

Revelation

Part Sixty-Two

Take the Water of Life Freely
(Revelation 22:12-17)

With Study Questions

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“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*” ¹⁴ Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. ¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” ¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:12-17).

Introduction

I was about ten when I we found a flare on the playground of our elementary school. We began daring each other to light it up. The turgor pressure of my peers was more than I could bear. Snap, strike, flame, principal’s office! It was enough of an infraction to summon the Redondo Beach Fire Department.

I sat awaiting my verdict. Two firemen sat me down and began to engage. They asked me why I decided to light the flare. I explained the social dynamic that led to the violation. I tried to remain cool as one of the firemen explained something to me. Sadly, I am convinced that I was so cool (not really) that he probably walked away from that meeting feeling it was a waste of his time. Yet, here I am, almost sixty-years later, sharing the story (never underestimate what God might do).

He said, “son, in this world there are leaders and followers. You need to decide which you’re going to be.” As the years went by, I realized, by the grace of God, that everybody is following somebody. And in order for me not to be the kind of follower this fireman was talking about, I needed

to thoughtfully decide who I would actually follow. Who, in the final analysis would be my master? Who you ultimately bow the knee to-whose name will be stamped on your mind and hand-heart and deed, is a recurring question throughout the Revelation.

And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work (Revelation 22:12).

The Naysayers

It's not as if answering naysayers is, or should be, a ministerial priority, but there are times when the naysayers have a point. Vincent Bugliosi, the lead prosecutor in the Charles Manson trial, is one of those naysayers. In his book *Divinity of Doubt: The God Question*, he seeks to indict the Scriptures, particularly Jesus, due to His failed prophecies.

Many years before Bugliosi, famous atheist Bertrand Russell offered the same criticisms in his well known *Why I Am Not a Christian*. Keep in mind, failed prophecy is a serious, death penalty, offense (Deuteronomy 18:20).

Among the passages they cite in the Bible is the one currently before us. Others are:

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matthew 16:27, 28).

And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power (Mark 9:1).

In a passage speaking of the "**tribulation**" the sun being "**darkened**" and the moon not giving its "**light**," we read,

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place (Mark 13:30).

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His Father's*, and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:26, 27).

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:8).

Of course, there is the context established in the opening of the very book we're studying.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must *shortly take place*. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. ³ Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; *for the time is near* (Revelation 1:1-3, italics mine).

And then we have the immediate context of our current passage.

Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. ⁷ "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:6, 7).

And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand (Revelation 22:10).

Just this past week I was excoriated for having the audacity to suggest that many of the visions in Revelation metaphorically refer to kings and battles which took place in the first century as God preserved His church against its detractors. Yet these same critics will take these many passages in the Scripture, which speak of the timing of these events, and morph them into something exegetically unnatural.

Although Revelation does address the final judgment (Revelation 20:7-15) at the Second Coming of Christ, the primary message in Revelation concerns the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. From BC to AD, and the promise of God to preserve His people. A promise He gave in Genesis 12:3 to bless those who bless His covenant people and curse those who curse His covenant people.

The original readers of the Revelation were under the heavy hand of religious and political persecution from Rome and Jerusalem. The Romans would have God's people bow to Caesar. It should be horrifying to our ears to learn that it was the covenant people of God who answered Pilate with the words,

We have no king but Caesar (John 19:15)!

And those same covenant people knew the course they must take in order to enlist Rome in their quest to kill Jesus and His followers.

These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus (Acts 17:6, 7).

Jesus was born, lived and died in a politically and religiously hostile environment. He was killed, but He rose again. And He would ensure the preservation of His bride, the church. And the primary theme of Revelation is the call for His bride to remain faithful.

Some would most assuredly be killed, but their blood would be the seed of His church, which would continue to move forward, the temple and the Roman Empire being reduced to an afterthought. We have a solid reason to think that good will prevail.

A Reward

When he communicates that His “**reward**” is with Him “**to give to every one according to his work**” He is not contradicting what is taught elsewhere. The Bible is not a systematic theology splicing up doctrines. Enough to say that to be given our heavenly reward “**according to**” our work is not the same as being saved by virtue of our works.

Yet the works of the Christian are so necessary-so tied to saving faith, that one should not think themselves a child of God if good works are entirely absent. Perhaps the most quoted passage in the Bible telling us we're saved by grace, also tells us why we have been saved.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*" ¹⁴ Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city (Revelation 22:13, 14).

God With Us, God Save Us

Kings and kingdoms come and go. Truly, they are "**as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales**" (Isaiah 40:15). But there is one kingdom that will never end (Daniel 7:14) because it has a King who will never again die. And not only is He our king who will never die, He is our living Priest.

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:23-25).

When Jesus refers to Himself as the Alpha, Omega, Beginning, End, First and Last, our only reasonable conclusion is that He is assigning deity (Godhood) to Himself. Our Mediator is both man and God. He is God that He might keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God and the power of death in satisfying God's justice in saving us. He is God with us (Immanuel) and He is Jesus meaning (Jehovah is salvation) He is the God who saves us.

In all of our difficulties, our greatest dilemma, whether we acknowledge it or not, is broken relationship with our Maker, with God. And no mere man is capable of mending that.

It is safe to conclude this self-description Jesus gives is designed for us to weigh our trust of fear of the world versus their trust or fear of God. Like I've said earlier, of all the visions, beasts, monsters and cataclysms John saw in the Revelation, only one made him fall **"as dead"** (Revelation 1:17).

A Right?

But like John, Jesus will lay His right hand upon us and bid us not to **"be afraid"** (Revelation 1:17). So thorough, so satisfactory in His victory over death that He uses almost uncomfortable language describing our access to the **"tree of life."** True, eternal life is expressed as a **"right"** *exousia* that we have. People love to take about their rights. But one must take a deep breath and approach God demanding our rights. But John uses the same word in His gospel.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie (Revelation 22:15).

Outsiders

It would appear that today's church has grown very uncomfortable with the idea that there are those excluded from the kingdom of God. **"Dogs"** may be referring to some type of sexual deviancy (Deuteronomy 23:18). **"Sorcerers"** are those seeking to supplant the wisdom of God in guiding us in wisdom and direction. **"Sexually immoral"** covers the vast spectrum of sexual perversions that destroys families and cultures. **"Murderers"** are those who have jettisoned the idea that men and women are made in God's image and have lives that are inherently valuable. **"Idolaters"** are those who are committed to bow the knee to anyone but the true Living God. And those who love, and practice lies are convinced

that their darkness deserves to prevail, even if the truth is bent beyond recognition.

It is not an act of love to make someone comfortable in their sin and rebellion against God. People, myself included, take comfort in the record of Jesus dining with sinners (Matthew 9:11). But this is often presented as if Jesus just left the sinner comfortable in their sin. But if you read of these encounters, they end with Jesus explaining why He was dining with them.

When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ But go and learn what *this* means: ‘*I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:12, 13).

At some point in the evening meal, these people would hear that they were sinners in need of repentance. There are few things more dangerous than false assurance. Heaven help us as a church if we fail to blow that trumpet of warning, that the blood be on our hands (Ezekiel 33).

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16).

The Ultimate Testimony

In a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult to ascertain the truth, God has graciously given us His word. The message of Revelation had immediate and direct application to the seven churches to whom it was addressed. But it applies with equal measure to all churches throughout the course of history who find themselves in similar situations. Whether the onslaught comes from Christ-rejecting religions (even some that claim to be Christian) or heavy-handed political oppression, the church must ever hear the testimony.

And that testimony is that Jesus is the **“Root and Offspring of David.”** God had sworn an oath to David that **“He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30).** And when did Jesus take the throne of David?

...he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:31).

Jesus is currently the **“King of kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:16)**. He is currently **“the ruler over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5)**. He is not, as is commonly taught today, the soon coming King. He is now King.

Bright and Morning Star

That He is **“the Bright and Morning Star”** speaks of the beginning of a new day in a new covenant. The world was a dark, dark place before the coming of Christ. His victory marked the beginning of the lighting of the entire sky. The Old Covenant can be compared to a single string of light in a dark sky, like a firework before it explodes in the sky. Christ will light the entire sky, the entire world.

But it begins in the hearts of individuals. Peter writes of a **“lamp shining in a dark place...**

...until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

The Water of Life

Through the work of the Spirit in the bride of Christ, she proclamations should so resonate that we agree with God that it is good for Him to intervene in the affairs of men.

And for those who thirst, and by thirst is meant a thirst for that which nourishes the soul. The intensities of our lives can push us from or drive us to the true fountain, who is Christ. Let us not lose sight that the Revelation is ministerial. David S. Clark comments,

This book, so full of judgments and the smoke of torment from the lake of fire, does not leave the reader with only such

visions in his mind. The grace of God, and the mercy of God shines out grandly amid them all. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

Questions for Study

1. Is it possible to avoid being a follower? How does one avoid being a follower in a worldly sense (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the time texts found in the book of Revelation, and in the rest of the New Testament. How do we reasonable understand the passages which speak of the imminent return of Christ (pages 3-5)?
3. Does God reward us due to our own wisdom or righteousness? Explain (pages 5, 6).
4. Why is it important to acknowledge the deity (godhood) of Christ (pages 6, 7)?
5. How is it possible that we have a "right" to be a child of God (page 7)?
6. Is it unloving to call sin out for what it is? Explain (pages 7, 8).
7. What does it mean that Jesus is the "Bright and Morning Star" (page 8)?
8. How is the book of Revelation ministerial (page 8)?