

Revelation 22:20

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[0 : 00] Before we do turn to the passage that we read in Revelation chapter 22, there's one notice that I want to mention. I should have done so earlier, but especially in the light of there not being an intimation sheet today. On Tuesday, on the 1st, we have a New Year's Day service at 11. And I know many of you are aware of that, but for those who aren't, or as a reminder, all are welcome to take in the new year, not take in the new year, but begin the new year gathering together for worship. So, that's on the 1st of January, 11 o'clock here in the church. Well, how was Christmas for you? In what way did you celebrate the Advent or the coming of Jesus? It is good to remember to celebrate the coming of Jesus.

And in that regard, Christmas serves a useful purpose, even in the absence of any explicit biblical command to mark the occasion. So, even in the absence of such a command, it is a good thing to have an opportunity in a particular way to remember and celebrate the first coming, the first advent of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But what of Christ's second coming? We've already touched on it as we spoke to the children, and this is what we want to think about this morning. Just a few days ago, we were remembering and celebrating the first coming of Jesus. But what of His second coming? What thought do we give to that future event? His first coming? His first coming is enthusiastically celebrated. But what of His second coming? I think the reality is that while most folks, be they religious or otherwise, accept that Jesus came, regardless of what opinions they might have as to who He is or what He came to do, but most would accept that He did come, very few would concede that He will come again. His first coming, as a cute wee wane, merits a party. But His second coming, as judge, merits for many only disbelief and disdain.

But it is concerning that second coming that we want to focus our attention this morning. In the Old Testament, we've been looking in these past few Sundays at prophecies in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of Messiah. And in the Old Testament, and we've seen some of this in the prophecies we've been considering, the coming of Messiah is generally presented as a single event, where there is no distinction, certainly no clear distinction drawn between His first and His second coming. The prophetic descriptions merge the events and consequences of the first and second advent into one glorious vision. The New Testament, of course, given that it is written after and in the light of Jesus' first coming, does look forward to His second coming and present in some detail, maybe not in great detail, but in some detail, the second coming of Jesus, what it will be like, what it will involve, what will be the purpose of it. These matters are addressed.

In different parts of the New Testament. But this morning, we are going to limit ourselves largely to what is said in the final chapter of the Bible, the chapter that we've read in Revelation chapter 22.

[4 : 04] And everything that we say will revolve around the thrice-repeated statement or promise of Jesus, behold, I am coming soon. There in verse 7, behold, I am coming soon. Again in verse 12, behold, I am coming soon. And then to close the chapter in verse 20, yes, I am coming soon.

And the manner in which we want to consider this statement, this promise of Jesus is to think of it in two ways. First of all, as a promise to the church, a promise to us as believers in Jesus Christ, a promise to the church, but also to consider, as the chapter does, the response of the church.

We have the promise to the church, but we also have in these verses a description of what ought to be the response of the church, of us, to these words of Jesus. So, first of all, then, let's think of these words in this way as a promise to the church. Behold, I am coming soon. First of all, who is speaking? Now, that seems such a blindingly obvious question, but while it in many ways is a very obvious one, and it's very easy to identify Jesus as the speaker and maker of the promise, there is merit in both confirming from the text that this is indeed so, not just taking it as a given, confirming that that is the case, but also, and perhaps more helpfully, to notice the manner in which this Jesus,

who is indeed speaking, describes Himself. So, who is speaking? Well, what does the passage reveal and make very clear? Notice what we read in verse 16, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches." So, there it's clear who it is who is addressing the church and the manner in which He is doing so. But then, as we move on, and especially at the end of the chapter, the matter becomes so explicit. We read in verse 20, "He who testifies to these things says, yes, I am coming soon." And what is the response?

"A man come, Lord Jesus." So, beyond any shadow of doubt, we have established within the text itself that Jesus is the one who is addressing His people. He is the one who makes this promise, "Behold, I am coming soon." But I want us also to notice the language that Jesus uses to describe Himself. Who is this Jesus who speaks in this way? Who is this Jesus who declares that He is coming soon, that He is coming again? Well, we limit ourselves to the words that He Himself uses to describe Himself. Verse 13 of our chapter, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." How much could be said regarding the significance of this language? But this morning, I want to limit myself to one, I think, very important and revealing observation, and it is this, that precisely the same language that Jesus uses of Himself that Jesus uses of Himself is used by God of Himself in this same vision, the vision that John received. Notice in chapter 1 of Revelation, in chapter 1 and verse 8, listen to the words of God, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." So there very clearly, very explicitly, God declares, "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

At the beginning of the vision, we come to the end of the vision, and it is Jesus who is speaking, the Son of God. And what does Jesus say? "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Indeed, in the previous chapter, in chapter 21 and verses 6 and 7, we have this same manner in which the Father and the Son share the titles and the descriptions. In verse 6 of Revelation 21, "He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To Him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost. From the spring of the water of life, He overcomes, He overcomes, will inherit all this, and I will be His God, and He will be my Son." Who is speaking? Well, God is speaking. How does He describe Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end? And then very revealingly, Jesus, as He speaks, takes to Himself these same titles, these same divine titles and attributes. So, who is speaking? Who declares, "I am coming soon?" It is Jesus, the Eternal Son of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. And so, if we accept that it is indeed such who speaks, we would do well to listen to what He says." And what does Jesus promise? What is it that He declares? What is it that He promises? Well, in these familiar words that are repeated on three occasions in the chapter, "I am coming." This is what Jesus promises, "I am coming." The promise is of a return to earth. Jesus, as we well know and have remembered in these days, was born in Bethlehem.

[10:16] He lived a perfect life. He died a sinner's death in our place on Calvary. He was risen from the grave on the third day. He ascended to the right hand of the Father. And from that place of majesty and authority, He promises to return. He will come again to this earth. For what purpose? Why will He come?

Why will He come again? Well, again, we would limit ourselves to what we find in the passage. And the language of the passage is, unmistakably, the language of judgment. Notice in verse 12 what Jesus goes on to say, "Behold, I am coming soon. My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what He has done." The language of judgment. The language of reward and punishment. I say reward and punishment, but in actual fact, Jesus declares that all will be rewarded. All will be rewarded.

Now, what it is they will receive is another matter. I will give to everyone according to what He has done. The picture painted in the passages of a heavenly city where some will go through the gates while others will remain outside. We have that picture painted in verses 14 and 15. So, there is a reward.

For some, the reward will be entrance into this heavenly city. For others, their reward will be to remain outside. What will determine? What will determine the reward that will be received? Well, again, we repeat the words of Jesus, "I will give to everyone according to what He has done." Are we to conclude that this is a judgment based on works? Yes, it is a judgment based on works. But are we then to conclude that we are justified by these works? Not at all. Because what does Jesus go on to say in verse 14? Blessed are those who wash their robes. Where the language clearly is an allusion to the forgiveness that we receive, that is given to us by grace as we trust in God's

provision for us. So, the works upon which we will be judged, these works are works that do not secure our salvation, but they are the works that evidence our salvation. Yes, we will be judged according to what we have done. That is clear not only in this chapter. It's the repeated truth that we find in the New Testament, but it doesn't in any way contradict our convictions concerning the truth that we are justified by faith through grace. So, this is the purpose of Jesus' return. He comes to judge the world. He comes to judge each and every one of us. When is He coming?

Well, Jesus does make some reference to the matter of time, if you wish, in His words. He says, I am coming soon. He doesn't just say, I am coming. He says, I am coming soon. We're not told when.

[13 : 51] We're not given an hour or a day. We're not given a date or a year or a century. We simply have this reference to Jesus coming soon. Now, when we think of this matter of when Jesus will come or the end of the world, we know that periodically we have failed prophecies in that regard, only in these last few days we've had one further failed prophecy concerning the end of the world, on this occasion with a Mayan flavor. And such failed predictions are largely met by those who take any concern with them at all.

They're met with amusement and maybe with incredulity. But even though we may share in that amusement at the failed prophecies that come and go, what we mustn't forget is that this world, certainly in its current form, will end. We don't know when, but it will end. I think NASA came up with a prediction based on, oh, I don't know what, but... And I think we've still got, according to NASA, a few million years, yeah, nothing too soon, according to NASA, as to the end of the world. But what is clear, certainly, on the basis of the testimony of Scripture is that this world, in its present form, will end.

We don't know when. All we are told by Jesus is that He is coming soon. But what does that mean? You have already touched on this with the children. When we think of the word soon, well, we think of it in the context of our appreciation of time. Of course, we are time limited, and we have a limited time of life, and so anything beyond our lifetime seems a very long way away from our perspective. But what is the meaning? What is the purpose of Jesus using this particular word, I am coming soon? One word that is often used, I think, helpfully in understanding what Jesus means by saying, I am coming soon, is that His coming is imminent. It's imminent. The language of Jesus is not intended to encourage feverish speculation as to the day or the hour, but to remind God's people, generation after generation, that the coming of Jesus is imminent, and perhaps most importantly, that we should live in the light of His imminent coming, in the light of His imminent appearing. He will come. He will come. He will come soon. We don't know when, but we are to live in the light of His imminent appearing. So, His coming is imminent. But another aspect of His coming that relates to the matter of timing, if you wish, we can say this, that His coming is patient. What do I mean by saying His coming is patient? Well, in a way, it's to respond to the understandable reaction of some who are incredulous to this language of Jesus. You know, folk would hear what we're saying, I'm coming soon, and they would say, well, when did Jesus say that? When was Revelation written? Well, it was nearly 2,000 years ago. He said, I'm coming soon. Well, you know, 2,000 years have passed, and He still hasn't come. You know, what credibility can we give to this promise? The years pass, and the centuries pass, and the millennia pass, and there's no sign of Him appearing. How can we take seriously these words?

[17 : 37] And at face value, that would seem to be a legitimate concern or criticism. The words of Jesus, I am coming soon. See, that word soon would appear to give fuel to the doubters who would question if He is coming at all. Now, what we should be aware of and recognize is that that response and that doubt is nothing new. It was dealt with by Peter in his second letter. We can read very swiftly what Peter says in 2 Peter chapter 3, and we'll read from verse 3 through to verse 9. Peter's dealing precisely with this objection of those who say, well, Jesus said He's coming soon, but where is He?

The days pass, the months pass, the years pass, and nothing is happening. And how does Peter deal with that? Well, listen to what he says. First of all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, where is this coming He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's Word, the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and

destroyed.

By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. And then very especially notice what Peter goes on to say, but do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise.

As some understand slowness, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. So, Peter, in addressing this objection, he says, you know, people object and people say, well, when's He coming? He said He's going to come.

[19 : 46] He said He's going to come soon, and He's not appearing. What's going on? And Peter says, well, part of what's going on is the very grace of God who is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should fail to repent. So, we live in a time of grace. We live in a time of opportunity. This seemingly long time between the promise and its fulfillment is God giving you, giving me, giving us the opportunity to repent so that when He does come, we will be ready. When He does come, we will be welcomed in to that heavenly city and will not be left outside. And so, if there is slowness or perceived slowness, this is the reason Peter assures us. So, His coming is imminent, but His coming is patient. But let this also be very clear. His coming is definite. We don't know when. We can't be sure.

We're not intended to know. But we know that His coming is determined, and it is definite. We think of the words in this very chapter that we began our reading with. These words are trustworthy and true.

These words are trustworthy and true. I am coming soon. So, this is the promise to the church. But we also want to move on and consider the response of the church. Now, the response of the church is, intriguingly, to echo the very same verb employed by Jesus, to come, I am coming soon, but to echo that word in three directions. We're going to notice in a moment the three directions. Well, I'll mention what they are now and then develop them. First of all, the church to the church. The church is to address the church with the word come. In this case, come to Jesus. We'll go to the text in a moment to see where we find that. But then also, the church is to address this verb, this invitation to come to the world in the same terms, come to Jesus. But then finally, the church is to address these words, or this verb, to Jesus Himself. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Now, we find this in two verses in particular, in verse 17 and in verse 20. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. 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. And then in verse 20, He who testifies to these things says, Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. So, the response of the church, employing this same verb to come, addressed in three directions, is found in these two verses. Now, of the two, the most intriguing and the one that requires more careful consideration is verse 17. And so, we'll spend a little time thinking about what is actually being said in verse 17. It is, at face value, somewhat cryptic. In verse 17, we have what we might call a chain of invitation, which we do need to explore. And I would encourage you to have your Bible open and very much focus on this verse to see what I say and to see if it's valid what I say as we explore this verse. This chain of invitation. Well, let's follow the chain. First of all, it begins with the Spirit and the bride say, Come. Okay, so that's the first link in the chain. The Spirit and the bride say, Come. The question is, who are they speaking to? Well, presumably to the next actor, if you wish, in the chain. And who is he? Well, then we read, And let him who hears say, Come. So, the first link in the chain, the Spirit and the bride, they address the one who hears.

The one who hears in turn invites others. And who does he invite? Well, then we come to the third link in the chain. Whoever is thirsty, let him come. And whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Okay, so we have these three actors in this chain of invitation. But who are they? [24 : 18] Who are they? Well, let's try and identify them. First of all, in the first link, the Spirit and the bride, they are easily enough identified. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God, and the bride is the church, language that is often used to speak of the church. So, we have the Holy Spirit and the church speaking as one, delivering this invitation. But who are they speaking to? Who is the one who hears? Let him who hears. And this is where things get a little bit more complex, because the one who hears is distinguished from the bride. The bride is the church made up of all believers. And so, at that level, we would say, well, it can't be a believer, because it's the bride made up of all believers who is addressing the one who hears. But then, just to make things a little bit more complex, the one who hears in turn invites others. And it would seem primarily invites unbelievers to come to Jesus. And we would say, well, that's something that a believer would do. So, on the one

hand, we have reason to imagine or conclude that this is not a believer. And yet, on the other hand, we would have reason to conclude that this is a believer that is being spoken of, this second link in the chain, the one who hears.

I think the answer to the enigma is to recognize that this invitation to come, and the invitation is to come to Jesus, this invitation to come is both addressed by and to the church. The one who hears is also the one who announces. The one who hears, in the language of verse 17, is the church, or perhaps preferably the individual believer, being beckoned by the church to come to Jesus. And that same individual who is beckoned to come, in turn, invites others who are outside of the believing community to come to Jesus. You see, that takes us to the third actor, the third link in the chain. We've really, really, we've already identified who we think he or she or they are, whoever is thirsty, whoever is thirsty. And I think here the reference in the first instance primarily is to be understood as those who are unbelievers, being invited to come to Jesus. Though I think it can also be understood to include believers who are being invited to come again and again to drink the water of life. We're not to drink of the water of life on one occasion alone. It is a fountain of life that we can come to again and again. And though it would appear that primarily this third party, this third link in the chain, refers to those who are not Christians, who are not believers. It can also be understood to include those who are. So, I hope that helps us have some understanding of what's going on there in verse 17. And having explored the verse in some detail, what I want to do is to now move on and to consider in more detail each direction in which this invitation to come is addressed by the church. We've already said in three directions. And the first one was the church to the church. The Spirit and the bride say, come. Where? Come to Jesus. The church directed by the Holy Spirit is to permanently and insistently call itself and each individual member of the community to the community to Jesus. Back to Jesus. It's a good thing, especially at the end of a year, to ground ourselves in this great central truth of who we are and why we are here. The most important invitation that can be addressed to us, come to Jesus. Come to Jesus. Ever come back to Jesus. Yes, there is so much that we can study and learn and discover concerning our faith, but let us never forget that at the very heart of who we are, we are those who come to Jesus. We are those who love Jesus, who trust in Jesus. He is at the heart of who we are and why we are here. And so, as the church, we call one another, come to Jesus, come to Jesus. Why such an invitation to those who are already Christians? Well, there are so many ways we could answer that question. We are, come to Jesus for protection. This was particularly relevant for the readers of Revelation when it was first written.

These were Christians who were enduring severe persecution. And so, what a welcome invitation for them. Come to Jesus that He might protect you in troubled and dangerous times. We are to come to Jesus also for cleansing. We've noticed the language of verse 14. Blessed are those who wash their robes.

[29 : 57] We know that as we continue to sin. So, we continue to be those in need of cleansing and forgiveness. And so, the invitation, come to Jesus for cleansing. Come to Jesus for refreshment. The language of verse 17, whoever is thirsty, let him come. Yes, those who have never tasted of this water, come. But those of us who have, let us continue to come and find satisfaction and refreshment in Jesus. And so, this invitation, though, this invitation of the church, echoing the very language of Jesus, the very word that He uses, I am coming soon, is addressed by the church to the church. Come to Jesus.

But we notice also a second direction, and that is the church to the world. Let him who hears say, come. The believer who is granted this invitation to come to Jesus, he hears. And the one who hears, in turn, invites others. Let him who hears say, come. We who have been invited to come to Jesus, as we who have been enabled to accept that invitation, we who enjoy His protection, His cleansing, His refreshment. We are those that can and must invite others. Who are we to invite? Who are we to invite? Whoever is thirsty. Whoever is thirsty. Whoever is willing. Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. And we must not lose the force of that word, whoever. Whoever is whoever. None are excluded, or none are to be excluded from this invitation that we direct to the world. The word whoever, there are echoes of that very famous verse in John 3.16, for God so loved the world that He gave

His one and only Son that whoever, whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have, enjoy eternal life. Whoever. Who are we to invite? Whoever. None are to be excluded. And though that is important and ought to be stressed, it is certainly the case, and on the basis of the language of the

passage, it is the case that those likely to respond to the invitation will be those who are thirsty, those who are conscious of their need, those who experience spiritual thirst and emptiness. Whoever wishes. Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. If somebody doesn't wish the free gift, well, it's very unlikely they're going to take it. And we are, with God's help and direction, to seek out the thirsty, always conscious, and this almost as a caveat to recognizing that we are to seek out the thirsty, always conscious that spiritual thirst is not always visible, not something we'll be able to see or detect easily, and also to recognize that by God's grace, spiritual thirst can be awoken even by the very invitation that we extend. What are we offering? Those invited, where are they to come? The invitation is to come, but come where? Come to Jesus. The language of the passage highlights what it is that Jesus offers, the free gift of the water of life. But this water of life spoken of by Jesus is not to be understood as a resource distinct from Jesus, but Jesus Himself. Listen to the words of Jesus recorded for us in

John's gospel in chapter 7 from verse 37. On the last and greatest day of the feast, the reference here is to the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He didn't say, go to that well or there's water that I'm going to give to you. No, if anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink. So, the invitation is that those who are thirsty would come to Jesus. How are those invited to come? The invitation to Jesus may sound fine and dandy, but what does that mean? How do you do that?

How do you come to Jesus? Perhaps somebody here this morning says, well, that's fine. That's a great invitation, but what does that look like? What do I have to do to come to Jesus? Where is He? You know, it just all seems a bit vague. What's that all about? Well, the verse that we've just read points us in the right direction. What did Jesus say? Whoever believes in me, whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within Him. To come to Jesus is to believe in Jesus. It is to trust in Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Savior of the world who died on Calvary's tree in the place of sinners that we might know and enjoy forgiveness. To recognize who He is, to acknowledge what He has done for sinners, to put our trust in Him as our Savior, as the one who will and can forgive us. This is how we are to come, by believing in Him.

[35 : 47] And so, friend, this morning, if you are not a Christian, then I invite you to come. Come to Jesus. Please put your trust in Him. If you are thirsty, drink. If you wish, take the free gift of the water of life. But I would also address those who are Christians. You see, in this chain of invitation, what are we told? The one who hears, the one who is invited to come, the one who has come, is also to invite others. Come. Come to Jesus. May this year that begins be a year in which we set ourselves this task, this great privileged task of extending to others the invitation that they too might come to Jesus. But then finally, the third direction in which the church is to direct this invitation of these words to come to itself, to the world, but also the church, to Jesus. This is much clearer than in verse 20. He who testifies to these things says,

Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The verb is the same, but the invitation is not to come to Jesus, but the invitation or prayer is directed to Jesus, that He might come. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Why this heartfelt prayer? Is this something that we pray? What about you in this year that is ending? It's a simple question that I direct to you. Is this something that you ordinarily or regularly pray as a Christian? Come, Lord Jesus. We might say, well, why don't we just wait patiently for His coming?

Why the need to cry out, Come, Lord Jesus? Words of Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 4 perhaps can help us in answering that question. What do we read there? As Paul writes to Timothy in this particular letter, we read as follows, Notice the description of those who are to receive the crown of righteousness, all who have longed for, all who love His appearing. And so, I ask myself, and I ask you, Christian friend, do we love or long for His appearing? Why should we long for, why should we love His appearing?

And as we do, so cry out, Come, Lord Jesus. Well, I think two words sum up why we are to long for His appearing, why we are to love His appearing. And with this we close. Two words, deliverance and delight. You see, on that day when Jesus returns, we will be delivered from all opposition and hostility, delivered from our own sinful nature and body of death, delivered finally and fully from sin and its dark consequences. And how we should long for such deliverance. We who are frustrated by our own sin and by our own failings so often. What a great day it will be when we are finally

delivered from sin.

[39 : 29] And so, we long for that day because of the deliverance that it will bring. But also delight to be with Jesus, which is better by far, to see Him face to face, to be transformed into His likeness.

What unimaginable delights await us on that day when Jesus will return and gather His own to Himself.

How we should long for such delight. We're all big fans of celebrating the first Advent, the coming of the coming of the coming of the coming of the coming of Jesus as a babe in Bethlehem.

But what I would encourage you as we come to the close of 2012 and the dawn of 2013, may we also live in the light of the second Advent. The one born in Bethlehem has a word for His people. He has a word for you. I am coming soon. I am coming soon. What is our response to these simple words?

[40 : 49] May our response be to encourage and to exhort one another, come to Jesus. May our response be to go into the world and invite others, come to Jesus. And may our response also be to look to our Lord and cry out, Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Let us pray.