

Final Words - Part 1

Revelation 22:6-17

This morning we come to the conclusion of this magnificent letter. These are the final words of this letter, and of the Bible. Final words are generally important words. When a loved one dies, we care about our last words to them and, more importantly, their last words to us. These are the very last written words of Christ given to the Church. And they are extremely important.

Kevin DeYoung makes the point that the book of Revelation seems to end somewhat anticlimactically. The words of 22:5 would have been a great ending.

Rev. 22:5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

After all the wars, persecution, and trauma of this book – it's how Hollywood would have concluded. Everyone lived happily ever after.

But that isn't how Jesus ends his letter to his beloved bride, because verse 5 doesn't capture the central purpose of the book. This letter isn't primarily about the joys of heaven; it is primarily about how to get there. Jesus' primary purpose in sending us this letter is to motivate us to persevere in faith, obedience, and love so that when he comes again, we will be ready to meet him and able to join him in his new heaven and new earth. And so, this concluding portion of the letter emphasizes the immense significance of this book and the direct and immediate impact it should have on our lives.

The conclusion of the letter can easily be broken into 3 parts, each speaking about the church's relationship and responsibility to the message of Revelation.

- A Word to Be Kept (vv. 6-9)
- A Word to Be Proclaimed (vv. 10-17)
- A Word to Be Preserved (vv. 18-21)

You will notice that each of these sections are sealed with the same affirmation: "Behold, I am coming soon." (22:7, 12, 20). The point could not be more clear. The King is coming. He has given us this message so that we might be prepared to meet him.

I. A Word to Be Kept

Rev. 22:6-7 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

A. The Significance of This Message

Jesus begins his closing remarks by directing our attention to the immense value, weight, and truth of his words. "These words are trustworthy and true." We saw the same thing in 21:5.

Rev. 21:5 *And he who was seated on the throne said... "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

That is not just a statement concerning the veracity of these words, but the authority they contain. Earlier in the book (Rev. 3:14; 19:11), Jesus himself is described as "faithful and true."

Rev. 3:14 *"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness...'"*

Rev. 19:11 *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True...*

Eric Alexander: "The principle is clear – the *written* word of God is as faithful and true as the *incarnate* word of God which is Christ."

It is not possible to draw a line between the authority of Jesus and the authority of his written word. You may hear people say, "I love Jesus, I just don't agree with everything that's in the Bible." But Jesus is saying here that it is not possible to accept him as he is – the Faithful and True Witness of the will of God – and not accept the words he speaks. The two cannot be separated. Jesus said to some of those who were following but not obeying him, "Why do you call me, LORD, LORD, but do not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). Rather, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

As Jesus closes his letter to his precious church, he wants us to grasp the incredible significance and weight of this. These words are his words – they are trustworthy and true – and we will be judged according to them.

B. The Necessity of Keeping It

Rev. 22:7 *Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.*

The book closes much as it began.

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.*

What does it mean to "hear" and to "keep" what is written in this book? It means that we must obey the words of this book. The words of this book are meant to shape our moral lives. That may surprise you. When you think of the book of Revelation you probably don't think of rules or commands. And yet, the book is full of them.

In the letters to the 7 churches we saw specific commands from Christ:

- Don't settle for orthodoxy alone (the church in Ephesus). Orthodoxy is meant for mission. If the church didn't repent, Jesus would remove their lampstand.
- Don't allow the Devil to mislead you by false teachers and the pressure to accommodate to the sexually immoral spirit of the age (the churches of Thyatira and Sardis). Again, repentance is required.
- Throughout the book we are being called to wake up to the reality of the spiritual realm – the glories of King Jesus, the destructive power of the Devil, and the coming judgment of God.

These are words we are meant to hear and keep. They are meant to snap us out of our love affair with sin, to wake us up to the immense value of our eternal soul, to tremble before the glory and wrath of the King, and to run to the shelter and victory of the Lamb.

To “keep” these words means that these truths are cherished so that they mold our life. Notice, the “God of the spirits of the prophets” is speaking in this book. The role of the prophets in the OT was not primarily to foretell the future. Their primary role was to teach God's people his will for them, along with all his promises and warnings, and then call them to keep that word.

***Deut. 32:45-47** And When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, ⁴⁶ he said to them, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”*

These words of Jesus are “no empty words.” They are our life! And by these words we shall enter and possess the promised land! If you allow false teachers, you will lose your life. If you allow moral compromise with the harlot of Babylon and spirit of this age, you will lose your life. If the realities of heaven and hell as portrayed in this book do not mold how you think and how you live, you will not enter heaven and will certainly enter hell. These are not empty words!

This an important message in a day when the word “obedience” sounds harsh and unpleasant. People who profess to be Christians will say, “Christianity is about a relationship, not about rules.” That would be news to Jesus. And it violates what we experientially know to be true. Every authentic, intimate relationship has rules that must be obeyed for that relationship to flourish. For example, if you're married, there are rules.

- There are things you can't do – you can't go on vacation with another man or woman. You can't have a secret lifestyle or secret addiction or family.
- There are things you can't say – you can't use hateful, derogatory language.
- There are places you can't be.
- There are things you can't look at.

The rules are necessary to protect the relationship and to create the intimacy. If you break the rules you wound the relationship. But if you truly love your spouse, you will embrace these rules as good. And when you violate them, it will grieve your heart and you will confess it and strive for true repentance. Why? Because that's what love does.

Jesus is simply calling us to live authentically in this love relationship we have with him. If you love Jesus, you want to keep his rules. You want your life to be molded according to his own beauty and purpose. You want to be like him. You want to please him.

As Jesus concludes this letter, he wants us to know that this letter and this book are his words, and he intends for us to keep them.

II. A Word to Be Proclaimed

Rev. 22:10-11 And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

This seems like a strange thing for Jesus to say. It sounds like He is condoning wicked behavior. "Let the evildoer still do evil."

These verses are best understood in light of very similar words given to the prophet Daniel in Daniel 12. Daniel lived about 600 years before Christ. But he also received visions and messages from angels, like John, about the judgments of God at the end of time. However, this is what the angel said to Daniel:

Dan. 12:9-10 He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly."

Daniel is told that the words are shut up and sealed until the end of time.

John is told the opposite: "DON'T seal it up." Let people know. This letter is meant to be read, to be passed around. These truths are meant to be talked about, meant to be published and proclaimed.

Likewise, the church has a calling in this world to proclaim this message. We cannot seal up this message because of fear or apathy. We must tell the world about the King who sits on the throne. We need to tell them why he and he alone is worthy to open the seals, why he

alone is worthy of worship – for he is the Lamb who was slain, the One who, with his own blood, purchased the souls of men for God. We need to proclaim that this Jesus is coming again, that he has set a day when he will return to judge the living and the dead.

There is an urgency to this proclamation.

Rev. 22:10, 12 *"The time is near...Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."*

This message must be proclaimed because the King is coming. Judgment is coming. There will be a day when the age of grace has ended and the King returns. I think that's how we need to understand verse 11. "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

Kevin DeYoung: The point is simply that at the end of time, when Christ returns – people will be what they are. When Jesus comes on the clouds of heaven – the opportunity to repent will have passed.

"When God begins his final work of judgment on the earth, he will not be offering salvation to those who are lost. He will be coming to reward people "according to their deeds."

There is coming a day when change will be impossible. It will be too late. You will be left, unalterably with what you have chosen.

Jesus makes the very same point in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25). There is a day when those who were spiritually careless find that the door is closed. There is no more opportunity to enter in. There will be those who are inside and those who are outside – and it cannot be changed.

That's precisely what our text speaks of next.

Rev. 22:14–15 *Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

There is a great division between those who are inside and those who are outside. What's the difference?

First, **those who are on the outside.**

¹⁵ *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

“The dogs” sounds like a derogatory term, but it was a way to refer to pagans:

- Those whose god is their belly.
- Those who are driven by their basest desires, like an animal.
- Those who are sexually immoral – who love sexual sin either openly or secretly.
- Those who are murderers – either physically or with hateful words or slanderous tongues.
- The Idolaters – those who love and serve comfort, reputation, pleasure, and security above God.
- Everyone who loves and practices falsehood – people who lie and who embrace lies.

There will be many people on the last day who went to church, who believed the Bible, who professed to be Christian – and yet will find on the last day that they are left “outside.” They will be judged according to their deeds.

What is the distinguishing difference between those on the outside and those inside? This is the most important question of your life! It is critical to pay attention here, because your eternal soul depends on it. The difference is not what we might easily assume it to be. Those on the outside are defined by their sin. What is the defining characteristic of those on the inside? It is that they are without sin! That does not mean that they have not sinned or do not sin. The difference is that they have washed away their sin in the blood of the Lamb!

“Blessed are those who have washed their robes...”

Ananias to Saul: **Acts 22:16** *And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*

The gospel message is that God has made a way in Jesus Christ for sinners to be washed clean! Sins can be washed away by the blood of Jesus. When you confess your sin and ask God to forgive you – trusting that Jesus bore your sin in his body on the tree, believing that Jesus died in your place, bearing the guilt of your sin – the Bible says that so God washes away your sin! It’s gone! The guilt is gone.

The great difference on the last day is that some will be judged according to their deeds and some will be judged according to the atoning, cleansing, blood of Jesus Christ. The difference isn’t between those who have sinned and those who have not sinned. All have sinned. The difference is between those who stand before the judgment throne in the stain of their sin, and those who have washed their sins away by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Rev. 22:14 *Blessed are those who wash their robes...*

This is the last of the 7 benedictions in the book of Revelation. It is the most blessed of all blessings. Blessed are those who wash their robes – day after day, again and again.

What is the blessedness that belongs to them? They have the right to the tree of life and may enter into the city by the gates. They are welcome to eternal life and are citizens of the eternal city of God.

III. A Gospel to be Received

Jesus invites the sinners of this world to come and be clean.

Rev. 22:17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Do you hear the tender, urgent love of Jesus? Come. Have you defiled yourself with sin? Come to Jesus, come wash away your sin. Have you parched your soul serving the gods of self and sin? Are you thirsty for change? Thirsty for holiness? Thirsty for God? Jesus invites you to come and drink freely of the water of life.

"Let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

This letter should leave you feeling that there is something essential at stake here. You should sense that Jesus, right now, is inviting you to drink the water of life. His gospel is that water. The gospel is the message of all that God has accomplished for sinners in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. This is the message that brings life to all who believe. Drink of it. Today. And live.