

Duty, Honor, Country

The Last Words – Part I

Revelation 22:6-9

Introduction

In my study at home I have a book entitled *Lend Me Your Ears*. It is a book with more than a thousand pages dedicated to some of the greatest speeches and tributes delivered in history; from Socrates' address before his judges as he was condemned to die to Charles the First's words before he died on the scaffold.

This book includes the defense of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms with his famous finale, "Here I stand, I can do no other." It also includes the famous sermon of Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

In addition there is the farewell address of George Washington, a challenge by Napoleon to his troops, and the rallying message from Winston Churchill to the English people during World War II. There is also the famous speech of John F. Kennedy who borrowed thoughts and expressions from a much earlier speech by Abraham Lincoln, yet included his own famous line, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

This book includes Martin Luther King's address delivered from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial exactly one hundred years after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. There is also the speech delivered to the Federal Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia – a speech that was read by a lawyer because its author, Benjamin Franklin, was too frail to read it himself – in which the delegates were challenged to adopt the Constitution of the United States.

This book also includes Thomas Jefferson's rebuke of the press for talking about things they should not, as well as a rather shocking speech from a young Mark Twain in which he made fun of the famous authors Emerson, Holmes, and Longfellow, who happened to be sitting in the audience.

One of my favorite speeches was delivered by Douglas MacArthur at West Point in what would become his final address.

MacArthur had begun his military career of nearly fifty years as a student at West Point in 1899

and rose in rank to become the Supreme Commander of the allied forces through World War II. Two years before he died at the age of 82, he was invited back to West Point where he addressed the academy with a stirring challenge built around three words: duty, honor, and country.

Let me pull out a paragraph from this speech in which MacArthur said,

Duty, honor, and country: Those three . . . words . . . teach you . . . not to substitute words for action . . . to learn to stand up in the storm, but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future, yet never neglect the past; to be serious, yet never take yourself too seriously . . . [These words] teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.ⁱ

MacArthur's speech was even more profound given the fact that the words were coming from the lips of an old soldier, a man with little time left to live.

For quite some time now, we have been listening to a soldier of another sort deliver one message after another. We have been studying the address of the Apostle John – a man in his early nineties with just a few more years to live.

The difference between the speeches of statesman and heroes like the ones I have briefly mentioned and John the Apostle's message is that John's message is not just inspiring, it is inspired. His are not merely the words of a hero veteran of the faith – they are the words of God delivered through him.

As John begins to wrap up his inspired record in chapter 22 of his book of Revelation, verses 6 through 21 form an epilogue – closing thoughts in this Spirit-inspired speech. John will challenge us, invite us, remind us, warn us, and deepen us with powerful, God-breathed words.

Keep in mind that these are the closing words of God's inspired Revelation. These are the last words

from God, for now, but we shall one day hear Him and see Him face to face.

Turn in your Bible to John's closing address in Revelation chapter 22. You will immediately notice that all that John saw and all that we have learned through this record of scripture is meant to produce certain responses.

Anticipation

The first response is anticipation. Notice this as the epilogue begins in verse 6.

And he [the angel] said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

In other words, "John, you weren't seeing things! You didn't make this stuff up. Just as God's spirit controlled the spirits of the prophets to deliver His inspired word in the past, so you have been under the management of the Holy Spirit to deliver my word about the future."

The Apostle Peter put it this way in II Peter 1:21.

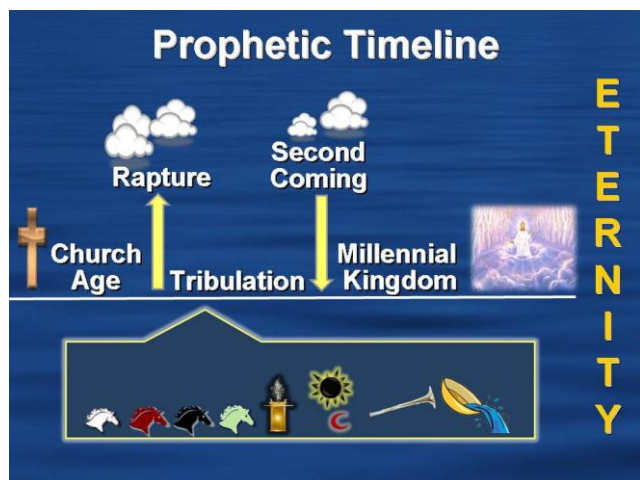
. . . no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

John, however, has an edge in this process of inspiration – he is an eyewitness to the prophetic panorama. Skip to verse 8 where John writes,

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. . . .

The timeless Creator pulled back the curtain of time and took John into the future where he could hear and see the drama of prophetic history unfold.

John is literally back from the future and records what he heard and saw.



What have we learned from John's revelation?

The first few chapters of his revelation revealed Christ's challenge to the church during the present church age. Seven letters to seven churches not only span the course of church history but define the potential of every local church in every generation. The church is warned, encouraged, motivated, and instructed in these special delivery letters.

The scene then shifts dramatically from viewing the church on earth to seeing the church in heaven, singing a new song to its Redeemer.

How did the church go from earth to heaven? Paul answered this question when he wrote to the Thessalonians about the whisking away of the church – the rapture – suddenly and without warning to be with Christ. This is just prior to what Jesus Christ described in Matthew 24 as the time of "tribulation".

So, in that exact chronology, John's revelation shifts back again from viewing the church in heaven to the Tribulation, which then begins on planet Earth.

Most of the book of Revelation covers this seven year period – a time of unparalleled human suffering, demonic activity, cosmic disturbance, Jewish awakening, gospel preaching, and global crises. Chapters 6-19 cover this intense period of time when the antichrist forms his one-world coalition and one-world religion.

The antichrist is the first horseman who rides onto the world's stage – a peacemaker who manages for the first time in modern history to forge a time of peace on earth. Weapons are laid down. Coexistence actually looks like it has a chance.

People have tried to make this work throughout human history, but then someone invents a bigger canon. How does one coexist with someone who is trying to kill them?

The rider on the white horse – whom we have learned is the antichrist – will bring peace for a brief period of time.

However, it all unravels as God's wrath is unleashed on planet Earth. From the four horsemen to the final pouring out of the bowl, God's wrath and judgment pummel the earth.

As we study this period of seven years, we discover five primary purposes that God accomplishes through the Tribulation.

1. Israel will be revived and readied for her true Messiah's second coming and His millennial kingdom on the earth.

2. God's sovereignty will be revealed throughout His creation, and it will clearly be seen that this was not our planet after all – it was His. This was not our air, our water, or our nature either. It was never ruled by mother earth, but by Father God who rules all things.
3. The counterfeit master plan of Satan will be exposed after briefly succeeding and then falling apart. Satan will be seen for what he is – a lying, conniving, God-hating, Christian-despising, blood-lusting, pride-hungering fallen angel; he will be exposed.
4. The rebellion of man's heart against the gospel of grace will be fully demonstrated, even during all the terrible things unleashed on planet Earth – from stars falling from their orbits to a global earthquake, from water turning into blood to a worldwide famine, from demons unleashed to torment the human race to a global darkness that will envelop everyone but those who have come to believe in Christ. Even though mankind knows that all of this is the wrath of God against unbelief, they will refuse to repent and the rebellion of their hearts against God will be fully demonstrated.

There is one more purpose for the Tribulation that John revealed. Not only will Israel be revived nationally, God's sovereignty displayed over all of creation, the counterfeit plan of Satan exposed as a lie, and the rebellion of mankind reach self-destructive levels never seen before, but in the midst of all of this there is one more purpose.

5. There will be millions of people, of every tongue, tribe, and nation, who will be saved through the preaching of the gospel. This will be the greatest spiritual awakening in the history of humanity.

Was John the first to prophesy of these events? Not on your life – he was the last to prophesy of these events.

- Amos prophesied of the wrath of God and a coming Gentile world power;
- Isaiah prophesied of Israel's conversion along with cosmic disturbances;
- Zechariah prophesied of the salvation of Gentiles and the appearance of Christ;
- Daniel's prophesied of how long the Tribulation would last, the coming of the

antichrist as Satan's prince, the desecration of a newly built temple, a coming world empire, and the appearance of the Son of Man – the Messiah.

The Tribulation ends with the second coming of Christ. This will not be in the air to rapture His church. John sees Christ in His second coming (in chapter 19) with His redeemed – riding on white stallions and already clothed in wedding garments. We, as believers, descend with Him to establish this glorious Millennial Kingdom – a thousand years long.

Those who came to faith during the Tribulation and survived now become the population on earth that we, the glorified, immortal redeemed reign over as the earth is healed and populated over the course of a thousand years, and Christ sits on David's throne.

John next sees and hears something that we find hard to fathom. After a thousand years of benevolent rule when the earth and its population enjoy incredible success and health – mortals living for hundreds of years and even the animal kingdom reverting back to the conditions of the Garden of Eden where the lion will lay down with the lamb – Satan is able to raise an army numbering as the sands of the sea and march toward Jerusalem to attempt to overthrow Christ the King and His beloved.

One word destroys them all, incarcerates Satan forever in hell, and begins the great white throne judgment. This judgment is when all the unbelieving world of all time is judged and sentenced to an eternal hell.

Then chapter 21 begins and John describes the Father's house. And what a house!

Rising for miles into the sky and spreading miles in every direction, the Father's house of gold becomes the capitol building of a brand new earth and a brand new universe.

Heaven, for us, is introduced.

The Father's house is set on gemstones the size of freight cars and its gates are fashioned out of pearls the size of stadiums. From His throne flows a river flanked on either side by orchards bearing fruit year round.

John describes heaven by telling us what will not be there – no more death, no more sadness, sorrow, or pain.

Eternity has begun.

This was two and a half years in quick review!

You might come to the end of this review and say, “That’s got to be science fiction. There’s no way all that is coming true! In fact, it’s too good to be true, and you know what they say about things that are too good to be true? They aren’t true!”

The angel that is commissioned to be John’s companion guide anticipates this kind of response from John and from us. This is why the Spirit of God moves immediately to the statement in verse 6 of chapter 22,

... “These words are faithful and true” . . .

In other words, “John, you’re not dreaming! These magnificent scenes and these amazing promises are true. They will come to pass.”ⁱⁱ

“John, you can anticipate everything you’ve seen and everything you’ve heard to literally take place. The Lord is the God who has directed the prophets before you and now directs you, John. These prophecies are equally true.”

The ending is not too good to be true! All these things will come to pass.

What anticipation! I can tell you personally that I have come to look for the rapture as never before. It has to be soon. I have come to long for the moment when we return with Christ to set up a thousand-year kingdom on the earth, in which millions of Tribulation believers will be under our rule as they populate the earth. They will expand commerce, education, the arts, and the ministry of the gospel under Christ’s direct presence like never before imagined.

For the first time in our lives we will be able to serve Christ as His co-regents in places He assigns for us throughout the world. The exciting part is that we will serve Him with sinlessness, consistency, stability, perspective, balance, wisdom, and undiluted joy.

In our glorified bodies, our old sinful flesh will never get in the way again. We will all be able to serve in such a way that every one of the redeemed will hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

This is only the beginning.

However, anticipation is not enough. There must be another response to all that we have learned from John’s eyewitness account.

Application

There must be the response of application. Notice verse 7.

And behold, I am coming quickly. . . .

The word “quickly” means that everything related to the coming of Christ – including all that John has revealed to us – will happen in a short amount of time. It may seem to us to have been drawn out for a long time, but from the perspective of eternity, everything in the book of Revelation is going to happen fast. This is the idea in this verse.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice what John writes in light of this truth in the last part of verse 7.

. . . Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.

This could be rendered, “take it to heart”.^{iv}

In other words, “Live in light of what you have learned!”

God did not just give us the prophecy of end times so we would be smarter, but so that we would be surrendered.

John wrote in one of his earlier letters,

. . . when He appears, we will be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.

And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself . . .

(I John 3:2-3)

The truth of prophecy is not just to give us the ability to draw out a timeline and a chart, but to help us develop character and pursue the pleasure of Christ.

This is the consistent encouragement of scripture. Paul ends his statements regarding the coming resurrection of the believer at the rapture of the church in I Corinthians 15 by exhorting the believer in light of this coming day to remain . . .

. . . steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain [when He comes]. (I Corinthians 15:58)

Paul also wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians that he preferred . . .

. . . to be at home with the Lord. (II Corinthians 5:8)

As a result of anticipating his future dwelling place, Paul writes,

Therefore, [I] also have as [my] ambition . . . to be pleasing to Him. (II Corinthians 5:9)

One author put it well when he wrote in his commentary on Revelation that eschatology – that is, the doctrine of last things, the doctrine of future events – leads to ethics.^v

In other words, we not only anticipate our future with Jesus Christ, but we live in light of it!

Anticipation should lead to application.

What will happen to us later clarifies and motivates how we live now.

Even our gathering today – on the Lord’s day – is an application of our anticipation.

The writer of Hebrews put it to the church this way,

[Do not forsake] the assembling of ourselves together . . . (Hebrews 10:25)

This is every pastor’s favorite verse! How many times have you been beaten over the head with this one?

However, why do we meet? So pastors can have some job security with people showing up? No. The writer of Hebrews is not finished.

. . . to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . .

and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

(Hebrews 10:24-25)

In other words, we should be increasing our encouragement of one another to apply the truths of scripture as we anticipate more and more the last days approaching.

The day is drawing near. If the writer of Hebrews thought the day was drawing near when he lived 1,900 years ago, how much more should we be filled with a sense of anticipation and a desire to encourage one another toward the application of biblical truths?

The day has drawn nearer than it has ever been!

As John the Apostle, this old soldier of the cross, begins his final remarks, he was and wants us to also be anticipating all of this and applying our lives in light of it.

Adoration

John is so overwhelmed that he falls in response at the feet of the angel to worship. Notice verses 8-9.

. . . when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

But he said to me, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. . . .”

Do you know what the angel has just done? He has collected all the Old Testament saints represented by the prophets and those who heeded their words, along with all the angelic hosts of heaven and New Testament saints together. Then the timeless command and privilege comes echoing from his lips to all of us,

“. . . Worship God.”

Anticipation leads to application which ultimately leads to adoration.

There is only One worthy of worship. The Greek word in this verse for “worship” is “proskuneo” (προσκυνεω). It is a compound word – “pro” (προ), meaning “toward,” and “kuneo” (κυνεω), meaning, well, let me just say it has an interesting history.

Etymologists have shown that “kuneo” is related to the high German root word, “kuss,” which transliterated, gives us our word, “kiss”.^{vi}

“Proskuneo” historically means “to kiss toward”.

This actually developed the religious practice of blowing kisses.

The Greeks showed their adoration for their many gods by blowing kisses toward their idols.^{vii}

This developed further to an act of bowing before a god and even before a superior, while at the same time moving the hand near the mouth in a circular motion. This motion meant the person was blowing many kisses toward their superior.

King Nebuchadnezzar did this before Daniel after Daniel correctly interpreted the dream – he bowed and paid homage to Daniel.

Over time this word expanded to mean “trembling before a superior or serving or simply bowing toward a superior”.

This is what John is doing in verse 8. He is paying homage to this angel; he is communicating that he believes the angel is superior to him.

He is not worshipping the angel because he has suddenly become an idolater and thinks that an angel is worthy of worship. He is simply paying homage to the angel because after all that the angel has shown him and explained to him, John assumes the angel is superior to him.

This explains the context for the angel's response. Notice again in verse 9,

... ***“Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours . . .”***

In other words, “I’m not your superior; I’m just a fellow slave of God. I’m not better than you.”

The angel effectively educates John that in the hierarchy of heaven, no one pays homage to any superior but to God alone.

So, blow kisses to God alone. He alone deserves adoration.

What an interesting perspective this is. Every time we speak highly of God, we “proskunew” – blow Him a kiss.

Every time we thank Him, we blow Him a kiss. Every time we obey His word, we blow a kiss toward our sovereign Lord. We are paying homage to His singular superiority in our lives.

Conclusion

As John begins his epilogue, he makes it clear that all he has seen and all he has learned and transferred to us by the inspired text should produce at least three results in us. These include:

- A growing anticipation of delight in the coming day;
- A commitment to application in light of the coming day;
- Daily adoration for the One who alone has promised us the coming day, and who alone can deliver just as He has promised.

Can we help but *love* Him and live our lives *for* Him knowing that one day we will live *with* Him forever?

Anticipate that day and live in light of it and blow Him kisses as you wait for it. Thank Him ahead of time for this eternal future of grace and glory.

What glory it will be – what incredible, eternal glory!

ⁱ William Safire, Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History (W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 75.

ⁱⁱ Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record (Tyndale, 1986), p. 471.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 472.

^{iv} Mark Wilson, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Revelation (Zondervan, 2002), p. 130.

^v Grant R. Osborne, Baker Exegetical Commentary: Revelation (Baker Academic, 2002), p. 783.

^{vi} Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume VI (Eerdmans, 1968), p. 758.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 758.