

The Abundant Eternal Life

Revelation 22:1-21

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Revelation is a book that, for many Christians, elicits one of two responses: an eager reader to figure out how “it is all going to happen” or resistance and dismissal because of poor teaching or its confusing content. Let’s be honest, Revelation is not an easy book of the Bible to read, let alone study and apply to our lives. Martin Luther once expressed his distaste for it by saying, “Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit leads him. My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing.”¹ Imagine looking close up at the details of an impressionist painting. All you can see are strokes of paint and dabs of color. It’s hard to make sense of it. But take a step back, and the picture becomes clear. And what emerges is not just a scene but the mood it evokes. That’s how we should approach the Book of Revelation. Lean in too close, look only at the detail, and it’s all a bit perplexing. But step back, look at the big picture, and Revelation not only becomes clearer, but grabs our imaginations. That’s John’s aim. Since we are faced with the threat and seductions of the world around us, John wants to recapture our imagination about how God is at work in the world.²

Yet, this mysterious book of the Bible began by telling us that if you read it, you will be blessed (1:3). And it will close by reiterating the same truth (22:7). Why is that? Well, as we have come to see, Revelation is to foster hope in us as it increases our anticipation for the things of God and his final act in the scope of redemptive history. God delights in our holy anticipation of what he will do in our lives and in the scope of human history. But the blessing or the gift of anticipation in God’s economy is not that we are filled with a fantastical wish. It is that our anticipation grows proportionally with our hope because we see God at work in our lives and in the most difficult of circumstances. We want to know that it is going to be ok. We want to know that it is going to work out. We are no different than the generations before us or the original audience in that way. To this need and to a culture and humanity wrapped in fear, God speaks to us through Revelation. He desires our holy anticipation because **anticipation increases hope... hope fosters faithfulness.**

¹ Dr. Michael Cooper, *A Faithful Witness* (Ephesiology Press, 2021), 19.

² Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 6). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

1. Hope – “The Lord will be their light.”

- a. What is hope? → A confidence that it is all going to be ok.
 - i. cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5 – **“³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”**
 - ii. A biblical term (Greek *elpis*) referring to the expectation of the believer that God will fulfill promises made in the past. **Biblical hope is more than a simple wish; it entails certainty based on God’s demonstration of faithfulness to people in the history of salvation as recorded in the Scriptures and as experienced by the church.** Ultimately the Christian’s future hope lies in the promise of Christ’s return and the anticipation of resurrection from the dead.³
 - iii. **What is cosmic hope?**
 - 1. If in this passage we experience the weight of the cosmic problem, that is the problem of evil and sin that impacts not only this world but the spiritual realm as well, we also see the offering of cosmic hope. That is, a hope that both meets and transcends our physical reality.
 - iv. What hope do we have? → v. 9b-10
 - 1. Those who are redeemed are made into a kingdom and priests.
 - a. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9 – **“⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**
 - 2. The universal scope of redemption is brought out by piling up expressions to show that the redeemed come from no restricted group but from all over the world. **John is fond of linking every tribe and language and people and nation (see 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; cf. 10:11; 17:15).** An interesting point of style is that John’s word order is not the same in any two examples. The expression resembles the ‘peoples, nations and men of every language’ (Dan. 3:4, 7, 29; etc.), and indeed some think that John is quoting Daniel.⁴
- b. **How do we have hope?** → Our hope is not in our circumstances or abilities but in the one who offers us victory.
 - i. The new song sang by the elders and four living creatures - Vv 9b–10 express the content of the “new song.” In the OT a “new song” **is always an expression of praise for God’s victory over the enemy**, sometimes including thanksgiving for God’s work of creation.⁵
 - 1. The word *ōdē* is ‘the general word for a song, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, whether of praise or on any other subject’. In the New Testament, however, it is always used of sacred song. This “new” sacred song is

³ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 61.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 100.

⁵ 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), 358.

not merely referencing the time of its signing, but the deeper reality that it is reflective of. **It is concerned with quality rather than date.**⁶

- ii. The praise of every creature – v.13
 - 1. Now the whole creation joins in the song. *Every creature* is explicit enough, but John spells it out by mentioning specifically heaven, earth, the subterranean regions and the sea. *All that is in them* is redundant, but it serves to emphasize that all are included in the mighty chorus of praise. John’s vision is not concerned with an obscure being of no great importance. **In the last resort there is no creature, wherever found, which does not recognize the superior worth of the Lamb.**⁷
- c. We are still forced to ask: What are our options for hope?
 - i. **Myself** – “Only I can save myself.”
 - 1. Is this really a sure thing?
 - ii. **Someone / something else** – “I cannot save myself.”
 - 1. Who really can I hope in?
- d. What does it mean to live as a person with a living hope? (1 Pet. 2:12)
 - i. 1 Pet 2:12 – **“¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”**
 - 1. **Resiliency** – Holding fast (i.e., conquering) just as the seven churches were encouraged to keep going.
 - a. i.e., We don’t give up on cross-bearing and being salt and light.
 - 2. **Faithfulness** – Forward-facing trust in God.
 - a. i.e., We don’t place our trust in anything else to be our ultimate hope.
 - 3. **Declaration** – Proclaiming the good news of the gospel as the most important message we can share and the greatest hope we could offer.
 - a. i.e., We don’t shrink from thoughtfully giving a defense of the hope that resides within.

2. Remembering – “Trustworthy and True”

- a. **1. These words are true.** John’s angelic guide says, “These words are trustworthy and true”. He’s probably referring to the whole book. They’re true because they have come from God (v 6). John refers to himself by name for the first time since chapter 1 (22:8). He heard and saw the visions in this book for himself. This is a first-hand apostolic report (akin to 1 John 1:1-3).
- b. **2. These words are to be kept.** Then Jesus himself speaks and calls on us as readers to “[keep] the words” (Revelation 22:7). What does this involve? In one sense, all that has been said. But the next incident perhaps highlights the key message. John bows in worship before the angel (v 8). But the angel rebukes him for this idolatry. The command is “Worship God!” (v 9). This goes to the core of Revelation. We’re to worship God in the face of both the seductions and threat of idolatrous power.
- c. **3. The words are to be read.** Daniel is told to seal up his prophecy, for it describes a future time (Daniel 12:4, 9). In contrast, John is told not to seal the scroll, for “the time is near”. In other

⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 99–100.

⁷ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 102.

words, this is not a message for some far-off future. This is for John's generation (Revelation 22:10)—and therefore also for our generation. The first half of verse 11 is ironic. Let wrongdoers continue for their end is coming. Meanwhile, let us continue to do what's right. Again the word "continue" indicates that this is a contemporary word. It addresses those doing wrong and doing right in the present.

- d. **4. These words are gospel.** 21:8 and 27 have warned, at least implicitly, that not everyone enters the temple-garden-city. 22:15 reiterates this. Jesus will reward everyone "according to what they have done" (v 12). So what hope is there for guilty sinners? "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city" (v 14; 3:4; 7:14; 16:15). Our hope is not in our righteousness. Our hope is in Christ (22:13). By faith, we wash our guilty stains in his blood and clothe ourselves with his righteousness. "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (v 16). In other words, Jesus is the promised Messiah, the son of David who receives David's authority. The Morning Star is also a messianic title (Numbers 24:17). So through Christ the invitation comes to us from the Spirit speaking through the church ("the bride"): "'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).
- e. **5. These words are final.** Verses 18-19 are important. At the very least, they warn us against both ignoring the book of Revelation and extrapolating from John's words so that they say something different to that which he intended. But throughout the history of the church, they have often been interpreted as an affirmation that the canon of Scripture is now closed (just as the Law of Moses was closed; Deuteronomy 4:2). To add to John's words is to add to Scripture. But John warns that no one will receive a message from God that has the authority of Scripture. No book can be added to our Bibles—and that includes the Qur'an, the Book of Mormon and any prophecy that claims to supplement or supplant the Bible. So explicit is Revelation 22:18-19 on this that to claim another source of divine revelation is to deny John's revelation. You can't find hope in what John says about our share in the tree of life while at the same time denying what John says about the close of the canon. If you deny the latter, then you deny the former. The final word of Jesus in the book (and indeed in the Bible) is this: "Yes, I am coming soon". And the response is, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (v 20-21; 1 Corinthians 16:22). Perhaps we can think of this as the final "test" offered by the book of Revelation. Jesus says, "I am coming soon". Do we respond with an enthusiastic "Amen"? Do we pray this prayer? Do we long for Christ's return? Or are our longings elsewhere? Would we prefer his return to be postponed? If so, then this may be a sign that we need to "come out" of Babylon (Revelation 18:4).⁸

3. Anticipation – "I am coming soon."

- a. We started this sermon with the idea that we are to find transforming principles in the text and not just explaining timelines.
 - i. What is the principle that we are to see in the opening verses? → The importance of anticipation in relationship to faithfulness.
- b. **Anticipation** – The longing and expecting of something to happen... particularly something good.

⁸ Chester, Tim. Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective (pp. 166-168). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

- i. Yes, anticipation can have a negative tone, but tend to differentiate that with the word, worry.
 - ii. We are to anticipate the things that are going to happen soon.
 - 1. Again, the prime thing is that Jesus will have the final victory.
 - 2. As we anticipate this and abide in Christ, we grow in hope not fear for what is to come.
 - iii. Anticipation is not going to relieve all of the tension from the text or our lives. In fact, tension in our lives is a good thing, something that keeps us grounded and reminded that we are not God.
- c. Can anticipation set us free from tension? → **What is at risk for us when we think that we are able or even that we should be able to live out a worldview that relieves all of the tension?**
- i. **Set ourselves up for disenfranchisement.** I.e., Think house of cards. When everything is neat and clean theologically, ethically, and philosophically you knocked one card down and the whole thing crumbles.
 - 1. This is often what is at the root of the current deconversion / deconstruction movement.
 - ii. **Look for secret knowledge** – In order to keep a lack of tension, we can be driven down the road of secret knowledge that solves and alleviates the tension for us. The internet quickly becomes a source of “new or higher” truth. There is no shortage of teachers, voices, and perspectives that affirm our perceptions. We must resist the urge to outsource out theology, instead, we are to embrace the hard work of intellectual honesty.
 - 1. Secondly, if we feel as if this only applies to the “other side” we need to reexamine our own “side.”
 - iii. **Alienate neighbors** – When we live in a worldview that leaves no room for tension, we ultimately live in a space that suffocates growth due to an increasingly myopic perspective. As we stay in that limited soil, we begin to see those who are not “just like us” as inferior, lacking, or insufficient. It is really hard to care for someone let alone share relationship with them when you look down on them.
 - iv. **Live with a lack of grace** – A very NT warning comes for us that as we live in a lack of tension, we quickly become seduced by the siren song of pride that comes from legalism. Legalism ultimately states, I have transcended the need for God because I have secured my salvation through my performance. If there is no tension, there is no need for repentance or humility. And, again, ultimately, no need for grace. Being a person who has no need of grace, makes you unbearable. The greatest personal risk is the emotional cliff we walk along when we live without a need for grace. Eventually, we may just become aware of the damage that has done and we can go tumbling off of the cliff.
- d. **Hope** – Biblical hope is more than a simple wish; it entails certainty based on God’s demonstration of faithfulness to people in the history of salvation as recorded in the Scriptures and as experienced by the church.⁹
- i. Rather than expressing the desire for a particular outcome that is uncertain, hope in the NT by definition is characterized by certainty.¹⁰

⁹ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 61.

¹⁰ Brad J. Eastman, “Hope,” ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 499.

- ii. Because we have the certainty that Jesus is victor, we are then prompted to live faithfully now as we wait for the realization of that hope.
- e. **Faithfulness** – Faith is a forward looking trust, that is rooted in God’s past provision.
 - i. Let’s come back to the “soon” note of v. 1.
 - 1. Soon is less of a day and hour to figure out and more of a posture of expectancy.
 - ii. How does this inform our posture? → Expectant and faithful to be about the mission.
 - 1. Great commission living is motivated by Great Commandment love.
 - iii. What does our statement of faith say? → Statement #9 – Christ’s Return
 - 1. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, **motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.**
- f. If Jesus is the victor... what changes for me because of that truth?
 - i. EFCA SOF → **motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.**
 - ii. What is going to change in my Monday to Friday life if the claims of this book are true?
 - iii. How will I approach my relationships if the claims of this book are true?
 - iv. How does this inform my efforts if the claims of this book are true?
 - 1. So often in our modern American context, we think, “I’ll do it. I’ll fix myself. I’ll read the next self-help book and way to live manual. I’ll be better.”
 - 2. These aren’t bad things or ideas, but they aren’t complete.
 - 3. John wants us to be saturated in the core idea of this letter, Jesus is victor. If he is victor then I am to linger and abide in that truth, as I do that, he transforms me from the inside out.

On the “time is near.” –

That brings us to the intriguing question of what it means for Revelation to say that Jesus is coming “soon” (22:6, 7, 12, 20). After all, two millennia have now elapsed since those words were written. The question is not unique to Revelation, since Paul, for example, could write as if he expected Christ to return within his lifetime (1 Thess. 4:17). The New Testament leaves its readers to live with a tension. Some passages announce that Christ will soon return and that Christians must remain awake and watch for him (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30, 37). Other passages declare that God alone knows when Christ will return and that it is not for others to know “the times or periods that the Father has set” (Acts 1:7; Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32).

Revelation’s own perspective on the question is helpfully complex. The book envisions Christ’s coming in three ways: First, the writer assumes that Jesus has come and is already present. Jesus died and rose years before the book was written, but the opening chapter pictures him continuing to walk among the lampstands that represent the churches (Rev. 1:12–20). Second, the Christ who is already present may “come” in contingent and local ways. Readers are warned that “if” they do not repent, Christ “will come” to confront them (2:5, 16; 3:3). But such a coming would be to a specific congregation to address a particular situation. Third, the Christ who is already present is expected to bring about the final defeat of evil and redemption of God’s people in the future. That form of coming will mark the close of the present age when all the threatening powers are overcome (1:7; 14:14–17; 19:11–12). Revelation’s imagery connects the present and future in evocative ways. When the book envisions Christ “coming,” it assures readers of Christ’s continued action, yet it works against speculation about when that action might occur.

In the same way, Revelation declares that “the time is near” (Rev. 22:10), only to confound the readers’ sense of timing with a kaleidoscopic spiral of visions that periodically repeats similar messages through different images and interrupts its forward movement with suspended judgments and heavenly interludes. Revelation can tell readers that the marriage feast of the Lamb “has come” and that the bride is “ready,” yet it does not allow readers to see the bride until more than a thousand years have passed in its visionary world (19:7–8; 21:2, 9). Readers are left with the assurance *that* the End will come but without knowing *when* it will come.¹¹

¹¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 199–200.