

Understanding Revelation Part 33

Come Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:1-21

Today we'll complete a journey that began all the way back in February of 2014

As we began that part of our journey, I also encouraged you to join me in making **three commitments that we would hold to during our journey:**

- Keep my focus on Jesus
- Maintain my sense of the awe of God
- Focus on application, not just information

We've done a pretty good job in holding to those parameters that we set early on.

(Rev 22:1-5)

Unfortunately, most of us have gotten our ideas about what we'll be doing for eternity from movies and other places and people that just aren't consistent with Scripture.

So we get the picture that we'll meet Peter at the pearly gates and then once he lets us in to heaven we'll spend eternity sitting on a cloud playing a harp.

Or another common misconception is that we'll become angels after we die.

But that idea is not found anywhere in the Bible.

Much of the confusion, comes because we fail to recognize the difference between heaven – which is a temporary holding place for the souls of Christ followers – and the final estate which is described for us in Revelation 21 and 22.

That final estate consists of a New Heaven and New Earth where Christ followers will dwell for eternity after their souls have been reunited with their glorified resurrection bodies.

And the capital city of that new heaven and earth will be the New Jerusalem, a physical city of enormous proportions where Jesus has prepared a dwelling place of each of His followers.

The Bible text makes it clear that those Christ followers who dwell there will be able to go in and out of the city to both enjoy the renewed earth and to serve God according to the assignments He has given them.

It is that New Jerusalem, the capital city, that is described beginning in Revelation 21:9 and concluding in chapter 22, verse 5.

The first part of chapter 22 reaffirms some of the things we have already learned about the New Jerusalem.

We will be able to see God face to face and His glory will shine so bright that there will be no need for any other source of light.

But there are a couple of other aspects of the city that are new here – the crystal river and the tree of life.

It is not clear if we will even need to eat or drink in order to sustain our glorified resurrection bodies, these are both pictures of God's abundant provision for his children.

We will experience regular cycles of joyous provision, filled with variety.

But there is one puzzling description here – the fact that the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Since there will be no sickness or death in the eternal state, why is there a need for healing?

The Greek word translated "healing" is "therapeia" from which we get our English word "therapeutic".

Perhaps a better translation here would be "health-giving" or "life-giving".

It is not implying in any way that there is illness that needs to be cured – only that God will make provision for our complete well-being.

I wish we had more time to spend here, but I want to spend our remaining time focusing on the concluding verses of the book.

(Rev 22:6-21)

So the question I kept asking as I read this passage over and over was this:

HOW DO I "ENDURE TO THE END"?

Three key applications

1. Keep God's Word

The first thing we see in verse 6 is that the words are "trustworthy and true".

And because they are trustworthy and true, there is a blessing that comes from keeping the words of the prophecy of this book.

This is essentially the same promise that Jesus made at the very beginning of the book: **(Rev 1:3)**

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

The blessing that Jesus speaks of is reserved for those who go beyond just reading and hearing.

The blessing goes only to those who also keep the words that are written here.

But what does it mean to “keep” God’s word?

The Greek word used in both chapter 1 and again here at the end of the book means **to “guard, watch over, protect, or keep in custody”**.

It is primarily a matter of personally applying and implementing the words we find here.

In both verses, the verb “keep” is also in the present tense.

By now, we know that means it indicates continuing action.

So the blessing that Jesus promises comes to those who continually guard, watch over and protect His Word.

In other words, **we need to make the keeping of God’s Word a lifestyle, not just something that we do whenever we feel like it.**

This same idea is reinforced in verses 18 and 19.

When Jesus speaks of adding to or taking away from the words of this prophecy, He is not referring to some minor differences that we might find among different Bible translations

He is speaking about those who refuse to guard and protect God’s Word by failing to live in a manner consistent with that Word.

God is not threatening to take away the salvation of those who have received it as a gift from Him its not based on their own works in the first place.

Throughout the book of Revelation, we have consistently seen that our salvation is provided to us as a gift from God, based on faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus and not based on anything we can do to earn God’s favor.

But one thing that we do know from both reading the Bible and from our own observations is that **the greatest threat to God’s Word often comes not from those outside the body of Christ, but rather from those within the church.**

One example that immediately comes to mind is that of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

When they sold a piece of land and only brought part of the proceeds to give to the church even though they claimed they were giving the full amount, God immediately struck them dead.

God probably did that as an act of mercy for Ananias and Sapphira so that they wouldn’t further stray from God, but God also wanted to prevent the damage that could have been inflicted upon the early church by their hypocrisy.

When those who proclaim to be Christians do not live in a manner that is consistent with their professed beliefs, that almost always causes more damage to the cause of Jesus than those who are openly opposed to Him.

We “keep” God’s Word by perpetuating it in the lives of others.

As we proclaim God’s Word and share our testimony of Jesus, we have the privilege of taking the Word that has transformed our lives and passing that on to others.

2. Worship God

For the second time in the book, we find John bowing down to worship the angel who had brought the message to him.

John got so caught up in the emotion of the moment that his worship was improperly directed to someone other than God.

But before we’re too quick to condemn John, He at least recognized the need to worship in response to what God revealed to him.

We have often pictured worship as a never ending cycle of revelation and response.

God continually reveals Himself to us and then we respond to that revelation.

Throughout the book of Revelation, we have been given glimpses of the worship that is going on right now in heaven as well as the worship that will continue into the final estate of the new heaven and new earth.

And as we see here, worship of God will be one of the defining characteristics of the New Jerusalem as well.

I have worked really hard to keep our focus on Jesus and to maintain our sense of the awe of God.

There have been many places in Revelation where we just have to admit that we can’t figure things out completely because God hasn’t revealed enough yet.

But at the same time, God has revealed more than enough about Himself for us to be in awe of Him.

We have continually seen His absolute sovereignty on display.

If there is one thing we can learn from Revelation it is that even when things may appear to be spiraling out of control, God is still sovereign and completely in control.

God is never caught off guard.

He isn’t sitting on His throne wringing his hands, trying to figure out what to do next.

All of what is occurring is subject to His sovereign will.

And that is certainly reason to worship.

We've been given a glimpse of God's glory – a glory that is so bright that it will even outshine the sun.

And that glory is also worthy of our worship.

So how do we worship God's sovereignty and His glory appropriately? Let's define worship:

*Worship is...our response, both personal and corporate, to God –for who He is and what He has done! Expressed in and by the things we say, and the way we live.

We find here there are two essential aspects of worship.

First of all, we worship by the things we say.

We do that a lot of different ways.

We do it when we sing songs of praise to God.

We do it in our prayers when we give thanks and praise to him for who He is and what He does.

And we do it as we are witnesses for Jesus, verbally giving testimony about who He is and how to have a relationship with God through faith in Him.

But our worship must be more than just words.

Second, we worship by the way that we live.

In our passage there are actually two different words that are translated worship.

The first is used in verses 8 and 9 when John falls down to worship at the feet of the angel and then again when he is commanded to worship God.

The word used there literally means "to kiss towards" as an act of reverence, but it came to convey the idea of bowing down or prostrating oneself as an act of honor and worship.

Certainly one way that we honor God is through our physical actions – things like kneeling, or bowing our heads or even raising our hands toward Him are all acts that are intended to worship Him by giving Him honor.

But the word translated "worship" in verse 3 is a different Greek word that could also be translated "service".

It is the same word that is used in this familiar passage (Rom 12:1) - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

Paul uses the same word for worship here that John uses in Revelation 22:3 – a word that also means service.

In fact, in some of our English translations of both of these verses, the word "service" is used rather than "worship".

And as we have seen repeatedly, we worship when we offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God and conduct every area of our lives in a manner that is consistent with God's Word.

So there is a connection between our worship and God's Word.

It is God's Word that both reveals God to us so we can respond to Him and it is God's Word that is to serve as the guide for our conduct, which is an essential element of our worship.

And we've also seen how our worship is linked with the third principle we'll look at this morning:

3. Serve God

I talk to a lot of people who believe that our final estate in the presence of God is going to be a boring existence. Again, I'm convinced that this is a result of the unbiblical pictures that many of us have unfortunately picked up over the years.

But the picture the Bible paints is nothing like that.

In both the earthly millennial reign of Jesus and in the eternal estate to follow, Christ followers are going to be busy serving God.

We already saw a bit of that when we talked about how the word translated "worship" in verse 3 literally means "serve".

This is further confirmed in verse 12 when Jesus says that He is bringing his recompense with Him in order to repay each person for what he has done.

Unlike some similar warnings to unbelievers throughout Revelation, this is a message of encouragement to believers.

Jesus is promising that He is going to reward each of His followers according to how faithful they have been to Him in their life here on earth.

We sometimes forget that the context of Jesus' parable of the talents is His discourse about His return and His eternal kingdom.

The main reason that Jesus told that parable was to illustrate that our future assignments of service to Jesus will be dependent on how well we serve Him here on this earth.

To both servants who put their talents to work wisely and effectively, Jesus gave this same commendation: (Matthew 25:21, 23) - *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful*

servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The principle here is clear.

Those who are faithful with what has entrusted to them here on earth will be entrusted with even greater service in the eternal estate.

And what is even more encouraging is that our service in the eternal state will not be hindered and encumbered the way that it is here on earth.

In verse 3, it is revealed that there will be nothing accursed in the New Jerusalem.

God is going to remove the curse that resulted from man's sin that made his work burdensome.

Our service for eternity will be completely blessed and joyful rather than arduous and difficult.

John recorded the visions that God gave to him nearly 2,000 years ago.

And neither John's audience nor those of us who read his words today have experienced most of what is written in this book.

There is still much here that remains a mystery.

So why have we placed so much emphasis on this book by studying it for nearly a year

Certainly not for the purpose of developing and producing some nice tidy eschatological charts that allow us to depict the events portrayed in this book neatly on a timeline so that we can impress our friends or sell some books.

Certainly not so we can take the current events of the day and try to shoehorn them into the visions recorded by John.

Certainly not so we could develop or defend some particular systematic theology or some particular camp regarding the timing of the rapture.

Three times in this passage Jesus says, "I am coming soon."

As we discussed in the very first message on Revelation where we saw those same words, it is tempting to sit here 2000 years later and think that somehow we've either missed something or that these words just can't be true.

But the fact is Jesus is coming soon.

In fact, He is in the process of coming right now because that process commenced with His first coming and it will see its final culmination some day in the future.

We don't know when that day will be, but we do know this.

When it comes, these events which we see pictured here in Revelation are going to come quickly.

But the book of Revelation is not nearly as much about the future as it is about our current walk with Jesus.

In the pages of this book, we find everything that we need in order to be equipped to endure to the end and experience the fullness of our salvation in Jesus.

Because of what we read here, we can be confident that Jesus will again return one day and when He does, He will take all the things that the world has turned upside down and make them right. He will restore His creation, which has been corrupted by the sin of man and make it even better than what Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden.

And He will take all of His followers and settle them into a magnificent home that He has been preparing for us for the last 2000 years – a place that will be dominated by the glory of a God who we will be able to see face to face.

So with that knowledge in mind, we confidently occupy until he returns.

We get up every day and we keep His Word, we worship and we serve Him as we eagerly long for His return.

So today, as we come to the end of this great book of worship, it seems appropriate to end with the same prayer that John prayed in response to all that he had just seen: **Come, Lord Jesus!**