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Revelation #38

**The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!”**  
**Revelation 22:6-21**

We began our study of the book of Revelation on April 23<sup>rd</sup> of last year. Today is our final week in this incredibly challenging yet remarkably glorious book of the Bible. We have seen and heard and learned much, but here are the ten primary themes or points of emphasis in Revelation that have most greatly impacted me.

(1) Christians in this present age can expect to suffer intense persecution at the hands of an unbelieving and idolatrous world. No one is exempt. To suffer is not an indication of God’s disappointment with us but of our identification with Jesus and when embraced with humility and courage can be a tremendous way to make known the sufficiency and beauty of all that God is for us in Jesus.

(2) God is absolutely and comprehensively sovereign over all the affairs of all mankind. I say “all mankind” because not even the most wicked are outside of God’s providential power.

It often appears that the entire world reels with one blow after another. In Egypt dozens of Christians are killed when ISIS detonates a bomb on Palm Sunday. Bloody civil wars continually erupt all around the globe. Racial strife plagues our own country. Threats against Israel by Iran and other Muslim countries is a daily fixture. And drug cartels continue to supply a seemingly endless flow of illegal narcotics into our country. The world, by all external appearances, appears horribly unstable and chaotic and out of control. But the book of Revelation is God’s word to us that he is in complete control.

(3) Jesus Christ is preeminent above all earthly powers and persons. At the heart of human sin is idolatry: the tendency to exalt as god anything or anyone above or in preference to Jesus Christ. But he is the King over all kings and the Lord over all lords.

Jesus Christ is alive from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, reigning and ruling and exercising absolute sovereignty over all the kings of the earth, all the events in the Middle East and throughout Central and South America and even in the lunatic plans of North Korea and China and Russia.

As “the ruler of the kings on earth” he mysteriously governs and regulates what all earthly kings and presidents do, sometimes restraining them from doing evil, sometimes frustrating their plans, sometimes ordering events so that they might serve his purposes. We can’t figure out how he does it, but do it, he does! Thus, Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:25 that “he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” So don’t just read the newspaper or scour the internet. Read and reflect with the eyes of faith and confidence in the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all things.

(4) We have the assurance that God will accomplish his purposes and bring all things to their consummation in Christ Jesus. No matter how bad circumstances may become, no matter how oppressed the church may be, no matter how successful and powerful the world and its wicked ways appear, nothing can derail or disrupt God’s purpose in history to bring a Bride to the Bridegroom at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

(5) As the global oppression of the church increases and intensifies, there will come a time when it will appear that the church has been destroyed. For a time, its voice will have been silenced and its presence barely noticeable. But this is only in appearance, as the church will rise up in power and be the catalyst for a global harvest of souls.

(6) Satan hates God and hates you and hates the Church and will do all within his power, under God’s sovereignty, to undermine your confidence in God’s goodness and lead you to abandon your faith. But we are assured complete and final victory as we overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony.

(7) Although the wrath of God against sin and idolatry will intensify and expand as we approach the second coming of Christ, no Christian will be the object of it, but will be preserved eternally safe and secure. God has sealed his servants, all of them, with the Holy Spirit and no amount of suffering or hardship can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

(8) Neither eye has seen nor ear has heard the marvelous blessings that God has in store for his people in the new heavens and new earth. Or to use the words of Paul in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

(9) Judgment is certain. The one thing that will guard your heart from becoming cynical and pessimistic is the repeated assurance in Revelation that a time of reckoning is coming when God will bring justice to bear on the earth. Truth will be vindicated. Evil will receive its rightful recompense.

(10) Christ is coming soon. This is the very theme not only of Revelation 19 but also of Revelation 22. This is our only hope. This is our blessed hope!

There is no clear structure in Revelation 22. What we find here is a series of declarations, warnings, and promises, most of which have already appeared in one form or another earlier in the book. I will focus on a dozen of them.

(1) Once again I'm greatly encouraged by what the angel said to John in v. 6. After reading Revelation one is left in a whirlwind of amazement, perhaps a little fear, and especially with a question in mind: Is this all true? Or is it science fiction? Is this the real world or a fantasy land? Jesus knows that we all struggle with the bizarre images and graphically symbolic pictures in the book. It leaves us wondering if we can really trust and believe what we read here. Will the wicked of the earth really be judged? Will Jesus win out in the final day? Is life on the new earth as glorious and splendid as it is portrayed in the final two chapters?

The answer is an unequivocal Yes! Earlier in Revelation 21:5 John was told by God himself to "write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Now again in 22:6 Jesus commissions the angel to tell John who in turn tells us, "***these words are trustworthy and true.***"

(2) As a way of confirming even further that what God has revealed through John is trustworthy and true, notice how he is described in v. 6. He is "***the God of the spirits of the prophets.***"

First, the idea in this phrase can be paraphrased: "God ***over*** the spirits of the prophets" or "God ***ruling*** or ***inspiring*** the spirits of the prophets." In any case, God is clearly portrayed as sovereign over what prophets prophesy. God, as it were, owns, operates, and oversees the ministry of true prophets. This confirms what we see elsewhere, especially in 1 Corinthians 14, that the prophetic is entirely dependent on God, always awaiting his anointing and activity. Prophets may prophesy at will, but they only receive revelation by the initiative of God.

Thus, more so than with the gift of teaching, prophets are somewhat *passive*, being *instruments or conduits* for the revelatory word of God, whereas teachers are more *active*, drawing directly from the Scriptures and expounding what they interpret. This is, in fact, the primary distinction between the prophetic gift and the teaching gift: the former is dependent on a spontaneous revelation while the latter is dependent on an inscripturated text. However, this should not be taken to mean that the Spirit is not also active in the exercise of other spiritual gifts, such as teaching.

Second, is the word "spirits" a reference to the human spirit of each prophet or is it a reference to the Holy Spirit? I think the answer is Yes. Let me explain. Some find it problematic to suggest that the Holy Spirit would be mentioned in the plural. But remember: (1) the plural is used for the Holy Spirit in Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6; and (2) when the human spirit is energized by a charismatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit (i.e., when a spiritual gift is in operation), Paul seems to have in mind both. In 1 Cor. 14 it is difficult to know when one should translate *pneuma* as "Spirit" and when as "spirit". Gordon Fee simply renders it ***S/spirit***.

Third, Paul uses the same terminology in 1 Cor. 14:32 (“the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”; the only difference is that in Revelation the definite article appears: “*the* spirits of *the* prophets”). There he has in mind the control by the prophet of the manifestation of the Spirit. In other words, Paul is saying that, contrary to those who think prophecy is an ecstatic and uncontrollable phenomenon that overwhelms and overrides the will of the prophet, each individual is capable of consciously refraining from prophetic utterance in accordance with the rules and decorum for prophetic ministry in the church.

(3) Several times in this concluding chapter we are told that the events in Revelation and the coming of Christ are “*near*” and will happen “*soon*” (vv. 6, 7, 10, 12, 20). We talked about this in the very first sermon in this series, but let me remind you of what I think is being said.

Some say that the words “near”, “shortly,” and “soon” mean that once the appointed time arrives the events will unfold *suddenly* or will occur *rapidly*. In other words, the emphasis is on the speedy *manner* of fulfillment. Still others contend that all that is meant is that the events are *certain* to occur.

Some point to 2 Peter 3:8 (“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years”) and argue that John is writing from the divine perspective. What may seem like incessant delay to us is “soon” and “near” for the Lord who views time from a heavenly perspective. Robert Mounce argues that behind these words is the prophetic principle of *imminence*; i.e., John’s point is that the events could transpire *at any time*, even soon (although there is no way for anyone to know that with certainty; therefore, we must always be ready).

G. K. Beale contends that John’s words “quickly” (or “soon”) and “near” are a substitute for Daniel’s phrase “*in the latter days*” (e.g., Dan. 2:28). In other words, Daniel, in the sixth century b.c., referred to events that would occur in some distant future, in a time that he called “the latter days.” John, in the book of Revelation, understands Daniel’s words as applying to his own time. “What Daniel expected to occur in the distant ‘latter days’ – the defeat of cosmic evil and the ushering in of the divine kingdom – John expects to begin ‘quickly,’ in his own generation, if it has not already begun to happen” (153). John is declaring that prophetic fulfillment has already been inaugurated in his own lifetime, in the first century. But the consummation, however, is yet to come.

We know from numerous texts in the NT that the “last days” began with the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father and will extend all the way until the Second Coming of Christ at the close of history. That is why John substitutes the words “soon” and “near” for “the last days” as found in Daniel. ***His point is that what was future to Daniel is now being fulfilled in John’s day and will continue to unfold and occur until the time of Christ’s return.***

It seems as if John's intent is to bring events which were once in the distant future into the immediate present. In *that* sense, then, "the time is near." Thus we may translate this phrase, "things which must soon begin to happen." Again, "as soon as his letter reaches its destination in the churches of Asia, they will be able to say, 'These things are happening *now*'" (Michael Wilcock, 33).

(4) There is hardly a more important statement in this final chapter than the blessing pronounced by the angel in v. 7 – ***"Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*** This is a healthy reminder to those who are inclined to dismiss Revelation as too bizarre or obscure to be of any practical benefit.

Compare this with Revelation 1:3 where a similar blessing is announced: ***"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it."*** To "keep" the words of the prophecy of Revelation is not simply to believe them to be true but to respond with obedience to their commands. Note the emphasis on the "words" of the book. We believe in verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible.

Don't ever think that Revelation is beyond your ability to understand or that its commands and exhortations are irrelevant to people living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. God's "blessing," his favor and power rest especially on those who take this book seriously and commit themselves in the power of the Spirit to follow its dictates and to believe its teaching.

(5) You may remember that at the conclusion of his prophecy, Daniel was told to "shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). John, on the other hand, is told to do precisely the opposite with what has been shown to him. What Daniel was commanded to seal up for a future season, John is told to declare to all openly, for the time of fulfillment of such prophetic truth is at hand.

The sealing of Daniel's prophecy was due to the fact that the time of fulfillment was still in the distant future, in a different age of God's redemptive plan for his people. What has been revealed to John, on the other hand, concerns the time in which he lived and the age or epoch of the church, spanning the years between the two comings of Jesus.

(6) Perhaps the strangest statement in Revelation 22 is what we read in v. 11 – ***"Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."*** Something similar to this is also found at the close of Daniel's prophecy. We read in Daniel 12:10 – "Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the

wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.”

If this were merely a statement of fact, no problem would exist. But it is an *exhortation*. How is it that an angel exhorts unbelievers to be *unholy*? One commentator suggests that since the end is near “there is no longer time to alter the character and habits of men” (Mounce, 392-93). But we know now that for John and his readers the time of the end has extended for some 1,900 years. Perhaps the angel’s point is that “the bent of one’s choices forms an unchangeable character, so that the imperatives have the sense of ‘be what you always have been as you face judgment’” (Beale, 1132).

Others argue that the meaning is to be found in Isaiah 6:9-10 and its use by Jesus in Matthew 13:9-17,43. In both these passages unbelievers are exhorted not to hear because of their insensitive response to the prophetic word. “To such communities,” explains Beale, “God sent prophets whose words increased the blindness of the apostate but served to shock the elect remnant out of the spiritual torpor characteristic of the majority. The impious were even exhorted not to understand, as a punishment for their apostasy and idol worship” (1132). ***The exhortation of Revelation 22:11 would thus be a judgment in which those who have rebelled and resisted the word of God are, in a sense, consigned and given over to a deeper aggravation of their chosen behavior.***

Perhaps his point is that the end time events will make a sharp distinction and division between those who are committed to godliness and those who are equally devoted to ungodliness. The intensity of God’s wrath and the judgments to come will harden the unbelieving. You may recall these words that were part of the sixth trumpet judgment:

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Rev. 9:20-21).

This may then be a command for people to act according to their nature. It establishes human responsibility. Do what you want to do on the basis of who you are. But know that you will be held accountable. Or it may also be that this passage is designed to awaken sinners into the reality of what they are choosing to do and to realize that they will be judged.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Imagine that you are visiting the Grand Canyon. Your tour guide leads you to the precipice. You look over the edge into the canyon below, and he says to you: “Let the self-assertive fool who wants to destroy himself disregard caution, ignore my

instructions, and jump over the edge into the canyon below and certain death.” Is that what the guide wants you to do? No. he wants you to be careful and obey his instructions and stay back from what will certainly result in your gruesome death. Thus this “command” is God’s way of saying: “Do you realize who you are, what you are like, and how you have chosen to live? Do you realize this brings judgment?” So stop and turn. (I owe this illustration to James Hamilton).

(7) I mentioned earlier that one of the primary themes of Revelation is that God will bring judgment on those who have lived in willful disobedience and idolatry. When we look around in our world and see murderers and thieves and abusers and ruthless dictators seemingly getting away with their crimes with no repercussions, we can reassure ourselves that this will not last: “I am coming soon,” said Jesus, “bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (v. 12).

(8) We look next to the glorious promise of v. 14. What does it mean to “wash” your robes in the blood of Christ? It means you acknowledge your robes are dirty, filthy, stained with sin. ***You can’t get saved until you know you are lost!*** It means you know you can’t wash them in anything else: not water, not the soap of good deeds, not in the detergent of promises you have kept. It means there is only one solution to the guilt and stain of our idolatry and rebellion: the blood of Jesus. And what does the blood of Jesus refer to? It refers to his substitutionary death in which his blood was shed as he endured the judgment and wrath reserved for us.

(9) We have already seen in Revelation 21:8 and 27 what we encounter yet again here in 22:15. Here John adds one element: “dogs”, which in Scripture are generally regarded as unclean and despised and often refer symbolically to unbelievers (see Phil. 3:2-3; 2 Peter 2). The unbeliever and the rebellious are like a dog because he wallows in filth. Others choose not to submit to God but try to control the world through demonic sorcery. Rather than rejoice in the pleasures of marital intimacy they are sexually immoral. Rather than love and serve others, they kill them. Rather than worship God alone, they are idolaters. Rather than believe and live by the truth, they love and practice lies and falsehoods.

(10) Jesus has been described in many different ways in Revelation. Here in v. 16 he speaks of himself as “the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star” (see Isa. 11:1; Num. 24:17). Jesus is both the root or source of David as well as his descendant. He is thus the fulfillment of all the promises given to David. He is both David’s Lord and his physical descendant!

(11) There are no fewer than ***three invitations in v. 17***. In the first one, the Holy Spirit speaks through the Bride, the people of God, issuing an invitation to Jesus to “Come!” Does that request fill your prayers each day? It does mine! “Oh, Lord Jesus, don’t delay. Come now!” The second invitation is issued by the “one who hears,” again a reference to those of us who are listening to the reading of this book. It is also directed to Jesus for the same purpose. The final invitation is really an exhortation issued to people in general to believe and treasure and embrace Jesus as the only one who can quench their spiritual thirst (see 21:6).

Here is the solution to the problem of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Do you *want* to come to Jesus? Then come. He will never cast you out. Do you prefer not to come to Jesus? Then you have what you want and you have no one to blame but yourself. Do you *desire* the water of life that Jesus offers? If so, then drink! He gives it freely. If you don't desire it, but prefer to slake your thirst at the well of this world and what it offers, then you can't complain. Again, you get precisely what you desire.

(12) These verses are clearly built on Deuteronomy 4:1-2 (cf. 12:32) and 29:19-20. Moses commanded Israel, "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it." What does it mean to "add" to or "take away" from the words of the prophecy of Revelation? In Deuteronomy it refers to those who taught, contrary to what God had said, that compromise with idolatry was not inconsistent with faith in Yahweh. To "add" or "take away" from the words of Revelation is to distort or twist its teaching to conform to what we want and believe rather than submitting to what God has said. He is talking about ***deliberate distortions and perversions of the truth of this book, often done in order to justify one's personal sins.***

What are the consequences for disobedience to this exhortation? Some suggest that forfeiting one's "share in the tree of life and in the holy city" refers to something other and less than the loss of salvation. Perhaps it means heavenly reward or position.

Some contend that true believers can and, in fact, do violate this command and thus forfeit or lose their salvation.

Others contend that whereas loss of salvation is theoretically possible, it will not in fact occur. The threat of loss is the ***means*** by which God stimulates his people to obey the command. In other words, *if* a believer *were* to "add" or "take away" he/she *would* lose their spiritual life. But a believer, in point of fact, *will not*. The threatened consequence is what the Spirit uses to energize and motivate the believer to obey the command.

Others contend that those who "add" or "take away" are not true believers in the first place. A true believer is, by definition in Revelation, one who refuses to compromise with paganism. These are people who by their profession and outward behavior *appeared* for a time to belong to the church, but whose unregenerate condition is subsequently revealed by their disobedience to John's command (cf. 1 John 2:19).

### *Conclusion*

I want to close with a word of counsel to each of you regarding the urgent expectation of Christian men and women for the second coming of Christ. When we read in v. 20 the declaration of Jesus, "Surely I am coming soon," do you respond with unbridled enthusiasm and declare: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus"? I hope and pray you do.

***How seriously and sincerely do you look forward to the Second Coming of Christ?*** Does it occupy your thinking on a regular basis? I'm not asking whether or not you enjoy engaging in speculative debates with friends about the identity of the Antichrist or whether or not Russia will conspire with other nations to invade Israel. I'm not asking you about your opinion on whether or not there will be a so-called Great Tribulation and where you stand on the timing of the Rapture in relation to it.

I'm asking you: ***Does your heart pulsate in anxious expectation of seeing your savior, Jesus Christ, face to face? Do you awaken each day with the hope that this day might be THE day of his return?*** And if your answer to that question is anywhere from "Sort of" to "Absolutely" to "Well, every so often I do," what is it that you expect him to do? What do you envision ***the purpose*** of his Second Coming to be? What is it about the return of Jesus Christ that makes the thought of it so exciting and fascinating?

Do you think about the coming of Jesus primarily as a remedy to the global war with Islamic terrorism? Do you think about the coming of Jesus as the solution to our planet's problems, whether it be sexual immorality or economic chaos or the on-going reality of abortion or some such other problem? ***Why do you want Jesus to come back?*** What is the predominant motive in your heart? What is it that you not only expect him to do when he comes but want him to do when he comes?

The second coming of Christ is not about the anti-Christ or 666 or rebuilt temples or events in Israel. Stop thinking about or arguing and dividing over such stuff and start preparing your hearts to ***marvel at him! The second coming is all about Jesus Christ and our great privilege of glorifying God by marveling at his Son!*** Paul tells us that Jesus is coming back ***"to be marveled at among all who have believed"*** (2 Thess. 1:10).

Do you know that this is why you exist, this is why you were created, this is why God continues to sustain and uphold you in being? He made you and redeemed you so that you might marvel. Yes, to marvel is primarily a spiritual experience. Even quadriplegics can marvel. But for those with full use of their bodies, to marvel is to behold Jesus Christ with gaping mouths, bulging eyes, flowing tears, endless goose bumps, rapid heartbeat, deep joy, unending gratitude, dancing feet, and unending meditation on truths and ideas and images about Jesus that are so glorious and great that you will live in constant fear that your mind and heart are on the verge of exploding!

We will marvel at Jesus Christ:

For his limitless power in subduing and defeating all enemies of God  
For his impeccable justice in rendering punishment to those who rejected and mocked him  
For his measureless love in caring so deeply about you and me  
For his unimpeachable authority  
For his incomparable beauty in dazzling our senses and far exceeding our expectations  
For his integrity in having fulfilled all his promises to us.

For his blinding radiance that infinitely surpasses all beauty and brightness in this universe  
For bringing our salvation to its final consummation  
For transforming our bodies to be like his own (Phil. 3:20-21)  
For being a perfect Savior, never failing to provide and supply what we need most  
For eradicating from your mind and will and heart and soul every last vestige/impulse of sin!  
For pouring out his saving grace on us in such a way that we are not numbered among those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel  
For loving us into his kingdom so that we will not suffer the punishment of eternal destruction  
For enabling us to experience his intimate presence rather than being cast away from him and the glory of his might.

Even so, come Lord Jesus!