

“AN OFFER YOU CAN’T REFUSE!”

Revelation 22:1-21

Some time ago, my wife and I were invited to a birthday party. When I received the invitation, I had no idea what the evening would involve. All I knew was the location – a remodeled retreat center called *Faraway* on the Longbranch Peninsula. But the fact that we were going to be with friends made it appealing. So, we said, “Yes!” Then the evening arrived. To our delight, transportation had already been arranged for us, so that rather than driving ourselves, we were able to relax in the comfort of a friend’s “Caddy.” But there was more! Stepping out of the car, we found ourselves facing one of the most beautiful waterfront mansions we’d ever seen. The evening then began with a tour – delicate antique furniture, embroidered bedspreads from China, precious inlaid tiles in the bathroom. Each room was a masterpiece of interior design. Then dinner was served – one of the most delicious meals we’d had in months. It truly was an evening to remember.

As I reflected on it, I couldn’t help but compare it to another invitation we have received. On this trip transportation is also provided; we will be surrounded by Christian friends; and we will dine in the most glorious mansion anyone has ever seen. But there will also be some striking differences. This time we won’t have to return home afterwards. Instead, we will be at home forever! This time we can eat all that we want without worrying about our waistlines. And best of all, the Lord Jesus will be our host at this meal! As I reflected upon it, I wondered, how could anyone in their right mind refuse an invitation like this?

The invitation I’m referring to is the one given in this, the final chapter of Revelation. The key word here is “come.” This is not a new word in the Bible. When Noah finished building the ark, God invited him, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, and be safe.” When Israel turned to idols in Isaiah’s day, God urged them, “Come now, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” When John baptized Jesus, he said of Him, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” Andrew and Peter wanted to know more. So, they asked Him, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Jesus invited them, “Come and see.”

The Bible is full of invitations to “come.” But the invitation in Revelation 22 is unique. Actually, there are two invitations in this chapter. The first is Christ’s

offer to sinners, “Come . . . take the free gift of the water of life.” The second is John’s reaction to everything he has seen: “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”

Isn’t that a wonderful way to end such a serious book? For weeks, we have witnessed many terrible, heartbreaking truths. But now the curse of sin is lifted and “whosoever will” may come and freely enjoy the glory of God’s kingdom. No one need suffer the judgments mentioned in this book. That’s something people bring upon themselves because of their unwillingness to repent and turn to Jesus. Everyone is invited to enjoy the blessings of this offer. So, to help us understand what it involves, John emphasizes three key facts about it.

1. THE BLESSINGS OF THE INVITATION

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young once sang a song about man’s craving to “get back to the Garden.” While we may not recognize it in ourselves, that desire is real! Every philosophical, political, or religious movement is nothing more than man’s feeble attempt to recover what was lost in Genesis 3. But the good news John announces in this last chapter of the Bible is that Paradise Lost will soon be Paradise regained! What we forfeited due to sin, God will restore by His grace. To illustrate that, John describes four blessings we will enjoy in the New Jerusalem.

First, ***the fullness of God’s Spirit***. John says in verse 1, “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.” This is a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit who is poured out on everyone who believes in Christ. One reason for this conclusion is the origin of this water. It comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Another reason is the promise of Jesus in John 7:37, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him.” To what was Jesus referring? John explains, “By this He meant the Spirit, Whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.” In other words, just as Jesus will be the light of that city, so His Spirit will be our source of physical and spiritual life.

Second, ***access to the Tree of Life***. Verse 2 continues, “On each side of the river stood the Tree of Life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” Someone has said that the history of mankind revolves around three trees – the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil, which brought death upon all of humanity when our first parents broke God's commandment and ate of its fruit in the Garden. The second tree is the Cross of Calvary on which our Savior died to pay for our sins. The third tree is the Tree of Life that will grow along the River of Life in the center of the city. Those who have read Genesis 3 will remember this tree. For it was from this tree that man was banished. God posted cherubim at the east of the Garden with a flaming sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life, so that man could not eat of its fruit and live forever in his fallen condition.

Consequently, the presence of the Tree of Life in new Jerusalem is one of the strongest testimonies to God's full forgiveness and our complete salvation from sin. For what was taken away from us because of sin now brings eternal life to everyone who enters this city. Other details about this tree are also interesting. One is its fruit. It bears twelve kinds of fruit, one for each month of the year. That means there will be food in heaven – delicious food, of which we can eat all that we want without any worries of getting fat. In fact, it is in eating this fruit that we gain power to live forever. Another detail is its leaves. It says they will be for "the healing of the nations." What does this mean? Will there be disease in heaven? No, the word can be translated "health." That is, just as its fruit gives life to all who eat it, so its leaves maintain the health of those already healthy. Finally, look at its abundance. Genesis makes it sound as if there was only one tree of life in the Garden. But not in New Jerusalem! This tree will flourish throughout the city!

Henry Morris writes, "The tree is not rare but prolific, growing in profusion all over the world. In the New Jerusalem, it grows along the esplanade in the center of the golden streets and lines both banks of the cascading river. Presumably, outside the city, it grows along the shores of all the tributaries of the mighty river, as they spread out around the world. The need to continually partake of its life-giving fruit will be a testimony to the people of the New Earth that our Creator and Savior is Himself the source of life and breath and all things. This knowledge and requirement will never become a burden but will always remain a joy and a delight."

Third, ***fulfillment in our work***. People wonder, "What will we do in heaven? Sit around and strum our harps forever?" Certainly, music will play a major role in heaven's worship. But John says we will also be busy doing other things. First, he

says we “will serve Him.” What does that mean? Are we going to have to work in heaven? Yes and no. Yes, we will be actively engaged in serving Christ. That’s been our calling from the beginning. Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” Those who like to garden can appreciate what a pleasure that was, especially without weeds to frustrate their efforts. Thus, it will be on the New Earth! It will involve none of the drudgery involved in today’s work. For what turned man’s work into labor and sorrow was the curse. But Revelation 22:3 promises that there will no longer be a curse. Hal Lindsay says that the service we give to the Lord will be as laborious as a Bride making the bed for her new Groom on their honeymoon.

Compare it to your hobbies. Most of us have activities we enjoy doing in our spare time – sewing, painting, reading, writing, playing an instrument. These activities are pleasant because there is no pain or stress involved in doing them. So, will it be in heaven! God will let you explore interests you had in this life, but never had the time or money to pursue. Or maybe He will give you brand-new talents you always wished you had and let you cultivate them for His glory.

By the way, this is one reason we can afford to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and forego other things we’d like to do. Personally, I would love to have season tickets to the Seattle Seahawks’ games, a summer cabin at the ocean, a boat to enjoy on the weekends, and every evening free to spend with my family. But, like many of you, I forego those things. Not because they are wrong, but because there isn’t time in this life to do both everything I want and everything I should. Does that make me sad? No, and why not? Because I’m going to live forever and have all of eternity to pursue the things I enjoy. In fact, given that this is the only life in which we can sacrifice ourselves for Christ, wouldn’t it be foolish to try to get everything I want today? Remember –

***Only one life, ‘twill soon be passed;
Only what’s done for Christ will last!***

The second thing we will do is “reign forever and ever.” There’s no indication here over whom will rule, but I’m convinced that these are more than idle words dropped onto the page. If John says that we will reign with Christ, then there must be someone who needs ruling. 1 Corinthians 6:3 gives us a hint, for there Paul writes, “do you not know that we shall judge angels?” Another writer

suggests that there may be intelligent life on other planets that God will reveal in the eternity. In his space trilogy, C. S. Lewis imagines Perelandra and Malacandra, two planets with intelligent creatures living on them who have not rebelled against the will of God. But, of course, the definite answer to this, like so many other questions, won't be answered until we arrive in heaven.

Finally, ***the presence of Christ***. This will be our greatest joy in heaven. John says "we will see His face." Theologians call this the Beatific Vision, for there is no sight more beautiful to human eyes than the face of God. You ask, "Is it the face of God the Father or God the Son?" Jesus answered this in John 14:8-9. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus explained, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Colossians 1:15 reiterates this. Referring to Jesus, it says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." God is Spirit, and therefore invisible. But that won't detract from your heavenly joy. For in Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

Fanny Crosby, the writer of "Blessed Assurance" and many other great hymns, said she didn't mind being born blind because in heaven, the first thing she would see is the face of Jesus. In fact, in giving her testimony at a conference where Dwight L Moody was speaking, she shyly admitted, "There is a hymn I've written but never published. I call it my soul's poem. I repeat it when my heart is troubled, for it brings comfort to me. She then recited it while the audience wept: "Someday the silver cord will break, and I no more as now shall sing; but O, the joy when I awake within the palace of the King and I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story – saved by grace!" At age 95, her wish was granted. She awoke in heaven and the first face she ever saw was the face of Jesus. Imagine her joy!

2. THE CONDITIONS OF THE INVITATION

John continues in verse 6, "Then the angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place. Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.'" First, the angel emphasizes the trustworthiness of this invitation. In fact, he confirms the reliability of the entire Bible by emphasizing that the same God who inspired this

book inspired the prophets of old. But, notice, he doesn't stop there. He goes on to pinpoint two conditions for enjoying the blessings of this book.

The first is: **Keep the words of the prophecy in this book.** This means more than keeping a copy of the Bible on your bookshelf or nightstand. It means to stand up for the truth of this book and put it into practice. In fact, to demonstrate how vital our loyalty to this book is, John adds in verses 18-19, (Let the followers of Joseph Smith and other cult leaders beware!), "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the Tree of Life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

This was a common practice of scribes when recording royal decrees. Anyone who added to the King's words was warned that he would stand before the king in judgment. But this warning label is far more severe. John warns us that our very entrance into God's kingdom is at stake, determined by what we do with this book. Will we believe it and obey it? Or will we ignore it to our eternal hurt?

The second condition is: **Worship Jesus alone.** John himself is corrected about this. He confesses in verse 6, "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, 'Do not do it. I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'" The only acceptable form of worship in heaven is that which is directed toward the Father and the Son. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." He also added in another place. "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. (John 5:23) John's experience points out two eternal dangers that are at work today.

The first is the **danger of hero worship.** Most leaders are by nature charismatic personalities. Otherwise, people wouldn't be likely to follow them. But there is a danger in admiring them too much. And that's what's happening in

Christian circles today. People are so hungry for someone to follow that they develop little fan clubs around their favorite religious artist or Christian speaker. And that's wrong! Not only does it rob God of the glory that He alone deserves; but we inevitably discover that our idols have feet of clay. I once attended a Bible study where a woman said, "O, I don't know what I'd do if I ever heard my pastor swear! I think I'd lose my faith!" And I thought, "Then get ready to lose your faith, sister, because I know some things about your pastor you'd never believe."

The second is the ***danger of being carried away by emotion***. One of my seminary professors used to warn us prospective pastors, "Gentlemen, do not entrust the ministry of the church to artsy people." I wondered how he could be so harsh. But now I understand his concern. Human emotions are so powerful that unless brought under the control of godly wisdom, they can lead to all sorts of dangerous behavior – worship of angels, visions of giant Jesuses, as well as unethical and immoral behavior. More than once I've heard Christians excuse their immorality by saying, "It feels so right; it can't be wrong!" But that's when we need to remember that Satan is an angel of light who can just as easily counterfeit our emotions to deceive us as he can false doctrine.

3. THE ASSURANCES OF THE INVITATION

Finally, in verses 12 to 19, John moves from blessings and conditions to assurances of Christ's return and our invitation to heaven.

His first assurance is that ***it is near***. Three times in this chapter, Jesus promises, "I am coming soon!" One example is verse 12 where He promises, "Behold, I am coming soon. My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life, and may go through the gates into the city."

This confuses people. "After all," they think, "it's been 2000 years since Jesus made this promise. If He was coming soon, why hasn't He arrived yet?" The answer is found in the meaning of the word "soon." The word means "suddenly." Jesus wasn't promising that He'd come immediately. He was warning us that when He does come, it will be suddenly and without warning. It is what Paul

meant when he said that the Day of the Lord will come without warning “like a thief in the night.” In other words, when the things predicted by this book begin to happen, they will happen rapidly, leaving no time to repent. So, repent now!

That also helps to explain Jesus’ statement in verse 11: “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” Jesus isn’t advising people to continue in sin and be lost. The Bible says He is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. The point here is that when He returns, there won’t be any time for repentance. Those who have chosen to be holy will continue to be holy forever, whereas those who refuse His invitation will be lost forever. So, again, the time to repent is now, not then!

My next-door neighbor told me about an experience he had. He was helping his friend repair his roof when suddenly a piece of lumber knocked him off balance and sent him crashing to the ground. The fall fractured his collar-bone and nearly broke his neck. I asked him, “What did you learn from the accident?” He said. “I learned one thing for sure. I’ve always heard that a person’s life flashes before their eyes at a moment like that. But that isn’t true! I didn’t have time to think about anything. If I hadn’t known the Lord, I could have died and been lost forever! I realized that the time to make your peace with God is now!”

His second assurance is that *it is free*. Verse 16 says, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star.” And then He adds in verse 17, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let them take the free gift of the water of life.”

In other words, there is absolutely nothing you and I can do to earn our way to heaven. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Titus 3:5 adds, “Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us.” In fact, notice how the Bible ends in verse 21. John says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. That’s very different from how the Old Testament ends. There Malachi warns that Elijah is coming and will “strike the earth with the curse” unless his readers repent. The Old Testament speaks of law and judgment, but here we read of grace. Why? Because it’s only

through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that anyone can be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God that can only be received humbly by faith.

Yet, even though salvation comes freely to us, it came at a high price to God who gave the life of His Son to purchase our salvation. Furthermore, there is often great soul-searching and spiritual wrestling before a genuine commitment to Christ is made. Some Christians give people the impression that all they have to do is bow their heads, say a quick prayer, and “presto- chango,” you’re on your way to heaven. But that is not true. Verse 17 says it is those who are “thirsty” who may freely drink of the water of life. That means there must be a genuine recognition of our need for Christ and a sincere hunger for the salvation He can give us, in order for the change to be real. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” Jesus said, “for they shall be filled.”

By the way, be sure to notice from whom the invitation comes. John writes, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” That’s a reminder of our partnership with God in the work of evangelism. The Spirit is God, and He faithfully does His part by convicting the people of sin and drawing them to Christ. But we, the Bride of Christ, also have a part to play in the salvation of others. We are to be witnesses to Christ and invite others to believe in Jesus as often as we can.

Or to put another way, William Carey’s pastor was wrong! When the great missionary suggested taking the Gospel to India, he was abruptly told, “Sit down young man. If God chooses to convert the heathen, He will do it without the help of you or me.” But that’s bad theology! Here God reminds us that if someone gets into heaven, it will be because we’ve invited them. We are tools of the Holy Spirit, and our words, if they are God’s Words, have great power over people. Therefore, whatever the Holy Spirit chooses to accomplish, He will accomplish through us. “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” Therefore, prayerfully look for someone who needs that invitation and extend it to them today.

Remember, there are only two things that you can take to heaven with you: 1) Your Christlike character developed over a lifetime; and 2) Another person with whom you have shared the Gospel and invited to heaven.

STUDY QUESTIONS

(Revelation 22:1-21)

1. In **The Great Divorce**, C. S. Lewis describes a bus trip, where sinners in hell are invited to visit heaven and stay, if they want. Surprisingly, few are willing to go. Even fewer want to stay. A) Imagine you are leading a similar expedition of your unsaved friends. What promises or warnings would you make in order to get them to go? B) Now read John's invitation in Revelation 22:1-21. In your opinion, what is the strongest reason he gives for making the trip to heaven?
2. Read Revelation 22:1-5. A) What is the source of the river of life, and what does it therefore symbolize? (See John 7:37-39.) B) Where do we first read of the Tree of Life and how does that make its presence in New Jerusalem special? (See Genesis 3:22-24.) C) According to verse 3c, what will be our occupation throughout eternity? What do you think this will mean? D) Share anything else you are looking forward to in verse 1 to 5 and explain why.
3. Read Revelation 22:6-7. A) What does verse 6 indicate both about the trustworthiness of Revelation and the other books of the Bible? B) How has your study of Revelation given you a better understanding of the Bible as a whole? C) Why do you think the statement, "I am coming quickly!" is repeated three times in this closing chapter? (vv. 7, 12, 20) D) In your opinion, what does it mean to "keep the words of this prophecy?" (v. 7)
4. Read Revelation 22:8-15. A) Why do you think John repeats his earlier mistake of 19:10? What warning does this issue about our worship? B) Explain what verse 10 indicates about God's purpose for the book of Revelation, and what you're doing to fulfill it. C) Explain in your own words what the command in verse 11 means. (See Romans 1:18-32 for help.)
5. Read Revelation 22:16-21. A) What lessons can we learn about presenting the Gospel message from verses 16-17? B) Why do you think the warnings of verses 18-19 are added to this book? How do they correct many modern-day cults? C) Now take a moment to summarize what this study of Revelation has meant to you personally and how it has affected your walk with Christ.