

Revelation 22

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[0 : 00] The chapter that we've just read is not only the last chapter of the book of Revelation, it is the last chapter of the Bible. You'll perhaps remember that I think three weeks ago, we looked at the very first chapter in the Bible, Genesis chapter 1.

Today we're looking at the last chapter in the Bible, and just as Genesis 1 opens up God's story, Revelation 22 brings it to a conclusion.

So it's written for us not just to bring everything in Revelation to a conclusion, it's written for us to bring the whole Bible to an end, and to challenge us as to how we are going to live in the light of what we have read.

I suppose that to get the context we would have had to read the whole of the book of Revelation. I'm sure that you've tried with great difficulty.

You're not alone. Revelation is an extremely complicated book. It's an intriguing book. It's almost impossible to understand.

[1 : 16] In fact, I think it probably is impossible in this life to understand. One day we hope that it will all be explained to us, but meanwhile we have to try and unravel the mysteries that are in Revelation.

To what extent is it literal? To what extent is it historic? To what extent does it refer to the future? And to what extent is it symbolic?

I believe that a lot of it, a lot of it is symbolic. And I also believe that in order to understand it better, you need to know the rest of the Bible.

You need to know the language of the Old Testament. And in fact, the more you know the Old Testament, the clearer that Revelation will be. In any case, I don't want to go into the complexities of it.

I want us simply to remember that there are three messages in the book. The first message is God is on the throne.

[2 : 18] And that's a message that John needed to hear. Remember when you're reading the book of Revelation and you're trying to think, does this refer to the future? Remember that it was written first of all for John.

It was to give comfort to him. And so whatever meaning we take out of Revelation, you've got to ask the question, what did this mean to John when he saw it in the first place?

He was isolated on the island of Patmos. And he was suffering all the frustrations and the tension and the anxiety that someone like him would suffer, being separated from his friends and from his church and from the work that God had given him to do.

And he must have wondered, what is God doing in all of this? Why am I on this island? Why am I not able to get on with sharing the gospel?

And this had happened at what seemed to be just the wrong time. Things were going badly for the church, or at least they appeared to be that way.

[3 : 29] So why was God doing all of that? Why was he bringing about this uncertainty and this separation? Why was he weakening the church? Remember that John was the last remaining surviving disciple of Jesus.

He was the only person in the world that could say to the rest of the church at that time, I was there. I saw Jesus. I heard him. And I can testify because I was an eyewitness.

And now that very person is taken away from the rest of the church, and he is isolated on an island away from it. They didn't have internet. They didn't have letters.

They didn't have any means of communication. So he has no way of knowing what's going on in the rest of the world, and the rest of the church. And others have no way of knowing whether he's dead

or alive.

It must have been hugely problematic for him. And it must have generated all kinds of questions in his mind like, what is God doing in all of this?

[4 : 29] There are many times when we ask that question. Like now, we're asking, what is God doing in all of this? This time of uncertainty.

This time of trouble, and where we don't know what's going to happen from one week to the next. We don't know when we're going to be reunited properly with our family and friends and with our churches, and when things are going to go back to normal.

Now, of course, things were much worse in John's time. Nonetheless, nonetheless, we're asking those same questions this morning.

And that was when God gave John this extraordinary vision to remind him, first and foremost, that there is a throne in the universe, and that the events that take place, although they seem so random and meaningless to him and to us, there is no such thing as a random event.

God is in control. There is a throne, and there is one who sits on the throne. And that was a terrific comfort for John, and I hope it will be for us as well.

[5 : 45] We need to remember that, that God has a purpose in COVID-19, and all the havoc, and all of the devastation that is being caused.

Second message in the book of Revelation is that heaven is a real place. John is given a glimpse of heaven, and I know that the vision that he saw is largely symbolic, like I said before.

Nonetheless, heaven is a real place that God is preparing for those who love him and who follow Jesus. And Jesus' promise is that those who trust in him and follow him and believe in him will live beyond this world and will be taken one day with reconstituted, raised bodies to be forever with the Lord in a place which is perfect, a dimension, an existence which is flawless and which will last for all eternity.

Now, with my scientific mind, I'm asking all these questions. How is God going to do all of this? How do I know that there is this other dimension? How can I be sure of the reality of this place called heaven?

Well, I can be sure of it because I remind myself God created this reality, the reality that I know, this dimension, this universe. And if he is powerful enough to create this universe, he is powerful enough to create as many different parallel dimensions as he wishes to.

[7 : 33] There are no limits to the power and the ability of God. And so, when the Bible says heaven is, I believe it.

I don't know how that works scientifically. I don't need to know. All I need to know is that it's true because God has said it.

So, that's the second message in the book of Revelation. Heaven is a reality. The third message, and this is the message that runs all the way through this last chapter, is Jesus is coming.

Behold, he says, I am coming soon. And it was in the light of this truth, this promise, that John wanted and God wants us to live.

and this is the closing chapter of the Bible in which, once again, there is this great announcement. Jesus is coming and he is coming soon.

[8 : 38] So, it's a reality but it's also an imminent reality. Whatever that means, we might have a chance, we might have some time to look at that in a few moments' time.

How then do we live in the light of the reality that Jesus is coming soon? Well, I want us first to try and understand what that means.

Jesus is coming soon is a promise. It's an expectation. It's the closing words of the Bible. In other words, as we bring the Bible to a conclusion, as we come to the end of it, we're left with promises, with assurances, with realities and with challenges.

How do we live? We're to understand first that this is true. It's an expectation with which the Bible closes.

And it would be good, and it's always good to go back to, first of all, to when Jesus left this earth, having been here the first time.

[9 : 54] You remember that moment Jesus rose from the dead and he spent 40 days appearing from time to time with his disciples. And then he took them to a mountain and he issued the command to them to go into all the world to make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and he promised that he would be with them to the end.

And then he was taken from them, he was literally lifted from the earth. The disciples saw him rising from the earth and then being hidden by a cloud. And then, remember what happened after that? An angel appeared and said, this same Jesus, who you've just seen, being lifted from this earth and returning to heaven, he will return again in the same way.

Now that's really important because it draws a contrast between the way in which Jesus came into the world the first time and the way in which he will come again.

You remember the way he came first time in isolation, if I could use that great word again, isolation is something we all know about. In secret, in obscurity, he was born out of the public view.

[11 : 11] here's the king of the universe and he comes into the world and nobody knows about him. He was born in obscurity, he was born in secrecy, he was born in humility and in poverty.

But when he left this world, he left in a blaze of glory. And the angel promises he will return in a blaze of glory.

and every eye will see him. Somehow, I don't know how God is going to do this, but somehow God's going to make it so that everyone knows and sees the second coming of Jesus.

will the new coming. The second coming of Jesus will signal the resurrection of the dead.

That means literally that every single person who has died, all the millions and billions of people who have ever died, whatever has happened to their body, whether they have been buried or being buried at sea, or whether their bodies exist anymore, because even those who have been buried, there comes a time when by disintegration, they are no more, their body is no more.

[12 : 36] Nonetheless, God promises that he will reconstitute body, the bodies of every person who has died at the coming of Jesus, and they will rise.

Jesus will personally see to it. Let me read to you what was promised in 1 Thessalonians and chapter 4 and verse 16.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with a voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we are still alive and are left, we'll be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air, and so we will be forever with the Lord.

That is the promise that God gives to each one of us. And if you have lived and died in the Lord by believing and trusting in him, that promise is your security that you will rise again, we will rise again, and we will go to be with Jesus forever.

[14 : 06] Jesus is coming again. Now, right away, if you're anything like me, you'll be saying, well, how do I know this?

Revelation chapter 22 gives us the answer to that question, and the answer is this, trust me, God says, trust me.

These words, he says, are trustworthy and true. Verse 6, how do we know that Jesus will return?

Because he has personally promised it, and if God promises something, he will bring it to pass. promise. And in these words, in the closing chapter of the Bible, I can't help thinking that they apply not just to this particular promise, but everything that has gone before it.

Here is God at the very end of the Bible. He's bringing everything, he's wrapping everything up, and he's saying this, I know that you're asking, how do I know?

[15 : 26] Trust me, these words are trustworthy and true. Of course, it begs the whole question, why and how do we believe the Bible?

And there are two answers to that question. There is external evidence, and there is internal evidence. The external evidence is to do with the way in which the Bible is written, and the fact that it comes together so neatly, and that it contains a sense of seriousness and inquiry and research. I read, for example, the Gospel of Luke, and it bears all the hallmarks to me of someone who has made a point of gathering all the evidence together, putting it in a rational way, and in presenting it as eyewitness fact.

And the whole Bible is like that. That's what we call external evidence. It contains all the hallmarks of writers down the centuries who have seriously brought all this information together to present to us this truth.

evidence. But there's also internal evidence in which as we read the Bible, God speaks to us and affirms to us its authority and its truth.

[16 : 58] That's why it's so important to read the Bible for ourselves and to hear it. Because it is in being exposed to God's word that we become convinced of its truth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These words are trustworthy and true. But here's the challenge that's given to the church in the light of the coming of Jesus.

It tells us, do not seal up the words of this prophecy. blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Do not seal up the words of this prophecy. What does that mean? It means that the church must never withhold the truth of the gospel from anyone.

The task of the church is to make known this great message of the gospel. And that applies, of course, to every one of us individually.

[18 : 12] And it asks us the question, are you embarrassed? Particularly at a time when Christians are marginalized and often made to feel stupid and idiotic because they still believe in this Jesus and they still follow this Jesus as the Son of God?

And it applies to the church as well. Are we doing what Jesus commanded us to do when he told his disciples to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations?

This challenge must always be at the forefront of the church, including Bonacord Free Church. And as we go through this crisis, perhaps it's an opportunity to take stock again of this great command. Sometimes isolation can be an opportunity for us to think, to wonder, to reprioritise. Are we doing what God commands us to do?

And are we, is evangelism at the very forefront of our minds? However that evangelism takes place, do not seal up the words of this prophecy.

[19 : 32] Of course the chapter goes on also to give us other commands about the word. It says do not add anything to the words of this prophecy and don't take anything away.

In other words, we're not to pervert it in any way. We're not to read the Bible and say, well I don't like this bit or I actually find this a little bit awkward, a little bit embarrassing.

I'm going to just ignore it. I'm just going to dismiss it and put it to one side and I'm going to concentrate on what is more appealing. We're not to do that because that's a perversion of what God has said.

Later on in this chapter we read the warning that as well as people being in heaven there will be people outside of heaven and that's not a particularly appealing verse.

But I'm not to withhold that. I'm not to twist it. I'm not to pretend it's not there because it is there. We are to unashamedly preach the gospel, to preach it lovingly but to preach it truthfully and sincerely.

[20 : 45] We're to take God at his word. The third challenge that this leaves me with is this, that it demands a response.

look at verse 11. Verse 11 says this, let him who does wrong continue to do wrong. Hold on a minute. Let him who is vile continue to be vile.

But then it says let him who is right continue to do right. And let him who is holy continue to be holy. that's a strange way of putting things, isn't it?

What does it mean? Well, it seems to be a division into two options. And there are two options in front of us.

One or the other. It doesn't mean that somehow God is complacent about the way we live. Let him who is vile continue to leave.

[21 : 49] That doesn't mean that God is complacent. He doesn't care about the way you live. He does. I believe what it means is this.

And again, it has to be seen in the context of this being the last chapter in the Bible. And God is saying to us, you've read everything that I've said about myself.

You have read about the creation of the universe. You've come to know the reality that I've created the universe. You've come to know the reality of the separation that has come to pass between the world and God because of sin.

And you are part of that. We've come to know the reality of Jesus coming into the world as the Son of God to give his life willingly and lovingly as a sacrifice, as the sacrifice for our sin.

We've come to know in these pages about how he rose from the dead, triumphant over the grave.

This is the greatest truth in all the world.

[23 : 01] And we've heard in the pages of the Bible, God himself appealing to us, inviting us, offering us the free gift of eternal life.

Now that demands a response. sadly, there are some people who after hearing this whole message will say, no, I want to continue my own life.

I don't want to know what God has done or how God can save me. This verse tells us, if that's you, so be it.

It's your call. If you walk away from the offer of God of everlasting life, that is your decision. It's a very serious thing, isn't it?

Because the chapter goes on to spell out what the consequence of such a decision is. Eternal darkness. A Christless eternity. But the other response, of course, is the response of faith.

[24 : 11] The response that says, yes, I will accept Jesus. I will follow him. I will surrender myself to him and I want to live for him in faith and in trust and in belief for the rest of my life.

Because I do believe that Jesus is who he says he was and that his death is the payment of all my sin and that's what I want more than anything else.

I want God to wash away all my sin. And to that person God says, let him be holy and righteous still. Because remember, that's what righteousness means.

It means coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus, lastly, it signals the happiness happiness of all of God's people.

You notice that as we read this chapter, the word blessed appears twice. Once in verse 7 and once in verse 14.

[25 : 25] The word blessed is a popular word, is a common word in the Bible. If you've read the Bible, then you will notice that the word blessed is a word that occurs many, many times.

What does it mean? At root, it means happiness. It means to be happy. But when the Bible speaks about happiness, it doesn't speak about the kind of transitory, temporary, superficial happiness that people experience in this world.

It's coming and going, you're happy one day, you're not, the next. That's not the kind of happiness that God offers us. The joy that God offers in the gospel is a lasting joy, a joy that will see us through the roughest of times, the darkest of times.

Because it's a joy that's rooted in him and a joy which will come to complete, ultimate fruition in heaven.

A joy that will be unbroken and where there will be no threat to that joy.

[26 : 44] in the kingdom that will come to light one day. That's what God promises for his people.

And God invites you to share in that joy. You notice at the very end of this chapter, it ends with a warning.

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

The outside means a lost and a Christless eternity, a place of punishment. And yet, the chapter doesn't end there.

It ends with an invitation. come, says Jesus. Let him who hears come.

[27 : 46] Let him who is thirsty come and take freely of the river, of the water, of life. And that's symbolic language for the everlasting life that Jesus died to offer us.

He came to give us life, to give us new life, to give us abundant life, and to give us everlasting life. Life that will extend forever and ever in unbroken joy and perfection.

And he says that life can be yours. I hope that you have that life already by trusting in Jesus. if you don't, I hope you'll take it as God's gift, the greatest gift that you could ever have in all of your life.

These are then the closing words of the Bible. Words that assure us that Jesus will return one day to this earth to raise the dead personally, to judge the world, and to receive his own beloved people to live with him in perfection forevermore.

What a prospect, what a promise, what a certainty we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. May it be ours as we take it afresh today, on this Lord's Day, this first day of the week.

[29 : 22] May we discover afresh the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in his promise, in what he has done, and in what he is still to do when he returns.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will accept our worship as we reflect on these glorious words, and we pray that you will forgive our failure to dwell upon them as we ought to, but we pray that something of their truth will be brought home to us afresh by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that you will continue with us throughout the rest of this day.

In Jesus' name, Amen. 3