity.

Our beliefs drive our behavior, right? We live and speak from what is going on in our hearts. So the point is that our beliefs about the second coming should change the way we treat our spouse, do our jobs, spend money, use technology, and everything else.

Now, what makes Jesus qualified to serve as judge over all humanity? Look at how he's described. The first part comes from verse 13...

**Revelation 22:13**

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

That is to say, Jesus is the Lord of history. He's King over it all – everything that has happened. That's what makes Him qualified to be the Judge. Then look at verse 16...

**Revelation 22:16**

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."

He's the root of David or the source of David and David's rule over God's people. And Jesus is the descendent of David. That is, He's the fulfillment of the covenant promises to David's offspring. He's both divine and human, the Lord of glory.

He's the bright morning star. He's the brightest star that appears first and announces the beginning of a new day. When Jesus comes, a new day will dawn. Jesus will shatter the darkness and bring light. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:19 that morning star rises in your hearts, meaning that we have a taste of this already, but it's not yet here in all its fullness.

For believers in Jesus, when you die, you are not entering darkness but entering the light of His presence forevermore. So be faithful before Jesus.

### **5. Be Faithful to invite**

Look at this tri-fold invitation in verse 17...

#### **Revelation 22:17**

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 bride of Christ, which is the church and the indwelling Spirit of God say to Jesus, "Come!" That's you and me inviting Jesus to come and return again!

And let the one who hears, that's all who read this book and hear its message. We say, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

And let the one who is thirsty come. Let everyone who desires take the water of life without price. All we have to do is desire it.

What do I have to do to earn this? Nothing. There's nothing you can do. Jesus has paid the price. So come and drink.

There's some wordplay here as the invitation moves from the Spirit and the bride inviting Jesus to come and now the invitation for the thirsty to come to Jesus. In many ways, this is what the whole Bible is saying to us – come and drink! The Scriptures were given to us to make us wise unto salvation. What a gracious God to invite us!

Have you ever been left out of an invitation? Maybe there was some party you wanted to go to, but you weren't invited? Friends, this is a party that you're invited to. Jesus throws the best parties. The greatest of all parties is yet to come. Ain't no party like a Jesus party, 'cause a Jesus party don't stop. The King has invited you to come.

And now, our mission is to invite others to come and partake as well. We are now telling the world to come to Jesus. We're pleading with souls to drink of the living water that alone can satisfy.

So this year, let us be a church that does that. That we would invite people who are far from God to know Him. Invite them into your home, into your life. Invite them to church so that we might invite them to Jesus. Be faithful to invite.

## **6. Be faithful in hope.**

Look at verse 20...

### **Revelation 22:20**

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

Some commentators say that this is perhaps the earliest confession of the church – Maranatha.<sup>1</sup> Come Lord! It was likely used during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The presider would say, "He is coming soon." And the congregation would say, "Amen, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

And when Jesus returns, He will usher in His kingdom of perfect peace and righteousness. We didn't talk about it, but chapter 21 and the first section of chapter 22 speak about the New Heavens and New Earth, about how Jesus will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death will be no more, about how we will see His face, and there will be no need of any light for the Lord will be in our midst. It will be a paradise of perfect peace.

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1155.

There's not a lot of peace in our world today, is there? People are looking for it and long for it. The New York Times ran an article a few years back about Mayberry Day, which is celebrated in Mount Airy, North Carolina. It's the town where Mayberry from the Andy Griffith Show was based. **(show picture)** My mom was and is a big Andy Griffith fan. We used to watch that show almost every Sunday afternoon.



Well, now there's a festival about this idealistic, fictional town, where the neighbors all look out for each other and there's a community at peace. The sheriff doesn't even wear a gun. The writer of the article says that now thousands flock there to a place that never was but a place they choose to believe once existed.<sup>2</sup> The writer asks, "Why all the excitement over this make-believe town? People come, less to escape than to search. All this tells me that people are really looking for something. They want to know if there really was a place where people trusted each other, where there's peace and serenity."

Well, that place does exist, but it's not Mayberry. It's not Hogsmeade. It's not Rivendell or Hobbiton or any other idyllic fictional town you'd like to live in. No, it's where Immanuel lives. And that's where we're headed. So be filled with hope. And then finally...

## **7. Be faithful by grace**

John concludes his book and the whole Bible with this verse. How many of you struggle to write conclusions, even on an email or a letter? What could he say – happy trails? May all your Christmases be white? Well, this is what John writes...

### **Revelation 22:21**

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

It's a fitting end, isn't it? He prays that His readers would be sustained to the end. 'Tis grace that brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home. The first advent was all about grace. And His second advent will be too. We need grace to be faithful.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a New York farmer named William Miller and he began a new religion – the Millerites. And a primary feature of this new religion was the fanatical

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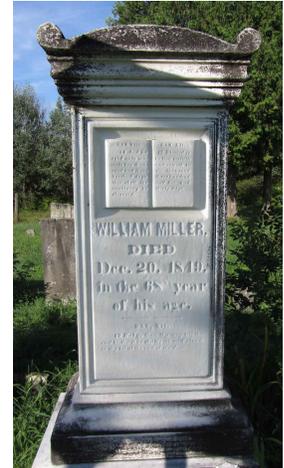
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/22/us/in-north-carolina-inspiring-mayberry-and-then-becoming-it.html>

act of predicting the exact date of Christ's return. It was announced publicly and the press had a field day with it. Jesus was to return between March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1842 and March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1843 and the people were to get ready. But, spoiler alert, Jesus didn't return. Disappointment swept through the followers, but Miller was undeterred. He admitted that he had made a few mistakes, so he recalculated and set another date – between October 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1844. Once again, his followers shut down their businesses and sold their possessions. But eventually, they were disappointed again.

Five years later, Miller died and his tombstone reads, "At the appropriate time, the end shall be."

(show photo)

And that's right. We believe that Jesus will come again. But that belief should not create crazy fanaticism, but consistent faithfulness. What a contrast between Miller and Richard Baxter who said he thinks about heaven for thirty minutes a day, and it inspired him to life with faithfulness because the King is coming.



So brothers and sisters, let us keep our hearts and minds on the return of Christ, and by His grace, let us be faithful. And so we say, "He is coming soon." And God's people said, "Amen, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

Let's pray together...