

The Final Promise

The Last Words – Part IV

Revelation 22:20-21

Introduction

In his book on heaven, Stephen Lawson told the story of a Philadelphia law firm that sent a beautiful floral arrangement to associates who were opening new offices in the Baltimore area. When the flowers arrived, due to a mix up at the florist, instead of congratulating the new achievement, the card read, “Our Deepest Sympathy”. When the florist was called and asked about the mistake, he said, “Oh no, I’ve mixed up the arrangements . . . which means the flowers that went to the funeral home said, “Congratulations on your new location.”¹

For Christians, this is actually pretty good theology. Death is the doorway to their new location. And what a location – the glory of God, sinless perfection in that eternal state, a glorified body, perfect service to God, uninterrupted lives of undiluted joy and unceasing worship unto Christ our Lord.

So where would we go to learn of the glories of heaven?

- Where would we go as a church to rediscover our mission on earth?
- Where would we study to unravel the mysteries of prophecies?
- Where would we see a description of God’s throne in heaven and His wrath poured out on earth?
- What book would we read that justifies the final judgment of Christ on all unbelief and where would we find it described in all its horror?
- Where would we hear the invitation for all to come and drink of salvation?
- Where would we discover why those who drink of salvation dare to believe that they will co-reign with Christ?
- Where would we watch the progression of nations and the revival of Israel?
- Where would we go to learn of a new universe with a new earth where orchards grow and rivers flow along avenues of gold?

- Where would we look to see the final day – the fulfillment of God’s promises – and watch time morph into the everlasting kingdom?

One place sums it all up. We find all of this and more in the book of Revelation.

The Revelation of John parallels, explains, and completes the prophecies of Daniel, Prime Minister of Babylon and prophet of God.

The Apostle John was given a different setting than Daniel. John was exiled on the island Patmos, which was used as a quarry mine by the Roman Empire and operated by hardened criminals and enemies of the state.

Daniel, the Prime Minister of Babylon, delivered end-time prophecies from the palaces of Babylon, while John delivered the final prophecies from the obscurity and austerity of a rocky island surrounded by the Aegean Sea.

It is ironic that the final prophecies of Christ’s triumph over the nations of the world would be delivered by an exiled apostle, living in a cave on a forgotten island. We cannot miss the irony of this. John is saying, “The cause and glory of the God I follow will triumph forever!”

It would be easy to respond, “It doesn’t look like it! John, you don’t look like a winner, you look like a loser. Perhaps you should consider switching sides.”

John would say, “Not on your life.”

As John has moved through his closing statements in Revelation 22, his epilogue has included a final invitation to come and drink the water of this truth of Christ to all who are thirsty. The ticket to heaven is free, without cost – we just have to get our ticket while there is still time.

John has included a final warning to not tamper with the text. We are not to be guilty of addition to or omission from the words. It is all or nothing, and no one sits in judgment of this book, this book sits in judgment upon all.

John writes in Revelation chapter 22, verses 18-19,

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city . . .

Now do not misunderstand. It is impossible to lose one's salvation, to be unborn having been born again. It is impossible to be unsealed, having been sealed by the Spirit. It is impossible to be unjustified, having been justified fully by Christ, to be unseated with Christ, having been seated already with Christ in the heavens.

So the warning for those who take away from or add to the Bible is simply a way to recognize that they were never genuinely saved in the first place. This fact will eventually be demonstrated by a disregard for the word of God and a placement of their own word and opinion as equal to or greater than His word.

We have been given this final warning which effectively allows someone to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith.

Remember, by the time all the events of this revelation have taken place, the believers will be enjoying the glory of heaven forever and all the unredeemed will be suffering the horror of hell forever.

The Bible is an open letter from God to mankind, but it is not an open-ended letter for a prophet, priest, mystic, guru, or visionary to go beyond the last period. These are the last inspired words from God.

From the time of the Apostle John's Revelation to our day, the Spirit takes God's word and speaks to our hearts in agreement with its truths, but never beyond or above its truth.

. . . the word of Christ richly dwells within [us] . . . (Colossians 3:16)

It calls the shots and literally acts as an umpire in our lives. As a result, we study God's word, memorize it, meditate on it, speak it, apply it, and live it.

We no longer ask God to speak – God has spoken!

Now we come to our last study of Revelation. We will look at the last two verses recorded by John and, in fact, the last inspired words of God.

In this epilogue we have read a final challenge, a final invitation, and a final warning. Let us look at the last two verses.

The Final Promise

We are given a final promise in verse 20.

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

Do not miss this as it is the last recorded promise from the lips of Jesus Christ. This is the promise He chooses to deliver to us.

Imagine all the promises that Jesus could have given as His final promise.

- I will see you through your suffering;
- I will carry your burdens;
- I will enable your obedience;
- I will delight in your worship.

These promises have all been delivered directly or indirectly by our Lord already. His promise in verse 20 is His choice of a final promise.

Does this final promise absorb all the rest? Do burdens, suffering, diligence, obedience, and worship not find their final meaning in His coming?

This is true, is it not? Our obedience, perseverance, mission, diligence, and suffering find hope and comfort in the fact that He is coming soon.

As the hymn says,

One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase,

So bravely run the race, 'til we see Christ.

Now, at the very end of the Bible, the Lord wants to speak to us directly, as it were, one more time. When He does, He reminds us that He is coming soon.ⁱⁱ

The Lord has delivered this promise twice already in the closing chapter of Revelation – in verses 7 and 12 – and now in verse 20. Three times He has said,

. . . "I am coming quickly" . . .

We cannot help but be aware that He wants us to catch on to this fact. The Lord did not repeat Himself because He wanted twenty-one verses in this last chapter and He ran out of things to say. He wants to impress our minds with this truth,

. . . "I am coming soon" . . .

His coming will occur in stages that will happen quickly, in the light of eternity.

- He will come for His church and rapture her (I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15).
- He will then come sometime later with His bride to set up His kingdom (Revelation 20).
- He will subsequently come with the redeemed of all time as the golden capital city of heaven descends and rests upon a newly created earth (Revelation 21).

He effectively says, “It is all going to happen before you know it!”

When the Lord delivers this final promise in Revelation 22:20, He actually uses the present tense, which grammarians refer to as a prophetic present.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is as if to say, “I’m already on My way!”

Notice that this third and final time the Lord says, “I am coming quickly,” He begins by saying,

... **“Yes . . .”**

This could be rendered, “Indeed or truly, I am on My way!”

The next event in the “parousia” of Christ – the second coming of Christ – is the rapture of the church. This is so certain that Jesus Christ effectively says, “I’m on the move!”

The coming of Christ’s Kingdom to earth is so assured that Christ speaks with the certainty of the present tense, “I’m on My way!” This coming of heaven and creation of a new earth is so guaranteed by God that He says, “I’m already on My way!”

My friend, are *you* ready? Are *you* as ready as He is? Jesus says, “I’m coming quickly.” Are *you* ready?

The next thing that John says in verse 20 is,

... ***Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.***

Jesus says, “I’m coming,” and John says, “Amen!”

The word “amen” is the transliteration of a Hebrew participle that means, “so be it.”^{iv}

This word indicates agreement with what the speaker has just spoken.

We say this in church to this day, more or less. Some people feel comfortable saying it. In fact, some pastors do not like to preach without it. If it is too quiet, they will ask for a little feedback by saying, “Can I get a witness?” Everyone will then shout, “Amen!”

There is nothing wrong with saying, “Amen,” in the assembly. It tends to keep the entire congregation awake! I would not want to discourage this practice, as long as it does not become a distraction or a competition. You do not get points for your section by saying it. The congregation does not get out early if you give the pastor ten “amen’s”! Amen? You only have nine more to go!

I remember when our church met in a band room in the early days. We could seat about three hundred people on one of three tiered levels that formed a semi-circle. The front row of chairs was on the same floor level as the pulpit. In those days I normally preached in front of the pulpit while walking back and forth with my Bible in hand. That was when I was young and could walk and preach at the same time. Now I can only do one at a time!

I was preaching one Sunday morning to our congregation in that little band room and a woman that I did not recognize was visiting. She and her husband were sitting in the middle of the front row. I said something early in my sermon when I was right in front of her and she suddenly shouted at the top of her lungs, “Amen!”

I completely lost my train of thought and had to start all over again! That was one long sermon. She never came back.

Let that be a lesson! No, actually I consider an “Amen,” here and there from a sincere heart, whether softly whispered or loud enough to wake others, a good response. Just know that it is not directed toward me, but toward the truth spoken and, ultimately, to the Author of scripture.

This word is verbal assent to the word of God and I hope your spirit says it much more often than your lips; I hope you live in an “amen” state of mind! I hope you say and live with your whole being,

- “Amen! Lord, I believe Your word.”
- “Amen! Lord, this is the truth.”
- “Amen! Lord, count me in on what You are delivering.”

Jesus Christ delivers this final promise to an old apostle writing in a modified cave under severe living conditions while in exile away from friends, family, and his flock. Jesus comes to the end of this revelation and says, “It’s just about over and I want you to know that I’m on My way.” And John says, “Amen to that!”

The Final Prayer

Notice that the next thing John does is offer up the last recorded prayer in scripture. We have Christ's final promise and now, we have the believer's final prayer. John says,

. . . Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The last recorded prayer from this believer's lips is, "Well, come on, Lord Jesus, come on!"

The words "Come, Lord," in the Aramaic language, are the words "marana tha," which mean, "Our Lord, come."^{vi}

These words squeezed together give us "maranatha," which is "perhaps the oldest creedal prayer in existence."^{vi}

Would we expect John to reply any other way than, "Maranatha – Our Lord, come!" This aged, weather-beaten, war-torn, ninety-year-old apostle has just seen the end of the age, the glory of God's throne, and the beauty of heaven. It is no wonder that he responds, "Come on, Lord, let's go!"

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the coming of Christ for the church and ended by saying,

*. . . comfort one another with these words.
(I Thessalonians 4:18)*

By the way, having a positive anticipation of the coming of the Lord has a lot to do with the way we are living.

Have you ever had your mother tell you, "Young man, just wait 'til your father gets home."

I heard that a few times – at least twice. I did not love the appearing of my father. I was not comforted by that thought. The sound of his car in the driveway was not a pleasant sound.

Maybe you were like me and my brothers who were occasionally up to mischief while our parents were away. We would stand our youngest brother, Jonathan, up on the window sill where he could see over the bushes in the front yard and down the street. He would watch for the appearing of our parents. The unexpected arrival would not be a good thing!

Jonathan Edwards resolved to never live in such a way as to be embarrassed should the Lord appear at that moment.

John writes in his letter,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

(I John 3:2-3)

Godly anticipation influences godly activity, and godly activity develops godly anticipation.

It is one thing to say, "Amen," in church, and another to go out and live in such a way that we can pray, "Lord, come any time You would like because I'm ready for You."

One author wrote,

This is another way of saying that you live every day for His glory as if it is your last. You work hard at your job, in your home, and for your church as if it is your last opportunity. You shine the light. You remain balanced, cheerful, and winsome. Why? You are anticipating His coming – today!^{vii}

This is what we would have found out on the rocky bluffs of Patmos, in the recesses of a cave, where on the Lord's day, John was writing of things he could not even imagine. And at the end of the revelation, without any hesitation, John says, "Let it happen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Perhaps you are tempted to say, "Well, what do you expect? John was given a tour of heaven. He was an apostle. He was personally discipled by Christ. John had something we don't have."

This is one of the reasons that I am glad John's Revelation did not end with verse 20. We have the final promise of Christ, the final prayer of John, and the final pronouncement from God through John.

The Final Pronouncement

Notice verse 21.

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

There is a final promise, a final prayer, and there is this final pronouncement.

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

This is a subjective genitive which can be expanded to read, "May the Lord Jesus show all of you His grace."^{viii}

With this final pronouncement, the Spirit of God through the Apostle John gives us genuine hope.

- How are we saved and guaranteed a home in heaven? Grace!
- As believers, how do we take one more step in the right direction? Grace!

- How do you treat others who also falter and fail both God and us along the way? Grace!
- What is sufficient to bear us up through every challenge and every valley we will face? Grace!
- How do we ever expect to escape the horrors of God’s wrath as described in this book? Grace!
- How do we ever hope to receive any of the blessings revealed in Revelation of heaven, joy, perfection, a glorified body, and face-to-face worship of Jesus Christ our Lord? Grace!

Think about the fact that every blessing outlined in Revelation is totally undeserved. These are the gifts of Jesus Christ to His own.^{ix}

John began this book by saying in verse 4 of chapter 1,

... *“Grace to you and peace . . .”*

He now ends the book in the same way,

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

The Greek word for “all” is “panton” (παντων) and means, “to everyone reading this book” – both believers and unbelievers alike.

In other words, John is hinting to those who are not yet saved who hear this letter read in one of the seven churches or in any church in any generation, “Listen, you accept the gospel of Christ by grace. You don’t deserve forgiveness, but that’s what grace means.”

Grace as an acrostic – “G.R.A.C.E.” – can stand for:

- God’s
- Riches
- At
- Christ’s
- Expense.

Grace is unmerited favor from God to us.

To the believers listening to the letter being read, John implies, “You accepted the gospel of Christ by grace, so now don’t forget that. Live out the gospel in the strength of God’s grace and distribute God’s grace to everyone else around you. They don’t deserve your grace any more than you deserve God’s grace. Grace is something given to the undeserving, that is why it’s called grace.”

So, here in this great book, grace has the first word and the last.

This is not just any grace that John pronounces on His worldwide flock – it is the grace of,

... *the Lord Jesus . . .*

The last word is really about Him.

This book opened with the words,

The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . .

The book ends with the words,

The grace of [this same] Lord Jesus . . .

- He is the God of all grace (I Peter 5:10);
- His grace is sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9);
- He is able to make all grace abound toward us (II Corinthians 9:8).

It is no wonder John’s closing pronouncement, the final blessing from the Spirit of God through this old pastor, does nothing more than entrust the church of his generation, and every generation since, into the hands of a gracious Lord.

To this we, along with John, can only respond with deep thanksgiving saying the same last word of this book, “Amen.”^x

In other words, “It is true; so be it; let it happen; we agree and by the daily deposit of the grace of God, we will live our lives in light of its truth and for the glory of our soon-to-come Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

ⁱ Stephen J. Lawson, Heaven Help Us (Navpress, 1995), p. 158.

ⁱⁱ Edward Hindson, Revelation: Unlocking the Future (AMG Publishers, 2002), p. 227.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grant R. Osborne, Baker Exegetical Commentary: Revelation (Baker Academic, 2002), p. 797.

^{iv} Renald E. Showers, Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! (Friends of Israel, 1995), p. 140.

^v Kendell H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman, 1998), p. 429.

^{vi} Osborne, p. 797.

^{vii} Charles R. Swindoll, The Finishing Touch (Word Publishing, 1994), p. 405.

^{viii} Robert L. Thomas, Romans: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 522.

^{ix} Sam Gordon, Revelation: Worthy is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 456.

^x Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record (Tyndale, 1986), p. 489.