

“Come Lord Jesus”
Revelation 22:6-21
Dr. Jerry Nelson

How do you end a good book or a good letter?

If you were the Apostle John how would you end the book of Revelation?

For that matter, if you were God how would you end the Bible?

For the last words of Revelation are also the last words of the entire Bible.

The Bible has one overarching story that begins with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

And the story ends, as we saw last week in Revelation 21 with “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

But the Bible, as a book, doesn’t end with the end of the story.

Like many books the Bible has an epilogue - the final words at the conclusion of the book.

Again I ask, if you were going to conclude the book of Revelation and the Bible what would you write?

I must admit I’m only mildly curious about what you or I would write but I am intensely interested in what God had John write.

In the book of Revelation John has given us a vision of the future.

He has spent much of the book describing the last few years on earth before the end comes.

It’s called the tribulation - time of intense suffering for unbelievers on this earth and a time of great persecution for believers.

But that tribulation will come to an end when Jesus comes again.

And after a thousand year reign on this earth by Jesus the judgment will come - a time when every man, woman and child who has ever lived will stand before God and either give an account for every thing they have ever done in this life or they will stand before God forgiven and bearing his family name - belonging to him.

Those who stand before God on their own, will according to Revelation 20 be sent to the lake of fire forever.

Those who stand before God trusting in Jesus, will according to Revelation 21 be forever with Jesus on the new earth.

And the story ends with 22:5 “And they will reign for ever and ever.”

That’s how the story ends, but how does John finish the book?

John was very invested in the people who first read the book.

Before being exiled to the island from which he wrote the book, he had most likely been their pastor.

He wanted very much for them to get the point of the book and the point of the Bible.

And what is the point? It is given to us in 22:7 “Behold, Jesus says, I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”

He made the same point at the beginning of the book: 1:3 “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”

The point is: it is our move.

God has told us what is happening - it is up to us to respond.

To get to that point I think John does three things in this epilogue:

He speaks of certainty, warning and invitation.

1. As to certainty, he stresses that the things he has seen will most certainly take place.
2. As to a warning, he stresses that what he has written must be taken seriously.
3. As to an invitation, he says, one last time, believe and live.

As to certainty: Do you believe Jesus is coming again?

For forty days after Jesus resurrection he met with his disciples proving he was most certainly alive.

Then, we are told, he led them outside of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives and “he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

As they were standing there thinking about what had just happened, an angel of God appeared and said to them, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Jesus himself described his own return when he said, “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power

and great glory.”

Can you see the sky through that windows around us?

Do you believe Jesus will literally, physically return from the sky to this earth? With no plane, no balloon. Do you believe in the supernatural?

John writes that he wants us to believe it, to know it, to count on it, to alter our lives because of it.

To underscore how certain we should be of this coming event - the return of Jesus, John includes several statements in his epilogue.

John writes in 22:6 that an angel came to him and said, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

John says I didn’t just make up all of this I have written about the end of the world.

An angel from God showed me these things.

That same angel declared these things will absolutely take place.

That same angel said the same God who prophesied through the prophets of old has told us what will come.

It will happen!

Then in verse 22:7 John reminds his readers of Jesus’ own words from Matthew 16: “Behold I am coming soon!”

It will happen!

Then in verse 22:8 John says that he isn’t just making this up - he is a prophet of God.

John is called a brother prophet.

The angel of God gave John the authority to accurately declare what would take place.

You have it from an angel, you have it from Jesus and you have it from a prophet, John - It will most certainly happen!

So concerned is John that we believe this with absolutely certainty that throughout the epilogue he reiterates the point:

V6 “the things that must soon take place”

V7 Jesus speaking, “Behold, I am coming soon.”

V10 The angel said, “the time is near”.

V12 quoting Jesus again, “Behold, I am coming soon.”

V20 again quoting Jesus, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Do you catch it?

If there is one truth John wants to drive home so that it will not be forgotten but acted on, what is it? Jesus is coming again.

I'm certain you couldn't help but notice that every time, Jesus says, "I'm coming SOON."

Wasn't this book written nearly 2000 years ago?
How could Jesus mean "soon"?

When the word "soon" is used, even by us, there are two possible emphases being made:

One emphasis might be on time - as in how many minutes or hours.
Another emphasis might be on expectancy - as in "you can count on it happening."

Have you ever had a young child ask you when something very enjoyable or very distasteful was to happen and you said "soon"?

What did you mean and what did they understand it to mean?

You meant, "you can count on it happening – it is coming!"
They understood it to be happening in the next 30 seconds.

You were focusing on the certainty and they were focusing on the duration.
You were speaking of expectancy and they were thinking of immediacy.

As they get a little older they come to understand that soon doesn't have to mean immediately but can mean some time yet to come but they can retain a sense of expectancy because it is so certain to happen.

John is, I believe, using the word in that sense of "expectancy" - "certainty" -
You can count on it, mark it down, consider it done, know for certain it will happen.

Now again I ask you, "Do you believe he's literally coming again?"

Do you believe what God has said about what will happen when he does come again?
Do you believe there is a lake of fire to shun and a new earth to gain?

What difference does it make to you?

The question is not do you believe Jesus is coming again in some generalized, spiritualized, non-specific way but do you believe he is actually, physically

coming again as King of kings and Lord of lords and that he will judge everyone who has ever lived?

John concludes his book and the Bible by saying, "Please believe it - it will happen!"

II.

The second thing John does with his epilogue besides emphasizing how certainly Jesus is coming, is to plead with us through a warning to **take this second coming of Jesus seriously.**

Look at verses 18-19

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

The warning is this: Don't add or subtract from what you have heard.

The warning is **not** first of all to textual critics or translators of the Bible but to everyone who hears the message - don't distort the basic message of this book - hear what God is saying and respond!

The warning is to those who don't take the content of the prophecy seriously - who assume an unbelieving attitude toward it - or if not unbelieving then unresponsive.

The warning is not to someone who doesn't full understand it but to the one who knows what the point is but doesn't accept it or act on it - choosing instead to discount it, ignore it, put it off, or outright reject it.

The warning, I think, is to those who trivialize the book making it little more than something about which to argue fine points of eschatology.

One author wrote, "It is easier to engage in ecstasies than to engage in obedience. It is easier to pursue a fascination with the supernatural than to enter into the service of God." (Peterson 186)

It is easier to get caught up in the minutia of the symbolism of Revelation or attempting to get every eschatological "t" crossed than to take the basic message of Revelation and respond to it - "Jesus is coming! - Am I ready?"

John warns against being more interested in predicting the future than preparing for it.

Back in verses 14-15 John reiterates what in the previous chapters he spent much time on - There are only, and ever will be only, two kinds of people in the world - Insiders and outsiders:

“Blessed are those who wash their robes that they might have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates **into the city**.

Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

Insiders and outsiders:

Using the symbolism of clothes that have been cleaned, John describes the “insiders” as the people who have been forgiven for their sins through what Jesus did on the cross.

Using very different and denigrating symbolism (dogs) John describes “outsiders” as those who will stand before God to account for the sin in their lives.

John is greatly concerned that you and I take this book very, very seriously.

It is fascinating and frustrating how many sit in church week after week and don't connect - won't seriously engage and interact with the truth – as if they are detached from reality.

How many listen to the Bible preached or even read it but ignore it?

If you believe Jesus is coming again, it demands a response of life not just apathy or passing thoughts.

John writes, “Don't miss it, this is serious life and death business!”

III.

But in his epilogue John not only declares how certainly Jesus is coming and how seriously this matter is to be taken, but he also extends one last invitation.

The grace of God is woven through every page of the book and appears again at the very end.

Look at verse 17 “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

The Holy Spirit of God and the bride, the church say “come!”

Everyone who hears and receives the message of life says to others, “come!”

God extends the invitation to anyone who is thirsty for life, anyone who desires to receive forgiveness and new life - Come! He says.

Ken Ross is the pastor of St. Nicholas Episcopal Church on Belleview.
 In his former church, in Pennsylvania, he served with pastor, Thad
 Barnum.

Through Ken I heard this story: Thad said that late one evening Michael, a
 parishioner, called him.

“My dad’s dying!”

Michael’s 78 year old father was dying of congestive heart failure.

Michael went on, “It’s hard because Dad and I haven’t had a good relationship.
 I was the last of four boys and by the time I grew up, Dad didn’t have much time
 for me.

He worked at his shop 12 hours a day, six days a week and played golf on
 Sunday.

Dad isn’t a friendly man. Doesn’t talk much and never calls.

The only time I felt his love was when he looked at my first
 born son and smiled.

I’m scared Thad, really scared.

Thad asked, “Are you afraid of being without him?”

“It’s not that. I’m afraid of what’s going to happen to him.

Dad only went to church when he had to.

As far back as I can remember, Dad opposed religion.

It was for sissies he said.

Jesus Christ is the name he uses when he swears.

Mom took us to church.

I received Jesus as my savior and Lord at a Billy Graham crusade and Jesus
 changed my life.

I told my dad what happened and he said he didn’t want to hear it.

He called it nonsense.

He told me I’d get to be his age one day, and then I’d know
 that it’s all superstition - an old wives’ tale.

He didn’t want to discuss it any more.

“I don’t know what to do, I love him so much.

I don’t want him to die without knowing the Lord.

I’ve prayed for my father every day since college.

I think it’s too late - the doctors said he might die tonight.

Pastor Barnum prayed with Michael over the phone and Michael prayed "Father please give me one more chance to talk to my dad. Please open his heart like you did mine.

Michael went back to the hospital the next morning and afterward called Pastor Barnum.

He said, "I got to his room before seven.

I couldn't believe it; Dad was awake, half sitting up in bed, and drinking juice.

He was weak but the night's sleep seemed to have revived him.

As I sat on the edge of his bed I knew the Lord had given me one more chance. No one else was in the room and I went for it.

I said, "Dad, I have to talk to you. There's something bothering me. He looked up at me encouraging me to go on.

I said, "Dad, what going to happen to you when you die?"

He looked at me and said in all seriousness, "I don't know son."

I said, "Dad, you'd listen to me if I told you about stock you could make some money on. Well please listen to me now."

So I started at the beginning and told him about what happened to me and how Jesus saved me, a sinner.

I said right out, "Dad he came to save sinners and he came to save you, too!"

You won't believe this Thad, but he started asking me all kinds of questions:

How did I know?

Why did Jesus die?

Is the resurrection really true?

Can anyone be sure he really going to heaven?

He asked me, "How could God ever forgive me for all I've done in my life?"

"Pastor Thad, we talked for over an hour and finally he asked me to pray for him that Jesus might forgive his sin and save his life too.

My father! On his dying bed. The Lord saved my dad!"

Michael's father lived another week and his sons and his wife said he was a changed man.

But Michael's father is not in heaven today because he finally listened but because he finally yielded.

He had heard the message before but before he had refused to respond.

I am perplexed by how many people can hear about God, sin, judgment, forgiveness and life **but never humble themselves** to personally, intentionally, verbally, out loud to God, admit their need and ask him to do what only he can do - forgive and give new life.

It is disturbing how many are afraid to admit such deep-seated, desperate, I-can't-help-myself need, and afraid to openly declare themselves - to humbly acknowledge that Jesus alone can save them from themselves.

Afraid that maybe it won't work and then they will be fools.

Afraid of the commitment it might entail - the lifestyle changes it might demand.

But through all that stubbornness and even fear, God says "Come!"

How about you?

You've heard about it for years.

Have you ever responded?

To you who are already Christians - what will you do with the information you have from the book of Revelation?

How will it affect your life?

What does it say about your priorities?

What does it have to do with your values, your actions?

1. What do you truly believe about the end of the world.
2. What does that mean you are to value?
3. How will that shape your priorities?
4. What actions will result from reshaped values and priorities?
5. How will your life be different because you know Jesus is coming again?

How will it affect your marriage, your family life, your relationships with your neighbors and co-workers?

What does it say about your recreation, your financial investments, the way you spend your money, your service for the kingdom of God?

I can't apply it to you - but God's Holy Spirit can - will you give him time to speak, will you listen?