

Revelation 22 Rebuilding Everything

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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This morning we're going to finish the book of Revelation and get another glimpse of what Heaven is really like.

Last week we saw the Heavenly City from the outside – we saw the foundations of the city, and it's walls - this week we get to see what's going on inside the walls.

We'll start with an overview of the entire chapter and then we'll come back and make some final observations about what makes Heaven, Heaven. It's almost like two separate sermons in one, but it's the best way I could think of to help us see all that there is to see here.

We start in Revelation 22:1 where John is being given a tour by an angel:

1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing (Grk: therapy – health) of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

6 Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

And now in the middle of interacting with the angel, John hears God Himself speak again:

7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

9 Then he said to me, "See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

This is the second time John has been busted by angel. I don't think he's actually worshipping the angel, I think he knew better than that, especially when God Himself is so near. I think what happened is, John just falls down to worship God, but he does it near the

angel, and the angel wants to make sure there's not even a hint of the appearance that John could be worshipping anyone or anything other than God. It's a good warning for us to consider. It should be obvious in our lives that the only thing we truly worship is God.

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

Friends, Revelation is a book we're meant to understand – you're even promised a blessing for hearing it's words. It was never meant to be sealed up and put away for another time. It's for us to read and understand. It's even got a pretty simple outline:

- 1 – the vision of Jesus
- 2-3 letters to the churches
- 4-5 the scene in Heaven before God's throne
- 6-19 God's judgment poured out on the earth – aka the Tribulation
- 20 the Millennium and the final judgment at the Great White Throne
- 21-22 description of Heaven

Yes, there are some difficult parts and some strange parts, but I think as we've gone through we've also seen a lot of important and encouraging stuff too, right? And instead of focusing on all the stuff we can't be sure about, the stuff people are always speculating about, like *what form of biotechnology is really going to be used for the mark of the beast?*, we've focused on what we can know, we've seen all the worship that occurs in the book, and we've see how God's mercy and justice collide: justice because evil is judged, but mercy because the gospel goes out until the very end. God never stops calling people to repent of their sins and come to Him. In fact, we'll hear more of that call in verse 17 in a moment.

But, we've also seen that some people simply refuse to respond to that call and eventually God says, "OK. Well, that's as far as it goes." It all has to stop somewhere, and when it does, it stays put for all of eternity:

11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."

Here's the point: no one is switching teams after the fact. It's very, very, important for us to know that. God is patient, long-suffering, merciful, and kind, but at some point people must be allowed to live with their choices. You've heard the saying: You make your choices and your choices make you. On one level it's true. As one commentator wrote: "If the warnings of this book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say." (Walvoord) God goes out of His way to get in your way, but ultimately, He will not force Himself on you, He'll simply confirm what you've already determined.

12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*"

14 Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

God takes copyright law seriously!

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.

And that's it. That's the end of the Bible. We end on a note of grace, but also with a note of expectancy, expecting Jesus to come. But it's been almost two thousand years now so what's going on? Well, it may simply be a matter of perspective – don't think of it as if we are rushing toward the edge of the end – as if there's a cliff out there somewhere and we're running toward it. It may be that the end is already here, and we're simply running parallel, along the edge of the cliff instead of toward the cliff, and we're just waiting for the moment when God says, "Turn!"

Jesus said no man knows the day or the hour when He will return, but He also told us to be expectant – to always believe that today could be the day – that if it comes, we won't be caught off-guard or embarrassed. You want to be found ready when He returns.

What I'd like to do now is circle back around to verse 3 and give you a summary of the things we see here in this final chapter. Would you look at it with me?

3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

Friends, here's a perfect summary statement about Heaven – the curse is gone, God is reigning, and we are serving.

Let's take that point by point and see what we can learn.

First, the curse is gone. But what is this curse? Where did it come from?

Well, it's the curse of sin and it's been around almost as long as humans have been on earth.

We noted last week that the Bible opens with God walking with man in the Garden of Eden, and it concludes with God dwelling with man in the city of the New Jerusalem. In between are thousands of years of suffering and sin that began when man chose to do the one thing God had placed off limits in the Garden: he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When God made mankind He gave us free will – the ability to choose to love Him or not. And we took 'not.' And we still take 'not.' Intentionally and unintentionally, I choose me over God on a regular basis. The Bible calls that sin – me doing what I want to do instead of what God commands.

And sin always has consequences. Sometimes they're immediate, but all sin has eternal consequences and sooner or later our sin always catches up with us. You can rush through a red light and think you got away with it, you probably even forget about it until a few weeks later when a letter shows up in the mail with pictures of your car at the intersection and a fine that you need to pay. There was no immediate consequence to your hurry – you thought you got away with it, but eventually it caught up to you.

Well, for us, and our planet, part of the consequence of sin is separation from a holy God and the loss of the blessing He provides. We have difficulty, disease, deformities, disasters, and death all around us now. It's part of what the Bible calls a curse that settled on us and on the planet.

We find it in Genesis 3 as God confronts Adam and Eve about their rebellion. Listen to what He says:

Gen 3:16 To the woman He said:

"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire *shall be* for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."

17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':

"Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat *of* it
All the days of your life.

18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread

Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you *are*,
And to dust you shall return.”

So today we deal with pain and sorrow in childbearing, and child raising. We deal with friction and fighting and disappointment between men and women. And we struggle with our work as we try to find a decent job or get things done in our job. And then, it all culminates in death. Welcome to your happy life!

That’s a rather depressing, way of looking at things, isn’t it? But it’s true.

It’s an interesting thing, but often when something bad happens in our lives or on our planet invariably someone will go shaking their fist at God – why did He allow this to happen? Why didn’t He stop it? Why would a good God allow people to suffer? The answer is: it’s a consequence of sin; it’s part of the curse. God made things perfect, we broke it by turning away from Him, and now that decision bites us.

But God isn’t spiteful and bitter – He didn’t just walk away and leave us in our brokenness. He actually promised to fix things for us and the history of mankind is the history of Him fulfilling that promise, even as we continue to sin. It was a promise that was completed on the cross of Christ. Galatians Chapter Three tells us that Christ became accursed for us.

So now at the end, which is really a beginning, we see the curse is lifted. We saw last week, there is a new heavens and new earth with this new city where God and man will once again be together in harmony. And because sin will have been dealt with forever, it will no longer run or ruin our lives or our planet. **“There shall be no more curse.”**

Instead, we find Heaven described as a blessed environment. A Paradise.

It doesn’t seem like a big deal to you and me – we’re used to being able to go to our faucet and turn it on and out comes cool, clear, pure water. But life isn’t like that for most people on our planet, is it? And yet, our bodies need water more than anything else but air in order to survive, so here in heaven we see a crystal clear river flowing right through the city. And growing on the banks of the river is a tree that bears fruit year round, not just once a year when it’s in season. So, you have this promise of food and water, the basic sustenance for life being there and available for free – there’s no more earning your food by the sweat of your brow as we saw with the curse.

And notice: the effect of the curse on the rest of the environment is gone too – everything about heaven is described in pristine terms. The streets are “gold, like transparent glass,” the walls are gold, “like clear glass,” the river of life flows “clear as crystal.” Instead of being muddied and marred by men the whole place reflects the fact that it has been prepared by God and comes from God. There is no more death, no more decay, no more deformity or disappointments. The curse that makes our lives hard and frustrating and empty at times is gone. Forever.

This brings us to our second point – the King will resume His reign.

When we got our first glimpse of Heaven in Chapter Four we saw God’s throne and now we’re told that when the city comes down, “[the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it.](#)” We’ve said several times Heaven is more about a Who than a where or a what – it’s the fact that God is there, and that He is on the throne, that makes heaven, heaven.

One of the things you do as a parent is give your kids some space to be able to make decisions, you do the same thing as a boss – give your employees or your subordinates room to operate and see how they do. You never surrender your authority, but you back off a bit and watch how they handle things. And sometimes, they make bad choices and there are consequences.

Well, that’s kind of what God has done with us – He’s never surrendered his authority, but He has pulled back for a season and Satan has been given some room to operate on this earth, and sin is allowed to occur without always being punished immediately. God gives us room to express the things that are in our hearts, even if those things are not good.

But one day He will re-assert His authority. Completely. And there will be no one and nothing that can resist.

Here’s why that’s important – Heaven is God’s kingdom, so the only people who will be allowed in are those He allows. Heaven is not automatic.

Friends, that is really, really, important for us to know. Most people think heaven is for everyone. But the Bible says it’s not. There are going to be people *inside* of heaven with God and people *outside* in suffering and darkness alone for all of eternity. When the King asserts His power on the throne, not everyone will benefit. Look back at

[Revelation 22:14 Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.](#)

That’s the team you want to be on, right? You want to be in this parade.

[15 But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.](#)

That’s the team you don’t want to be on. The outsiders. It is vitally important that we grasp this – we tend to be sloppy and romantic in our thinking about heaven. We tend to buy into a *fluffy-angel-Hallmark-store* kind of Heaven but that’s not what we find in the Bible. The Bible very clearly tells us there will be people inside Heaven and outside of heaven for eternity. And it tells us that matters.

We get a partial list of who the people outside of heaven will be, but it's not a complete list. It's a representative list. The basic point is it's a description of people who insist on living life their way.

The problem with insisting on life your way is that you lack this little thing called sovereignty – the right to make your own decision – to make your own declarations with impunity.

But God is, Vs 13 “the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*” “the Bright and Morning Star.”

Since God is the Alpha, the Beginning, the First – He doesn't receive His power from anyone, it's not an inheritance.

And since He's the End, the Last, the Omega – He won't give His power to any one – no one is coming along next.

He has complete and total power. But the King is also kind.

Friends, in the very last book of the Bible, at the very end of it all, we see yet another call to 'come!' to God's Kingdom.

Vs 17: “the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Let me ask: Do you thirst this morning? Is there a yearning in your soul for something more, something that will refresh and satisfy? Then come. Do you desire God? Then come. Are you a whoever? Then come. God does not shut you out, He calls you out. Those who are on the outside are those who would not come because the call has been going out throughout time. It's going out to you today and, unless God returns tonight it will go out tomorrow.

The Bible says:

Is 1: 18 “**Come** now, and let us reason together,”

Says the LORD,

“Though your sins are like scarlet,

They shall be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They shall be as wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient,

You shall eat the good of the land;

20 But if you refuse and rebel,

You shall be devoured by the sword”;

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Is 55:1 "...Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, **come**, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
2 Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread,
And your wages for *what* does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
3 Incline your ear, and **come** to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—

Matt 11: 28 **Come** to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Mark 10:14 Jesus said, "...Let the little children **come** to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid *His* hands on them, and blessed them.

What are your arguments for why you can't come to Christ? Pastor David Guzik show us how God gently refutes all of them with this call for those who are thirsty to simply come.

i. If you say, "I don't understand all the Christian doctrine and theology" you can still come, because it doesn't say *whoever understands, let him take the water of life freely*.

ii. If you say, "I can't repent the way that I should. My heart is hard and I can't weep over my sins or feel bad over them as I should" you can still come, because it doesn't say *whoever feels, let him take the water of life freely*.

iii. If you say, "I don't know if I can live the Christian life the way that I should" – you can still come, because it doesn't say *whoever can, let him take the water of life freely*.

iv. If you say, "I don't know if I am worthy to live the Christian life" – you can still come, because it doesn't say *whoever is worthy, let him take the water of life freely*.

Friends, we have no excuses. So, will you come to God? Will you come to the King, will you bow before His throne? Or will you remain on the outside?

Come this morning, come and join His servants who serve Him.

That's the third and final thing we want to see this morning: first, in Heaven the curse is lifted, second, the King reasserts His rule, and third, His servants – people like you and me – will be there, and we'll come and serve Him.

Spread across the chapter we see several things about God's servants, distinguishing marks of what it means to be a Christian.

First and foremost, "4 [We] shall see His face."

Spurgeon, the great preacher of the 1800's in London said this means not only will we literally and physically look into the actual face of Jesus, but that "spiritually our mental faculties shall be enlarged, so that we'll be enabled to look into the very heart, and soul, and character of Christ, so as to understand him, his work, his love, his all in all, as we've never understood him before."

And, the verse goes on to say; we'll bear his mark on our foreheads. That may or may not be a literal thing, but what it certainly means is that it will be obvious and undeniable that everyone there is dedicated to the King. We are all His servants. As the maiden says in Song of Solomon, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."

And because we are His servants, we keep His word. Vs 9 the angel describes God's servants to John as "those who keep the words of this book." And the words of this book are taken pretty seriously, aren't they? God doesn't tolerate people playing around with His Word – this is the way He wants to communicate to us – this is what He has given us as a means for knowing Him. Part of heaven will be our understanding how right and true all of this is and how wonderfully He planned and fulfilled it all.

And last but not least, as His servants, we do God's bidding and are blessed. Vs 14 "Blessed are those who do His commandments." Part of that blessing is our right to enter the city and eat of the tree of life, but vs 12 and many other parts of the Bible tell us there will also be rewards for those who do God's will.

Friends, this is what Heaven is like – the curse is lifted, the King reasserts His rule, and His servants come and serve. Will you be there? It's an important question for you to wrestle with this morning. If you're not sure, I encourage you – find the answer. Come to God, come to the King, come and serve – give your life to Him and in exchange receive forgiveness and blessing and meaning forever. Don't sit outside resisting the call but loving your sin. Come. And tell others, come. Come find forgiveness, come find food for your soul, come find freedom from sin, come receive your King and worship Him forever.