

Series: The Lamb's Final Plea (a study in Revelation 22)

Sermon Text: 22:6-13 Worship God!
(to ask questions)

(See App for lesson, slides, and

Every human civilization, from ancient Rome to our high-tech cities, thinks they can build paradise on earth. And without exception, Babylon-like corruption has led them all to implode, leaving us rightly weary of recycled vows to make things great again through flawed human effort. This is why **Revelation 21-22** unveil the New Jerusalem not as a project built by human sweat, but as a gracious gift descending from God. The challenge, of course, is that seeing God's city requires eyes of faith and worldly empires are more easily seen--with alluring attractions and empty-promise politicians who demand our ultimate allegiance. So, John wrote Revelation, not to fill our heads with pie-in-the-sky future speculations, but to unveil a counter-city God is constructing on earth--1 person at a time. He penned it to inspire present faithfulness in the middle of Babylon, highlighting God's command in **18:4** to **come out of her**, which involves resisting worldly seductions, injustice and idolatry--even when standing against culture feels like we're jeopardizing our own dreams and security. So, after unveiling how Christ is constructing a city of lasting joy, John rallies believers to ruminate on this...

BIG IDEA: Since we can't construct a perfect future, why not trust The Master Builder?

John began in **verse 6** by affirming that God is totally **trustworthy**: *And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of (who inspires) the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."* Repeating phrases from **1:1** signaled that Revelation has come full circle and makes **verses 6-21** the ultimate "So what?" of all John wrote. This also echoes what the Prophet Daniel (2:45) said about the certainty of God's coming kingdom, "*A great God has made known...what shall be after this. The dream is certain.*" These links prove that God's Words are **trustworthy and true** because every promise He made through Old Testament prophets was set in motion when Jesus exited the tomb. That event started the clock on what Scripture calls "*the last days*", a period that runs until His return. As Peter declared in Acts 2:17 and the

author of Hebrews (1:2) reminds us, we live in the age where God speaks to us through His Son and pours His Spirit on all nations. So, like the prophets and other apostles, John is assuring us that history is not drifting aimlessly because Christ's resurrection launched the last chapter of the current heaven and earth.

Now, have you ever been scrolling on your phone when one of those intense emergency alerts began abruptly blaring? When I was a kid, sometimes a voice would cut into the best part of a TV show to say, "*We interrupt this program to bring you a special announcement.*" Well, as John listened intently to *the angel, verse 7* says the voice of Jesus suddenly interjected: ***Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.*** This is proof that Revelation aims to spur present obedience, not future fascination! Here's how that looks: Jesus told the sleepy church in Sardis to "*wake up and turn to Him in repentance and faith in what they had first heard and believed.*" Later in **16:15**, He said we must "*stay awake and keep our garments on, so our true identity in Christ is always on display.*" ***Keeping His words***, then, can't mean tireless effort to earn God's favor, especially because of what we learned in **19:8--the resurrected Lamb gives us these garments**, which makes His Spirit the manufacturer of our spiritual growth! So, ***keeping His words*** begins with trusting them--daily resting in grace as the Holy Spirit strips away our caked-on cultural identities to let Christ's image shine through us as it did in Eden. The Apostle Paul got practical with the garment imagery in Ephesians 4:22-31 NIV: "*With regard to your former way of life...put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...be made new in the attitude of your minds; and...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness...*" Living like this involves removing Babylon's cultural costumes (e.g. the lying, reactionary rage, petty gossip, selfishness) and getting used to the linens Jesus purchased for us on the cross (e.g. bold power to declare what God says, to quickly resolve disputes, to work and give generously, to build others up, to be kind, to have compassion, to forgive). We don't wear these gospel garments to construct God's city by our own sweat; we wear them because the Master Builder has made us His own and so people can see that His presence is already infiltrating earth!

Now, imagine yourself on “*Extreme Makeover*” after they’ve just unveiled the house of your dreams! You tearfully fall to your knees and start praising the host who stares back like you're nuts saying: “*Get up! I didn't build this; I just led you to see it.*” **Verses 8-9** describe a similar experience: ***I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And as I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said: "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. WORSHIP GOD."*** For the 2nd time (cf. 19:10), John confessed that even Christ’s Apostles struggled to obey! Like we said before, their honesty highlights God’s mercy and bolsters the Bible’s credibility. Both texts also suggest that while John and *the angels* had unique roles in history, *keepers of these Revelation words* become *fellow servants*--no created being is superior to another! To worship angels, mentors, spiritual influencers, political figures, family or friends is basically like bowing before the tour guide instead of the Master Artist. Lamb-like leaders are servants, never lords. John’s 2nd slip-up shows how quickly our hearts slide into hero worship. While [God does say we’re to honor those who help us know Him better](#), we must only *worship God*, never other gospel *servants*!

I helped start the Ohio Safety Net Alliance which on September 8th will celebrate our growth to over 300 agencies by stuffing a time capsule for future leaders to unseal. In **verses 10-11**, we find John getting to unseal something the prophet Daniel was told to seal: ***And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 600 years prior to John’s Revelation, Daniel was told to seal up his end-times vision because the events were centuries away (cf. Daniel 8:26, 12:4-10). But because of The Lamb’s resurrection, the angel let John leave the book lying open for all to read! Christ’s resurrection essentially unsealed the time capsule and revealed its contents which He told the church to broadcast before all nations. So, we’re not waiting for the end to begin--our lives in Christ have become a live stream of new creation being hatched (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:11-21). In verse 11, the angel essentially tells John what Daniel’s angel said in 12:9-10: Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."*** While sounding like permission to sin, these sobering words are

instead a warning about moral inertia--they remind us that persistent choices solidify human character! The point being: Our responses to the unsealing and live broadcasting of God's gospel through people of all ethnicities are shaping who we'll be forever.

Jesus interjected again to reaffirm His return in *verses 12-13: "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* This echoes an ancient promise in Isaiah 40:10, "*Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him.*" Jesus was assuring us that God holds human history in His hands and telling us that the next key event on God's calendar is His return, where all accounts will be settled forever. Hearing that Jesus will *repay us for what we have done* leads some folks to ask: "*Are we saved by grace or by good deeds?*" But texts like Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT clear the air: "*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done...we are God's masterpiece...created anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*" The point is that God's saving grace won't leave us passive--it compels us towards daily, imperfect obedience, so that our good works become evidence that we belong to Him. And when He returns, our reward won't be a trophy--it will be Jesus, *the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*

In closing, this text rallies weary believers to ruminate on this **BIG IDEA: Since we can't construct a perfect future, why not trust The Master Builder?** Centuries of waiting for God to finish building His kingdom and the nagging sense that we can do nothing to speed that up, can make us feel exhausted, apathetic and even cynical. This leads to doubts that staying faithful is even worth the hassle. Speaking into our weariness, *Revelation 22 declares that our faithfulness does matter!* God's Spirit actively works in and through us to craft our lives into a collective living broadcast for a broken world. All who watch us discover that nothing built by human hands can satisfy our deepest desires and that the Master Builder who began a good work in us will faithfully bring it to completion (cf.

Philippians 1:6). This text also assures us that we're not alone--we can always take our next steps together with His help!

Sunday to Monday Connection: This week, the world will offer you endless things in which to put your hope: more success, more control, a better future. But Revelation reminds us that only Jesus delivers. He is the Master Builder, His Word is true, and He is coming back. So, fix your eyes on Christ, worship Him alone, and trust the Master Builder who is faithfully building His kingdom through you.

- **Question:** Where am I tempted to trust the promises of Babylon more than the promises of Christ?
- **Next Step:** This week, choose one way to trust Jesus instead of the world, and let that trust show through one act of kindness, forgiveness, generosity, or truth.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. In what ways do Revelation 21-22 conclude the book of Revelation, the New Testament, and the entire Christian Bible? How might they help shape the mission of our Christian community?
2. In your experience of the church, has it leaned more toward escapist apathy or trying to achieve moral perfection and salvation through their own personal choices and efforts without needing inner divine grace? What errors have you seen and how does the church maintain an appropriate missional balance without committing either of these errors?
3. How is my life displaying ongoing confidence in God's Words? When have I recently repented and/or kept them?
4. This text declares that believers are fellow servants with the angels, prophets and apostles. So, in what ways can we serve alongside their mission and how will that look?
5. Revelation does not lead to apathy about the present or future of the world. It compels its readers, rather, to be a missional community that bears witness to the coming of God and the fullness of God's kingdom among humanity. What would it mean if Revelation were taken as a book of Christian mission? What kind of church and what kind of Christian is the Spirit who speaks in Revelation aiming to form?

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Context:** "This section is the formal conclusion to the whole book...The epilogue shows clearly that the purpose of the book is to induce holy obedience among God's people in order that they receive the reward of salvation. No less than eight of the final sixteen verses underscore this intention either through exhortations to obedience, through promised

blessings for holy living, or through warnings of judgment for unholy living (vv. 7, 9, 11–12, 14–15, 18–19). This is in keeping with 1:1–3, where the main point was blessing for obedience. Such blessing is one of the main goals of the revelation (1:1) and of John’s witness to it (1:2) ... The chain of the book’s revelatory communication is from God to Jesus to an angel to John and finally to Christians (so 1:1; cf. 22:8), which implies that John held a specific prophetic office, which is confirmed by the Dan. 2:28–29, 45 allusion here and in 1:1, 19 and 4:1 (on which see for evidence of John’s prophetic office; see also on 4:2; 10:9–11).” (Beale, 508, 510)

- **The Last Days:** “The common misconception is that we are still waiting for the last days to arrive, but as the following New Testament passages indicate, believers have been living in the last days or end times since Jesus’s first coming. Occasionally, the focus is on the very end of the last days—the ‘last day’ or the day of Jesus’s return to resurrect believers (e.g., John 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24). At Jesus’s return, God’s final salvation will be revealed (1 Pet. 1:5). But most of the references to ‘last days’ speak of what first-century believers were presently facing. The author of Hebrews says that ‘in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son’ (Heb. 1:2), and Peter boldly proclaims at Pentecost, ‘In these last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people’ (Acts 2:17). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that ‘the culmination of the ages has come’ upon us. Apostles and early Christian leaders warn their readers to expect false teaching, deception, godlessness, and persecution since they are now living in the last days (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18; 1 John 2:18). (Duvall, 162)
- **The vision unsealed:** “If the revelation is sealed, the churches cannot know its contents or respond in worship. The command do not seal up implies that writing down the vision is just as much under the aegis of divine authority as the revelation of the vision was. Elsewhere, the writing down of the vision or its parts is explicitly commanded, which suggests that divine authority extends to the writing (1:10–11, 19; 2:1ff.; 19:9; 21:5; cf. 22:6 with 22:10). Vv. 18–19 bears this out. John’s prophetic commission is on a par with the commissions of the OT prophets (in this respect, see on 1:10–11; 4:1–2; 17:3a; 21:9–10).” (Beale, 512)
- **Verse 11:** “This verse does not mean that it is on the basis of good works that a person will be justified, for such works apart from Christ can save no one, since perfection is required for acceptance before God (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16; cf. Lev. 19:2). This is supported by Rev. 5:9–10, which says that Christ is the only One worthy to be accepted before God and that He was slain and redeemed by His blood people from their sins so that they also could be considered worthy. Indeed, this idea is not far away here since the idea connoted by ‘those who wash their robes’ in 22:14 goes back to 7:14 ‘they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ On the other hand, ‘works’ are considered a necessary condition for salvation at the final judgment. But how? Works are a sign demonstrating that a person has already met the ultimate, causal, necessary condition for salvation, which is redemptive justification from sin by Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. also

Eph. 2:6–10). The main point...The unexpected time of Christ's coming should motivate His genuine people to live godly lives in expectation of that event (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11–14). On the other hand, the ungodly are not spurred to repentance but only to further obduracy in the face of such revelation about Christ's coming." (Beale, 517)

- **Aim of Revelation:** "Although Revelation is many things, it is not a detailed forecast of the events at the end of the world. It is, however, a spiritual writing. Some people may have a difficult time connecting Revelation and spirituality. But the word spirituality in a Christian context simply means the lived experience of Christian faith, that is, life for God and God's kingdom, life in Christ, life empowered by the Spirit. We turn in this final chapter to a synthesis of all that has gone before, focusing on the lived experience of Christian faith that is both presupposed in and advocated by Revelation...What kind of spirituality emerges when we read Revelation as a theopoetic, theopolitical, pastoral-prophetic writing focused on the reign of God and the slaughtered Lamb, through which the Spirit still speaks to the churches—rather than as a script about the end of history? It is a theopolitical liturgical and missional spirituality, a spirituality of uncivil worship and witness. By its very nature this is not a private or merely inner spirituality; instead, it is embodied in the world—"performed." Faithful readers are faithful performers of the theopolitical drama and song that is Revelation...This performative or narrative spirituality has the following main elements: worship; discernment, vision, and imagination; faithfulness and prophetic resistance (to idolatry and injustice); self-criticism; cruciform, courageous nonviolent warfare; embodied communal witness and mission, including evangelization; and hope." (Gorman, 176-178)
- **Verse 13:** "Does not mean that it is on the basis of good works that a person will be justified, for such works apart from Christ can save no one, since perfection is required for acceptance before God (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16; cf. Lev. 19:2). This is supported by Rev. 5:9–10, which says that Christ is the only One worthy to be accepted before God and that He was slain and redeemed by His blood people from their sins so that they also could be considered worthy... On the other hand, 'works' are considered a necessary condition for salvation at the final judgment. But how? Works are a sign demonstrating that a person has already met the ultimate, causal, necessary condition for salvation, which is redemptive justification from sin by Christ's death and resurrection (cf. also Eph. 2:6–10)." (Beale, 517)

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.

4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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