

Series: The Lamb's Final Plea (a study in Revelation 22: Lesson #70!)

Sermon Text: 22:14-21 Follow The Lamb (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

If you've ever traveled, you know that uneasy feeling of lining up like sheep to find out if TSA agents will let you through--you hand over your credentials and watch the stone-faced agent stare at the screen. In that moment, the tiniest issue can be exposed and keep you from entering the gates. Sometimes they'll send you all the way back to the airline desk, other times they'll wand you or stick you in airport jail. Jesus wraps up Revelation by referencing a check point at the gates of New Jerusalem. Many jokes have been made about getting through the pearly gates, but Jesus wasn't being funny. He said some enter by *washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb*, but those *who love and practice falsehood* will remain *outside*. All this was written, not to the masses but to struggling 1st century churches, and so it exposes a sobering reality: Some churchgoers fake their credentials by claiming to believe but remaining rooted in Babylon's luxury, consumerism and false security. The message of Revelation boils down to this...

BIG IDEA: Are we truly following The Lamb or just using Him to fund life in Babylon?

Fear that we'll never be "*clean enough*" to pass the pearly gate check leads us to bank on Babylon's counterfeit solutions to manufacture our own worth. On one hand, is the temptation of self-help: "*look inward, pump yourself up or fabricate your own growth and goodness.*" On the other, self-indulgence: "*come cozy up to this world's wealth, luxury and fleeting promises.*" Seeking to cleanse stained souls through human striving or cultural compromise is like trying to wash dirty clothes by merely declaring them clean! **Revelation 22:14** offers a superior alternative to human self-help...divine cleansing. Jesus said: *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.* This 7th Revelation Beatitude declares that ultimate security comes not from navel-gazing or self-effort but from banking on the only One who can make all things new--Christ, our Creator and Master Builder. Consider the contrast: every human promise to build an earthly paradise ends in gated communities, exclusive

clubs and self-serving empires that inevitably implode. Like the TSA, human systems make us jump through constant hoops to get in and stay in. But Christ is building an eternal city with wide-*open gates* and unlimited access to His presence, represented by the *tree of life* in restored Eden. Earlier, this garden-city was identified as the church, a Bride wearing a spotless wedding garment bought by her Groom's blood on the cross. So, *verse 14* is His blueprint for how we become His living temple and receive our true credentials: He washes our stains (*7:14*), reforms our character (*19:8*) and welcomes us to dwell with Him forever (*22:14*).

Verse 15 goes on to deliver a sobering shock: ***Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*** Lists like this seem aimed at the lost world. But recall chapters 2-3: John's primary audience wasn't a secular stadium; it was sacred churches! His other letters employ these exact terms to describe people masquerading as faithful church members while living a double life (1 John 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10). Scholars rightly say such warnings aren't targeting unbelievers "*out there*", rather they unmask pretenders "*in here*" (in churches). They force us to ask: "Where do I cozy up to culture for socio-economic security while claiming to trust Christ?" John calls such people "***dogs***", not to disparage our cute household pets, but to equate church pretenders with ancient street scavengers driven purely by self-preservation. All 3 of his "*outsider lists*" in ***chapters 21-22*** (cf. 21:8, 27) end with ***liars***, unmasking the duplicity of claiming church membership while practicing sins Christ died for without repentance. This points to God's plea in ***18:4*** that churches from the 1st century onward ***come out of Babylon*** or risk remaining ***outside*** New Jerusalem--a city that represents the entire new creation. So, being ***outside*** likely reflects the awful place found in ***20:15*** which said, "*If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*" Whoever rejects God's presence is banned from the garden-city just like in Genesis 3.

His solemn warning to us is followed by a grace-filled plea in ***verses 16-17***: ***"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 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. Jesus claimed titles that proved He's the long-awaited Messiah fulfilling Old Testament promises (Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 11:1). As *the Bright Morning Star*, His arrival signaled the dawn of a new age! But look closely at the invite to *come and drink* in *verse 17*: It comes not from heaven but as *The Spirit* works through *The Bride*. We, the church, become God's living sanctuary of grace to counter Babylon's empty promises. He empowers us to invite struggling believers, and anyone parched by her salty waters, to "**Come!** Not by self-earning but by simply repenting and *taking the water of life without price.*" So, ask yourself: "How is my life echoing this grace-filled invitation to my parched neighbors, and in what ways have I been acting like a gatekeeper and keeping thirsty people out?" You see, a church that truly follows The Lamb can't remain silent. If you aren't sharing *the water of life*, it's because you've stopped drinking from it and started settling for the shallow, comfortable pools of Babylon.

Christ followed His open invitation with a final warning in *verses 18-19: I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.* After alluding to the 10 commandments in *verse 15*, Jesus echoed what God told Moses in Deuteronomy (4:2; 12:32). He wants us to recall the way Israel *added* idolatry and *subtracted* ethical commands from God's laws when they felt inconvenient. His point is that *adding to Revelation* is like "mixing in" Babylon's philosophies and self-salvation tactics. *Subtracting from Revelation* is like ignoring its call to radical purity, patient endurance and exclusive loyalty. That's the spirit of false teaching John warns us about: seeking spiritual insurance from Jesus while trying to maintain economic, moral and cultural allegiance to Babylon. Hence our **BIG IDEA: Are we truly following The Lamb or just using Him to fund life in Babylon?** So, *verses 18-19* are a warning against editing the gospel blueprint in *Revelation* to blend in with Babylon. They summon us to wholehearted allegiance which helps us become more like Christ.

Christ concluded with some very reassuring words in **verses 20-21: *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*** Ending this way proves that at its heart, John's Revelation is a pastoral letter. Just like the apostles who regularly ended their epistles with words of grace, Jesus wraps up the entire book Himself--leaving us with what amounts to the final test of Revelation. His words inspire deeply searching questions: First, for our hearts: "Are there things in this world that we love, desire or look forward to more than Christ's return?" Second, for our church: "Are we actively loving our spiritual family by speaking truth in **grace** or passively acting as if Jesus is fine with spiritual double-living?" Third, for our witness: "Are we living in ways that show the world we expect Jesus to return soon?" Honest answers don't condemn us; they simply point to where we need Christ's **grace** to help us **come out of Babylon, wash our robes**, and live in wholehearted allegiance to our King. They also remind us that we need each other--we can always take our next steps together with His help!

Sunday to Monday Connection: Revelation ends with a gracious invitation and a serious warning: don't merely claim Christ while living for Babylon. Our hope isn't found in self-improvement or worldly security, but in Jesus, who washes our robes, gives us access to the tree of life, and offers the water of life freely. The Lamb calls us to wholehearted allegiance as we wait for His return.

- **Question:** What is one area where I may be using Jesus to support my life in Babylon rather than truly following the Lamb?
- **Next Step:** This week, identify one place where you've been trusting yourself or the world more than Christ. Bring it honestly to Him in repentance, receive His grace, and take one tangible step toward wholehearted obedience.
- **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.

Our remaining app questions from SLIDO:

- We touched on this a lot in chapter 18, but the question, ***"Do you think that the return is a return to this planet in particular and if so, should that encourage devotion to earth's preservation during this life?"*** was also answered well by Professor Michael Gorman (p. 172-175), "The hope of a beautiful city here on earth is not an opiate for the poor, or an irresponsible middle-class reduction of the gospel to a ticket to heaven. Rather, it is the legitimate hope for liberation from poverty and oppression, and for the

fullness of life as God intended it to be...At the same time, such a hope does not relieve our responsibilities to and for others now...Thus hope in the coming of the Lord does not give believers either the duty or the right to do nothing except passively wait. Hope separated from faith is blind, self-help optimism, the heresy of Pelagianism. But hope separated from love is narcissism, the error of antinomianism (abandonment of ethical responsibility). It is effectively a rejection of the Christian faith. The Maranatha ('Come, Lord Jesus!') prayer and hope of Rev 22:20 should therefore be read as a short form of the Lord's prayer and its clarion call to the Christian community. To pray for the coming of the kingdom, the coming of the Lord, is to commit oneself and one's community to embody the values and practices of that kingdom—now—in whatever circumstances we find ourselves...The script present in Revelation 21–22 cannot, however, be reduced to a vision of social justice apart from God and apart from the salvation of individuals. Revelation will not allow that common mistake any more than it permits an escapist eschatology. Rather, the final vision is deeply pastoral, spiritual, evangelical, and liturgical, as well as social. The healing of the nations requires peoples to worship God and the Lamb together... The missional church—the fully missional church—constitutes a foretaste of the future we see displayed in Revelation 21–22: a Spirit-enabled partial and proleptic actualization of, and witness to, God's new creation for each and for all. 'Heaven,' writes Eugene Peterson, 'is not a purple passage tacked onto the end of the Apocalypse to give a flourish to the rhetoric, but an immersion in the realities of God's rule in our lives that has the effect of reviving our obedience, fortifying us for the long haul, and energizing a courageous witness.' This is nothing other than another form of faithful witness, of faithful resistance, for to resist Empire and its effects in the world is to live according to the empire (reign, kingdom) of God, and vice versa. This takes place only by the power of the Spirit and only in the realization that God alone can bring the kingdom in its fullness. Moreover, the church-in-mission must always be prepared to become the church under siege, as John warned his churches. Mission and suffering will, in fact, often go hand in hand. Both because the church's missional activity is always only a foretaste of the end and because the church universal always lives under the threat of persecution, the witnessing-suffering church is therefore always the hopeful church that never ceases to pray, 'Come, Lord Jesus.'"

- The question, "*If we get our bodies back, what about those who are or were cremated?*" finds its best answer in 1 Corinthians 15. Bottom line: Cremation can't keep God from reconstituting our bodies because, after all, He created them from dust to begin with!
- The question, "*What is the scriptural basis for thinking like in the apostle's creed, which says that Jesus 'descended into hell'?*" involves passages like 1 Peter 3:18-20, 1 Peter 4:6, Acts 2:27-31 where Peter quoted Psalm 16:10, Ephesians 4:8-10, Romans 10:6-7, and Matthew 12:40. The following 3 perspectives are offered as to what this might mean: 1) Catholic, Orthodox, Early Church: Christ descended to Sheol/Abraham's Bosom to deliver the Old

Testament saints and proclaim His victory over death and demonic powers. 2) Many Protestants: The translation of Hades or Sheol as “hell” means the realm of the dead, emphasizing that Jesus underwent a genuine human death and burial. 3) Reformed, Calvinists: Interpret “descended into hell” metaphorically as the spiritual agony and divine judgment Christ endured on the cross prior to His physical death.

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

1. How has God spoken to you through the words of Revelation? What specific steps are you going to take in response? How could our church embody Christian discipleship versus civil religion while still affirming the good aspects of the culture in which is located?
2. Do you pray, “Come, Lord Jesus”, as John does in 22:20? What factors shape your answer? Does hearing Jesus say, “I am coming soon” fill you with enthusiasm or something else? Where else are your longings, and would you prefer His return to be postponed? How might your answers indicate areas that you still need to come out of Babylon?
3. How does your life reflect the genuine citizenship of New Jerusalem and where are you quietly holding dual citizenship with Babylon? Which is your true home, and how do you know for sure?
4. When have you relied on the divine cleansing of the Lamb, and when have you tried whitewashing your life with worldly self-help and spiritual pretense? When God scans the passport of your life, will He see the authentic seal of Christ’s blood, or a counterfeit forged out of human effort and cultural compromise? In what ways are you resting in the righteousness Christ built for us, and how might you still be passing off moral compromises as a ticket into His kingdom?
5. In what ways is Revelation a hopeful book and how should it affect our church practices? Are you convinced that a life of nonviolence is central to Revelation and therefore to Christian discipleship? Why or why not?
6. Where do we see idolatrous claims, imperialist agendas and unjust economics today? Where is the church under threat? How is it being seduced? How do we resist the idolatry of consumerism and the ideology of the self?

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Verse 14:** “The reward for such enduring faith is that the believers are blessed, which is then explained as their receiving of authority: that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. This is essentially the same blessing as that received by those washing their garments in 7:14–17, as the expansion of this blessing with the metaphor of water in v. 17 below shows. The image connotes the blessing of salvation, especially as it has been pictured in the vision of the new Jerusalem. The language of a tree of life and open gates picks up on the Isaiah 60 and Genesis 3 imagery of 21:24–22:3, where the worshipping nations file through the open gates of the holy city and have access to the tree of life, in contrast to the unholy, who are

not able to enter (see on 21:24–22:3). Allusion is made here to Isa. 62:10, ‘Go through, go through the gates,’ which action occurs in order for believers to receive the salvation promised in 62:11, ‘Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him,’ which has just been alluded to in Rev. 22:12. This reward is for all believers, not just a special class of martyrs, for v. 15 will make it clear that the division of groups in this context is that between all the wicked apostates and all the righteous of the redeemed community.” (Beale, 518-519)

- **Dogs:** “Thus outside the New Jerusalem in its restored Eden are the dogs, the scavengers who live outside most of the walled cities of antiquity and eat whatever garbage they can find. ‘The dogs’ are then described in language nearly identical to that used in 21:8, at the end of the opening vision of a ‘new heaven and a new earth.’ Now, however, John begins with those who practice magic arts and follows with those who in turn break commandment seven (the sexually immoral), six (the murderers), two (the idolaters), and nine (everyone who loves and practices falsehood).” (Fee, 311-312)
- **Verse 16:** “The plural ‘you’ in this sentence, thus pointing to the believers in the seven churches, is the giveaway that John understands what Jesus is saying to him is intended for the churches themselves. What the readers are to hear is that John is only the scribe of this great vision, and that the vision itself comes to them ultimately from the living and reigning Christ.” (Fee, 312).
- **The item absent from 21:8 and 21:27:** “Dogs are despised creatures throughout Scripture (so Matt. 7:6), concerned only about their physical well-being. Likewise, those referred to here have an insatiable craving to preserve their earthly security, which is a mark of the beast (13:15–18). ‘Dogs’ in the OT can refer to covenant-violators (Ps. 59:6, 14) and unrighteous watchmen and shepherds whose focus (as with the liars) is economic gain (Isa. 56:10–11). It is also used of male cult prostitutes, whose wages are an ‘abomination’ (cf. Rev. 21:27) that cannot be brought into the temple (Deut. 23:17–18). John’s use of ‘dog,’ along with the description of those excluded from the temple-city in 21:27 as those who practice ‘abomination,’ suggests that the Deuteronomy passage is echoed here, especially when it is recalled that the lists in ch. 21 and here catalog sins associated with idolatry. Paul applies the same canine metaphor to Jewish Christians who profess to be part of the Christian church in Philippi but whose idolatrous actions and beliefs show otherwise (Phil. 3:2–3, 18–19). Also likened to dogs are professing Christians in the readership of 2 Peter who apostatize (2:20–22) by all kinds of corruption, including engaging in false teaching (2:1–3, 13–14, 16).” (Beale, 519–520)
- **Soon:** “As before (see on v. 7), the final Greek word, rendered ‘soon,’ is much more difficult to put into English than the English adverb indicates. Its primary sense has to do with the suddenness or swiftness in which an event occurs; nonetheless at the same time it carries a temporal sense as well, so that one can be led by this word to think that John expected the ‘coming’ to be in the near future.” (Fee, 314-315)

- **A word to would-be prophets:** “But throughout the history of the church, they have often been interpreted as an affirmation that the canon of Scripture is now closed (just as the Law of Moses was closed; Deuteronomy 4:2). To add to John’s words is to add to Scripture. But John warns that no one will receive a message from God that has the authority of Scripture.” (Chester, 172)
- **Verses 18-19:** “To add to or take away from the words of God’s revelation, according to Deut. 4:2–4; 12:29–32, means to accept the false teaching that idolatry is compatible with worship of the one true God. From the incident of the golden calf (Exodus 32) to that of Baal of Peor (Num. 25:1–9, 14–18, referenced in Deut. 4:3), Israel faced the temptation to engage in idolatry, the worship of other gods. Such false teaching amounts to ‘adding to’ God’s law. Furthermore, it is tantamount to ‘taking away from’ God’s law, since it violates the positive laws against idolatry, consequently nullifying their validity. This is not mere general disobedience but false teaching about the inscripturated word and following such deceptive teaching... This analysis also fits well with the situation of the churches portrayed in chs. 2–3, which depicts all the churches facing idolatry to one degree or another, and often not successful in their response. Strikingly, in the light of the above Deuteronomy background, some of the false teachers and their followers encouraging idolatry in the church of Pergamum are identified as those ‘who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality’ (2:14). The same deceptive teaching was also prevalent in the church of Thyatira (2:20–23). Such false prophets who distort the truth are either adding false theology or taking away from the revealed truth.” (Beale, 524-525)
- **Adding/subtracting:** “Thus the book ends as it began, as declaration that it is to be understood as a prophetic word, which at the outset is set forth as coming to John from the risen Christ himself. The warning is against either adding to or subtracting from the prophetic words written here. Thus in typical *lex talionis* (‘an eye for an eye’) fashion, If anyone adds anything to these ‘words of prophecy,’ the divine arbiter, God, will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. The ‘anyone,’ of course, refers to John’s own readers, those who will read these words aloud to any given community of believers. Here is a much-abused passage that has been made by many to refer to all of Scripture, but where John is himself following one of the features of the apocalyptic genre itself, where such warnings are a regular feature.” (Fee, 314)
- **Those who take away and the closing remarks:** “It is most likely that v. 19 refers not to loss of salvation but to denial of it for those who have claimed outwardly to be Christians but never had true faith. The characteristic highlighted repeatedly in the closing portion of the book is not that of genuine believers losing their redeemed status, but the counterfeit, double-dealing nature of people in the Christian community who will not receive the final reward...The closing benediction ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all’ is

a typical conclusion to NT letters (almost universally so in Paul). The point here, as in the other NT letters, is that the writer expresses his desire that God's grace enable the addressees to understand and obey the contents of the letter. We are reminded here again, as in 1:1–4, that the writing is broadly conceived of as a letter, the contents of which are apocalyptic and prophetic in genre (see on 1:1–3) ...If the epistolary form of Revelation functions like that of the rest of the NT letters, then its purpose is to address contemporary problems among the seven churches by appealing to this reality of the hearers' present and future share in Christ's blessings." (Beale, 526, 528)

- **Summary:** "Throughout the book of Revelation, John offers a penetrating social critique of the Roman Empire. Conservative readings of the book of Revelation tend to mute this voice, depoliticizing it or postponing its events until the end of history. Radicals recognise the social critique but then assume a certain kind of application—usually some form of political or consumer activism. But when you look at the response John calls for from his readers, it doesn't fit our categories. It's a call to turn from idolatry of all kinds and 'worship him who made heaven and earth' (14:6–7). It's a call to reject the seductions of the culture, to 'come out of her' whose judgment is sure (18:4). It's a call to overcome 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of [our] testimony' (12:11). Because this testimony or witness is contested, the book of Revelation is also a call to endure. 'This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people,' we're told in 13:9–10 and 14:12–13. For some this may mean martyrdom; for all it means dying to self (12:11) ...The book begins with a description of Jesus as 'the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:5). Jesus is the archetypal witness, who did not love his life "so much as to shrink from death" (12:11). But he has risen from the dead, and those who die for Christ rise to reign with him (20:4). Whatever the power and seductions of this world, Revelation gives us a vision of the greater and better reign of Christ." (Chester, 175-176)

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

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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