

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Believer's Immediate Response to Christ's Imminent Return

Scripture: Revelation 22:6-12

Code: 66-85

Revelation chapter 22, getting close to saying goodbye to this wonderful book. In fact, the only book left in the Bible after this is the book of Concordance and then there's Maps. We are at the end, as you will see in the next couple of weeks. There's nothing more that needs to be said after this book is complete.

As we come to chapter 22, and verses 6 to 12, we come to the epilogue, the wrap up on the apocalypse. All of the glorious and gracious purposes of God ordained from before the foundation of the world have now been attained. The rebellion of angels and mankind is all over. The rebels are all in the everlasting punishment in the Lake of Fire. The King of kings is now sitting on the eternal throne as the sovereign with His Father over the New Heaven and the New Earth. Absolute and unchanging holiness characterizes all within the universal and eternal Kingdom of God, the redeemed, the chosen, the glorified saints bought by the slain Lamb are now in their resurrection bodies, dwelling in the glory of the New Heaven and the New Earth, and particularly living in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city. Holy life and praise fills the universe, the universe having been recreated is the abode of God and His glory fills it with blazing light, starting from inside, the diamond holy city and splattering its beauty throughout the whole new heaven and new earth. Light, beauty, holiness, joy, the presence of God and the Lamb, worship and praise, service, likeness to Christ are all the realities of this eternal state. And that's what we have seen as we've come through chapter 21 and chapter 22 down through verse 5.

Now, backing up a little before that as we've gone through the book of Revelation, we have seen the church on earth in the first few chapters. And then it appears in heaven in chapters 4 and 5. And we saw starting in chapter 6 the breakout of a period of time known as the Tribulation, a period with tremendous judgment, that judgment that unfolds under the seals and the trumpets and the bowls that represent God's wrath poured out. Culminating, of course, in the final wrath in the Day of the Lord. We have seen the arrival during that Tribulation time of Satan's deceptive counterfeit Christ, namely the Antichrist coming up out of the pit, as it were, demon-possessed, capturing the worship of the world and assisted by the False Prophet who carries the world to worship him. And, of course, behind it all is Satan himself, running the course of unparalleled blasphemy. And he and his false prophet and Antichrist and all the rest of the ungodly then sink forever into a deserved hell.

We've seen the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords to destroy the wicked and the ungodly in a massive massacre at Armageddon as the Day of the Lord reaches its climax. Then

we saw the final glorious earthly Kingdom of Jesus Christ, called the Millennial Kingdom on the restored earth which included the arrest and imprisonment of Satan and his final brief loosing to lead the last war against God, and then his sentence with his angels into the Lake of Fire.

After that we saw the shaking down of the heaven and earth in the work of uncreation. The Great White Throne judgment of all the ungodly dead and their resurrection and assignment to the Lake of Fire, sin, death and Hades, the cursed demons, men all swept out of the presence of God forever. Then came the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, the paradise of God, eternal glory, immortality, peace and joy which we looked at in 21 and the first part of 22. Nothing's left, that's it. We're in the eternal state and it perpetuates itself forever and ever.

All that can be said is epilogue. All that can be said is a postscript, a P.S. And, in fact, it is very similar to the prologue...very similar. If you go back with me, for a minute, let's read the prologue. It's important because the prologue and the epilogue bracket the heart of this book. It starts out, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place. And He sent it and communicated it by His angel to His bondservant John, who bore witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near."

Now let's read the epilogue, chapter 22 verse 6. And notice the parallels. "And He said to me, 'These words are faithful and true.' And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place. And behold, I am coming quickly, blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book. And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down and worshiped at the feet of the angel who showed me these things, and he said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.' And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong still do wrong, and let the one who is filthy still be filthy, and let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness, and let the one who is holy still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly and My reward is with me to render to every man according to what he has done.'"

Now that is the first part of the epilogue. It runs all the way down to verse 21, obviously, to close out this book. But the first part of it, from verses 6 to 12 is directed to Christians. The last part is directed to non-Christians. And so we'll break them up into those two parts.

The first part, verses 6 to 12 which I just read, are directed to Christians. The latter part, directed to non-Christians, and we'll take that in the future. The character of these verses which I just read to you is rapid-fire, breathless, you almost feel like John is panting as he races his quill across the parchment to get this down rapidly. They are single statements, brief and independent, one after

another. And they move from theme to theme to theme to theme. Yet each deals with a needed response, a response that every Christian should have to the coming of Jesus Christ which is the theme of this book. Remember now, it is, as we read in the prologue, the revelation of Jesus Christ. It talks about His Second Coming, that is the theme of it. And here we find what our response is to be to that Second Coming. And that's why we've entitled it, "The Believer's Immediate Responses to Christ's Imminent Return." These verses, in fact, give the feeling of a furious rush, a kind of a wild flurry in an effort to call for immediate response to such vital truth. Nothing makes that more evident than the fact that he repeats three times, "Behold, I come quickly...Behold, I come quickly...Behold, I come quickly." And then down in verse 20, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." And so there is a rapidity and a repetition and at the same time there is a series of statements made on different themes.

The text is pregnant with urgency and specificity, pressuring every believer to think quickly and immediately about the truths that they have read and to react with haste in the light of what is coming. Jesus is coming. And the key word in this text is He is coming quickly. You will notice it there in verse 7. "Behold, I am coming quickly." You will notice it in verse 12, "Behold, I am coming quickly." And down in verse 20, "Yes, I am coming quickly." The term is tachy from which we get the term tachometer which measures speed. I'm coming speedily, I'm coming hastily, or I'm coming quickly, or I'm coming shortly, or I'm coming soon." Six times in the book of Revelation that is stated, six times, twice it is a warning. In chapter 2 verses 5 and 16 He is coming quickly with judgment on His mind. Four times it is a promise...a promise of blessing. The three that I read you here in chapter 22 and one in chapter 3 verse 11. In all four of those, He is coming to bless. In the first two, chapter 2 verses 5 and 16 He is coming to judge.

Also we read in chapter 3 verse 3 that His coming is like a thief. That is repeated in chapter 16 verse 15, it means He will come unexpectedly. He's coming soon and He's coming when not expected. That is, of course, the ploy that a thief has to count on is that he is not expected, that he can get in and get out and do what he wants to do immediately and hastily without anybody able to make preparation, or put up a defense.

Now what this is telling us is that the coming of the Lord is soon, it's coming shortly, it's coming hastily, you need to be ready. You say, "Well wait a minute. When this was written around 96 A.D., they might have thought that but we're here a long time, almost two thousand years after that and He's not here yet." Yeah, well that's from the human viewpoint, isn't it? From the vantage point of God, we remind ourselves that a day with the Lord is as...what?...a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. And from God's perspective, it's only been two days. In the light of eternity, it is very, very brief. People in the New Testament believed that Jesus could come at any time. They believed that He could come in their life time. That is very clear if you read the New Testament. It was obvious to any reader of the New Testament that believers felt Jesus could come at any time. They didn't have such a highly refined and defined eschatological scheme as to conclude that He couldn't come in their time because this had to happen and this had to happen and this had to happen, and

there was this very, very carefully laid out scenario of sequences and until those took their proper place in line, He couldn't come. They lived as if He could come at any moment.

There are a number of New Testament texts, I think, that support this view of what we call imminence, that is to say He could come at any time. Imminence could be defined as a certainty with an uncertainty. It was certain that He was coming, but it was uncertain when. They were living as if He might come at any time, but didn't know when He would come.

Let me show you some New Testament texts that help us to understand that they lived as if Jesus could come at any moment, for indeed He could. Let me take you back to 1 Corinthians. And it's important to capture this because otherwise the text doesn't have its force, the text of Revelation. Back in 1 Corinthians 1:7, and this describes the Corinthian church here and it says of them in verse 7 that they were not lacking in any gift. What that meant was that every gift that God through His Holy Spirit could bestow upon a church, every ministerial gift, every spiritual gift, every gifted leader and teacher that He could give to His church they had received. They didn't lack any spiritual gift from God. You're not lacking in any gift.

And then he adds, "Awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is a typical description of the attitude of a member of the early church, waiting eagerly for the coming of Jesus Christ. They didn't push the return of Christ for His beloved way off in some eschatological future. They believed that it was imminent, that it could come at any time, it could certainly come in their lifetime.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 5, Paul says, "Don't go on passing judgment." in other words, you're not the person who can judge someone, "Don't go on passing judgment before the time but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts." Literally, live in expectation of the coming of Christ. And they did. They did.

Then I want you to go to the sixteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians for a very interesting note there. And it all is built around one word. In 1 Corinthians 16 and verse 22 you have the word "Maranatha...Maranatha," we've heard that word, haven't we? Maranatha, and interestingly enough that is not translated. Maranatha is an Aramaic word, it's an Aramaic word...that's interesting because as far as we can tell, nobody in Corinth would have spoken Aramaic except some Jews who may have been living there. But basically nobody in the Greek culture would have spoken Aramaic. Aramaic was the language of the people who lived in Palestine. And so why would the Apostle Paul in writing an epistle to a Greek church in a Greek culture include an Aramaic word untranslated? It's interesting.

What it means, by the way, is “The Lord comes,” or “Lord, come.” It was a word that expressed the hope of the return of Christ. That’s very interesting. Why an Aramaic, really an Aramaic phrase squeezed into one word, why would an Aramaic phrase appear in a Greek letter to a Greek church? The only answer is, it must have been a word they were familiar with, right? It isn’t even translated. It must have been a watch word, a byword, a proverbial anticipation of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ that was so well-known to everybody that Christians just said, “Maranatha...Maranatha....Maranatha.” It summed up the truth of the vital hope of believers that Jesus could come at any time. It expressed their imminent hope. They were saying to one another, “Maranatha, Maranatha, our Lord come, our Lord come, our Lord come.” They were living constantly in the light of the return of Christ. It was their hope.

On a number of occasions the Apostle Paul expressed the idea that he might live until Jesus returned. Let’s look at some of the things he said. Philippians chapter 3, for example, and verse 20, he says, “For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” He was waiting for Christ. He was waiting for the return of Jesus Christ and he believed it could happen in his lifetime, or he wouldn’t have said that. “From which we eagerly wait for a Savior.”

Look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, here is Paul’s commendation of the Thessalonian church. And he says about the Thessalonian church, verse 9 of 1 Thessalonians 1, “You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven.” Listen, the early church was just filled with anticipation that Jesus could come at any moment. Chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians and verse 15, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord.” What’s he saying? He is saying, “You know what? Some of us may be alive at the return of Christ.” That’s what he’s saying. We...

Look at 2 Thessalonians for a moment, chapter 3, and I’m just trying to plant in your mind the idea that the early church believed in imminency, they believed that Jesus could come at any moment and they lived in that expectation. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 10, listen to this, “For even when we were with you we used to give you this order, if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.” Now we’ve got some problems in the church at Thessalonica, some people weren’t working. “For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life doing no work at all but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”

What does this have to do with the Rapture? The whole Thessalonian church was preoccupied with the return of Christ, weren’t they? And Paul had written them his first epistle and told them Jesus is coming, you’re waiting for His coming. They were already waiting for His coming, we saw that in chapter 1 verse 10 of the first letter. He said to them in that first letter, verse 4:15 which I read to you earlier, “We who are alive and remain when He comes,” they were living in the anticipation of the

return of Christ. And what had happened was, some of them were so convinced that Jesus would come in their lifetime that they stopped...what?...working. Is that uncommon? We have that today. Every time some guy comes along and writes another book on when Jesus is going to come, people do that. Remember back in 1988 when the guy wrote the book, Eighty-Eight Reasons why Jesus will Come in 1988? I mean, it's one thing to write a book and be wrong. It's another thing to write a book and be wrong 88 times. And people sold their property, you know, and got their pajamas on and got up on the roof and with indolence and laziness did what they did. I remember years before that when a guy told me that Jesus was going to come on January 1 of a certain year, I think it was like '81, can't remember exactly. And he had liquidated all of his assets and he had gone and bought Bibles and passed them out to everybody and sent out hundreds of thousands little glow-in-the-dark praying hands and he was kind of a bizarre character. And he had it all pinned down, Jesus was going to come.

Well it was a similar kind of mentality last year in 1994 when a man named Harold Camping wrote a book saying Jesus was going to come in September, remember? Of 1994 and people did foolish things getting ready for that? Well it was no different than what happened in Thessalonica. People in anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus Christ quit their jobs. The point is, they lived in the light of the reality that Jesus could come at any time.

Now look at Titus chapter 2 and I want you to capture this in your mind because it's very important. Now we are living, according to verse 12, Titus 2:12, we are living righteously and godly in the present age, okay? This is where we live in the present age. But we are, verse 13, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." We are looking for Christ. That's what Paul says to Titus. We as believers living in the first century are looking for the returning Christ.

Turn to the epistle of James, chapter 5, verse 7, "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." Verse 8, "Be patient, strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is near...at hand." That means next, soon. Then in verse 9 he says, "The judge is standing right at the door." From a human viewpoint, it seems like 2,000 years is a long time. From God's viewpoint, it's two days.

Look at 1 John chapter 2 and verse 28, "And now, little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Again, living as if He's going to come in our lifetime was just the way they lived. Chapter 3 verse 2, "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him."

You see, that's been the church's hope. That's been the church's hope, that Jesus would come. The church then, we say, believed in imminency, any natural reading of the New Testament yields the fact that the church believed Jesus could come at any time. That is really unarguable, as far as I'm concerned. They didn't know when, but they believed it could be at any time, even in their lifetime.

And the church has held on to that because it is such a great motivation to live every moment knowing Jesus might come in the next one.

And so, imminency is really what is on the mind of anyone who reads carefully the New Testament. With that in mind, let's go back to our text. Now when you read, "Behold, I come quickly...Behold, I come quickly...Behold, I come quickly," three times in chapter 22, you get the idea that God is reinforcing this reality. Quickly, not so much as having to do with the speed with which He comes, I mean what does that matter? We don't care whether He comes at the speed of light or ten times the speed of light. It's not the speed with which He comes, that doesn't matter because all we're going to know is when He gets here. If it took Him a year to traverse the heavens to get here, we'd only know Him when He arrived. If it took Him a nanosecond to traverse the heavens before He got here, we'd only know Him when He arrives. The issue isn't how fast does He come. The issue is that we live in the light of the reality that He's coming soon, that the judge is at the door, that the coming of the Lord is near. And we have to live in the light of the nearness of that.

Now that is the sum up of this book, He's coming, He's coming soon. With that in mind, look at verse 6. "And he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place.'" There again the emphasis...it's coming, it's coming soon.

Now in verse 6 he says, "And he said to me," and we have to identify the speaker, the very same angel introduced in chapter 22...pardon me, yes 22, the angel who was speaking to John. You go back to chapter 21 verse 9, you meet that angel, one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me. Now here is the angel, you remember, took him on the tour of the heavenly city. Showed him in chapter 2 verse 1 the water of life clear as crystal, who took him down through all of those marvelous realities inside the place where He will dwell and all saints will dwell forever. It's that very same angel who showed him the holy city, that same angel who was one of the seven angels who poured out the wrath of God in the seven-bowl judgments called the last plagues, that same angel now speaks to him. He's not showing him anything, he talks to him.

This is what he said. "These words are faithful and true." What is that all about? That is a heavenly confirmation, a heavenly attestation to what John has heard and seen throughout the entire apocalypse. That's very important. The angel is saying, "John, what you have seen is reality. These words are faithful and true."

Go back to chapter 21 verse 5. "And he said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'" If you go back to chapter 19 verse 11, Jesus Christ is called Faithful and True. In other words, the angel is affirming the validity of everything John has seen. He's saying to him, "John, you haven't just been wandering around in some mystical fog, you haven't just been having your own bizarre dreams. You

haven't been imagining things that aren't really real. This isn't a case of an extravagant imagination. Everything that you have heard and seen in this revelation is faithful and true." The scenes, the visions, the revelations, the conversations with heavenly creatures have been so startling and so graphic and so unearthly and so supernatural and so frightening and so wondrous and so amazing and so majestic and so transcendent that some might consider them a fantasy and some might consider them a series of dreams with some personal spiritual interpretation or allegories that need a secret spiritual meaning to be discovered. But the angel says, "What you've seen is exactly how it is."

Now that is a good word again to those who want to allegorize the book of Revelation, or those who want to shove it way back and make it all happen in 70 A.D. It is exactly as John has received it. They are utterly accurate descriptions of accurate events and personages to come. This emphasis, by the way, on the truthfulness of this is repeated in this final chapter. Verse 16, "I have sent My angel to testify to you these things." That's right, the angel has testified to these things and told you they are faithful and true. Verse 18 says, "If anybody adds to the words of the prophecy of this book, I'll add to him the plagues that are written in it." Verse 19, "If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part in the Tree of Life in the holy city." Don't tamper with this revelation. It is exactly as you received it. These words are faithful and true. And then he goes on to say in verse 6, "And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to show His bondservants the things which must shortly take place." What he's saying is it comes from God. Oh yes, God used His angel to reveal it, but the source is God, the same God...this is very important...who is the God of the spirits of the prophets. That is the same God who moved on the hearts of Old Testament prophets, the same God who spoke His Word through New Testament prophets is the God who has now revealed this. In other words, this too is equally inspired. The sovereign almighty God who revealed His Word in the past through the prophets who then wrote the Old Testament with all of its predictions, that's what I think He has primarily in mind, His Old Testament prophets, the same God who moved on the spirits or the minds of the Old Testament prophets and they wrote down the prophecies of the Old Testament...and remember...which were all fulfilled, literally and actually and are still being fulfilled. The same God who had those prophets write with precision and exactness, exactly how it would be has inspired these visions and given a message to His angel to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place. Bondservants, by the way, are Christians...Christians are the bondservants. And so that's why I said verses 6 to 12 is directed at Christians, it's for us.

Now there's a marvelous point to make here. The Old Testament is full of prophecies, full of future prophecies and literally those prophecies have come to pass. All the prophecies about the first coming of Messiah have come to pass. And scholars tell us there are over 330 specific prophecies concerning Jesus Christ that were fulfilled in His first coming. And that then becomes the standard. The exactness and the precision with which the Old Testament prophets predicted the first coming is the standard by which God has revealed His truth in this book to predict the Second Coming. These things are as faithful and true as the prophets of the Old Testament spoke about the first coming of

Christ because in both cases it is God, the Lord, the Almighty God who has inspired the revelation.

Now the end of verse 6 he says, "These are the things which must shortly take place." And there he's referring to the whole book. That phrase, "things which must shortly take place," sweeps back over the whole revelation. And so, God reminds John through this angel what you have is from Me.

Now God hasn't given us the exact timetable, but we are called to live in expectation. And the eternal God who revealed His Word to the spirits of the minds of the prophets has also revealed these truths to John through the angels for us. The things they say in here are real, the visions he sees are real, and they will happen just the way Revelation says they will happen. And I've told you all the way along, this is not a forgery, this is not a fantasy, these are not dreams that need interpretation, this is not an allegory, these are not fairy tales. The one who is faithful and true has spoken truly. Back in chapter 1 verse 1, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, God gave him to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place. That's it. And He communicated it by His angel to His bondservant John.

There was an angel coordinator who was in charge of all of this Revelation to John. And it is true, it is as it is written. And I emphasize that because there's a certain weariness in people undermining the simple straightforward realities of this great apocalypse. And so we've come full circle, from the prologue which said essentially the same thing, to the epilogue. And we know now that brackets the main body of the book.

Now if God says this is faithful and true, He means it will come to pass. Is that not true? It will come to pass. I mean, after all, His prophetic record is perfect. He said Israel would go into captivity and they did. He said Babylon would fall and they did. He said Tyre and Sidon would be destroyed, and they were. He said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and He was. He said that Messiah would be born to a virgin and He was. He said Messiah would be killed and He was. He said judgment would come in the future on land, sea, water, and, men, believe me it will. He said war will come killing half the world, and it will. He said nations will gather to battle at Armageddon and they will. He says there will come an Antichrist who will rule the world and he will. He says hell will belch forth its demons to run over the earth and maim the world, and they will. He says believers will be martyred and they will. He says the King is coming, and He is. He says He will set up His earthly Kingdom, and He will. What it says in here is exactly what it means. It is faithful and true and there's no reason to equivocate, there's no reason to undermine the integrity of God as He writes. In fact, it reminds me of Isaiah 46 where it says in verse 9, "Remember the former things long past, for I am God and there is no other. I am God and there's no one like Me declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that have not been done saying, 'My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" That is to say God will do exactly what He says He will do.

And this is how it will be done.

And so, it's coming, folks, the book of Revelation is coming. It's coming. And we're reminded three times in this last chapter that from God's vantage point it is coming soon...soon. And sometimes it seems so soon, so near.

In the light of that, in the light of the reality of verse 6 that it's true and that it's coming shortly, and it's coming soon and quickly and suddenly, what is to be the believer's response? That's the question. What is to be the believer's response?

Four responses...four responses. Response number one, immediate obedience...immediate obedience. Or if you like a better word, immediate compliance. Verse 7 starts with "And." By the way, "and" here seems to mark a change in the speaker. You see and at the beginning of verse 7, and at the beginning of verse 8, and at the beginning of verse 9, and at the beginning of verse 10. And that may be a key to seeing a change in the speaker. Here we have an immediate change because it's obvious who's speaking here, and it's not the angel. The angel spoke in 6 but in 7 "And behold, I am coming quickly." It's not an angel who's coming, who is it? It's Christ who's coming and so He's the speaker. "Behold, I am coming quickly." I am coming...present tense, the theme is urgency...I am coming quickly. And then He gives us what is the sixth of seven Beatitudes. The Beatitude always begins with the word "Blessed." This is the six of seven in the book of Revelation. "Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book." That's immediate obedience.

Jesus is at the door. The judge is at the door. He could come at any time. We're looking for His appearing. We love His appearing, as Paul told Timothy. And in the light of His soon coming, in the light of the fact that He can come at any moment, we're not waiting for some unfolding prophetic scheme, the church wasn't like that. They didn't have some chart or some timetable and they were sort of putting themselves along the path and saying, "Well, it certainly is not possible for Him to come now because we've got to go through all of this." No, they lived in the light that He could come at any moment. And the immediate response, first of all, was to heed the words of the prophecy of this book.

Now that, just to make a brief note, indicates to us that the words of this book are prophecy...the words of the prophecy of this book. By the way, that is repeated again in this chapter about the fact that this book is God's revelation of prophecy. You find it in verse 18, "In the prophecy of this book," you find it in verse 19, "The book of this prophecy."

Now certainly prophecy doesn't always mean prediction, but in this case it certainly does. This is a book of prophecy. This is a book of future predictions and promises. In light of it, He says, we are to heed the words.

Now what does it mean to heed? Well it's from tereo, it basically means to keep, to hold fast, or to guard. That's its meaning, to hold on to, to hold captive, to make one's own, to possess. That same term is used in chapter 14 verse 12 where it talks about the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God, who hold on to them.

Now it does call, I think, to a certain guarding and I don't want to beg this issue again, but I just want to bring it up. When He says "heed," it can be translated "to guard." And in that sense it's a protective role. I feel that way. I feel like I not only have to obey what the book of Revelation says, but I have to protect it from the people who want to destroy it. It calls for guarding this great book from its detractors who would deny it, guarding it from its critics who would ignore it, guarding it from its false interpreters who would obscure it...just as in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 20. Timothy is told, "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you." There is definitely a guardianship here. In 2 Timothy 1:13 and 14, "Retain the standard of sound words, guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure entrusted to you." This is the treasure, this book of Revelation. And it must be guarded against the detractors and the critics and the false interpreters who want to destroy its meaning, tamper with its interpretation, obscure its simple and direct significance.

But it's beyond that. It's not just talking about a guardian responsibility, it's talking about obeying. To keep means to obey, to heed is a good translation. You remember, don't you, that Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments." And that is repeated throughout that section. Verse 21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me," verse 21. Same thing in verse 23, same thing in chapter 15 verse 10, and you find it in 1 John 2 and 1 John 5, if you love the Lord, you keep His commandments. If you love His appearing, you keep His commandments. That's the whole point. If we believe Jesus is coming imminently, He could come at any moment, and, of course, if the Rapture of the church starts it all off, and the Rapture of the church is the first thing and then comes the time of the Tribulation when all the events are laid out, there's no event given in front of the Rapture of the church...so it could happen at any moment. And so we live every moment as if Jesus could come in the next moment. We have to live then obeying the mandates given in the book of Revelation.

Now that leads me to ask this question, and you would ask it, I'm sure, if you were studying, what are the commands we're supposed to obey? You might say to yourself, "I don't remember a whole lot of commands in this book," and you're right. In fact, if I had you start in chapter 4 and track your way through the book of Revelation all the way to this point, you know how many commands you'd find? None. No really direct commands to a believer. There are some commands to John to do certain things.

You say, "Well where are the commands we're supposed to obey here?" Well back in chapters 2 and 3 there are some direct commands given to the church. Remember now, in chapters 2 and 3 have letters to churches, symbolic of all the churches of all time and the same commands and warnings

that are given to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 apply to us. But beyond chapters 2 and 3, the book doesn't give specific commands to believers until you get here and you're told to heed the Words. Well then when you're told to heed the book of Revelation, what does this mean? Well what do you mean then heed the words of the prophecy of this book?

I'll tell you what it means. He means this, you know that Jesus Christ is coming, you know He could come at any moment, so long for His coming...long for your eternal fellowship, desire heaven, desire holiness, desire Christ vindicated and glorified. That's the spirit of this book. Desire the end of the curse. Desire a new heaven and a new earth. Live for the eternal state. You should, after reading this book, love Christ more than you ever loved Him for the sake of His coming glory. You should live in the light of the fact that some day you're going to face Him. You should by comprehending this book disconnect yourself from the perishing world and live in the light of the eternal world. You should long for the day when you're made like Christ, long for the time when He appears and you see Him face to face. Long for the hour of your eternal reward, long for your resurrection body, as Paul did in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, that he might be clothed upon with his house which is from heaven.

You are to grasp also the fearful judgment on the ungodly and call them to Christ before it's too late. That is keeping or heeding the words of this prophecy, living in the light of the Second Coming, living in the light of the return of Christ, living in the light of coming judgment on the ungodly. See, God does not ask us to read and understand and believe the prophecy of this book so we can cater to our own curiosity. And I have really tried to avoid that all the way through this study, not getting caught up in all kinds of curiosities that you read so much about when you read people who comment on the book of Revelation. God didn't write this book so we could feed our curiosity about the future or so we could see helicopters and very evident indications all around the world today of what every little thing might mean. Nor was this book given to us so that we might understand and parade our refined and impressive eschatological charts. It wasn't written so we could have our wonderful system in place. And I'll tell you, folks, I have been in the ministry long enough to have collected every imaginable scheme from the book of Revelation. And you know something? I rarely have a month go by when I don't get another one. And some guy has got the final and last word, rarely are they ever published by anybody other than the author...and you always want to watch out for self-published material.

There's an endless ream of stuff coming out as people try to come up with the latest scheme. God didn't write this so we could define and refine impressive eschatological charts. He didn't give us the book of Revelation so that we could analyze our culture, so that we could pinpoint social and political analyses of current events. He wrote it so that we might catch the spirit of the coming of Jesus Christ and live in the light of it. It's much more important that this book affect your life in terms of holiness and zeal for the lost than that you figure out how to fix a chart that will wow your friends. That's not the issue. Seeing the glory of heaven is the issue. Seeing the majesty of Jesus Christ is the issue. Seeing the terror of hell, feeling the heat of judgment on sinners, understanding the seriousness of the rejection of Christ, and at the same time feeling the joy of coming bliss so that we can both long

for heaven and witness to the lost, so that we can live a holy life and give a testimony for Christ, so that we can serve God with all our hearts because we are going to receive an eternal reward. That's how you keep this book. That's what He's calling for.

Revelation is not entertainment. It is not high-class fascination. It is motivation to live a godly life. It is truth to shape you. And Peter said that in 2 Peter chapter 3 in verse 11, he said, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be?" That's the question. Not what sort of chart should you draw. What kind of person are you going to be? The timing of these events is very elusive. That's why there are so many viewpoints. And as I told you before, even the men who wrote the Old Testament, the prophets, Peter says, "Searched what time they wrote about." They couldn't even comprehend the chronology of it. And they searched what persons were they writing about? There was mystery even in what they wrote and only those who were alive when it was fulfilled saw it clearly and so it will be with this prophecy.

The issue is, what kind of people are you going to be? Are you going to be living in holy conduct and godliness, 2 Peter 3:11 says? Because you're looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. You're so eager and you're anticipating it, and you know it's coming, and so you live holy lives. Verse 14 he says, "Beloved, but since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." That's it. Are you living in peace? Or are you using your eschatology to divide? Are you blameless? Are you without spot?

No, the issue here is immediate submission to the great reality of this tremendous book...immediate obedience. Why? Because He could come at any moment. The imminent return demands immediate obedience. There's no time to postpone, you better get busy obeying now, you better get in the spirit of the book of Revelation now because Jesus could come at any moment and you want to receive a full reward and you want to honor Him at His coming.

Second, and we'll just cover two of the four, second, this is very important because this wraps the whole book up and I don't want to be unfaithful to this part of it. Immediate worship...immediate worship, verse 8, "And I, John," there's the "and" again that signifies a change in speaker, "And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to...what?...to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things and he said to me, 'Do not do that, I'm a fellow servant of your's and of the brethren and the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.'"

John had the right idea, didn't he? I mean, he really did. The right response was to worship, wasn't it? Now the whole thing was so absolutely overwhelming. I mean, the whole description of everything he has seen in all these visions that he received when he was on the island of Patmos in exile, the whole thing is so overwhelming that when the angel gets through with this affirmation and affirms that it's going to happen soon and he needs to heed the words, the whole thing is so overwhelming that he

collapses in worship. He's breathless. He's absolutely overwhelmed. And so should we be. It is a testimony to our indifference, isn't it, when we're not.

Look what he says, "And I, John," I, John, "Am the one who heard and saw these things." You say, "Why did he say that?" Well the angel gave testimony to the fact that it was true and now John adds his. It's true, folks, I'm the one who heard and saw. It's his own testimony to the reality, to the veracity of what was revealed to him, seeing and hearing, saw and heard, he uses those terms twice. Vision and voice, and that's what Revelation is, it's a vision and the voice from heaven, from an angel, even from the throne, even from Christ. Vision and voice, seeing and hearing, he's so amazed. "And I, it's John," it's as if he says, "I...can you believe it...John, me, saw and heard." And he is captive to wonder and adoration. His compulsion to worship is unrestrained. He is so driven to worship that he just worships the nearest person. And he says, "I fell down to worship." Please notice, it doesn't say he fell down to worship the angel, it says he fell down to worship at the feet of the angel. I don't think he was worshipping the angel.

Back in chapter 19 verse 10, he did it there, too. He said, "I fell down at his feet," only this time he said, "I fell down at his feet to worship...what?...him, and he said, Get up...the angel did...don't do that. I'm a fellow servant of yours and your brethren and all the testimony of Jesus, worship God, don't worship me." So he had learned by now. But, you know, he fell down again. I don't think he wanted to worship the angel, he had already been instructed on that, I just think he just collapsed, like Ezekiel, you remember, who when he saw the vision in Ezekiel, collapsed. Like Isaiah in Isaiah 6 when he saw the vision of the glory of God, collapsed. Like the three disciples at the transfiguration in Matthew 17, they saw the glory of God revealed, they collapsed. I think he just crumbled in worship. I mean, lost in wonder, love and praise...so wonderful was the revelation of the knowledge of what was going to happen, so profound and so prolific that he just collapsed. He just collapsed. It says, "When...he was the one who heard and saw these things," all of it.

Now you know what? He may have thought the angel was Christ. He meant no idolatry. He just lost himself. For a moment he was so overwhelmed he couldn't discern between the messenger and the one who sent him. You know what? He knew that you're not supposed to worship angels, he had just been instructed about that in chapter 19 verse 10 and my guess is he probably read Paul's epistle to the Colossians anyway. Somewhere along the path long before this, he had read Colossians 2:18 which says, "Don't worship angels." He knew that was wrong. But he just collapsed in worship. And the angel who realizes that God alone is to be worshiped and feels so self-conscious at John's posture, verse 9, said to me, "Don't do that, stop. I'm a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren, the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. I'm just another creature...I love this...I'm a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren, the prophets." Isn't that wonderful that the angels felt like they were brothers with the prophets? Remember in the Old Testament where in the book of Hebrews where God says when God gave the law in the Old Testament, He gave the law through the angels? Boy, the angels have been involved in so many things, they even identify themselves as

brethren of the prophets, fellow servants of yours and your brethren, the prophets. We serve alongside of you. And Hebrews 1:14 says, "They are sent to minister for the saints." He said to me, "Don't worship me, I'm just a creature, get up." I think John would have said, "I really wasn't worshipping you, I just lost it there." And the angel then says, "Worship God...Worship God."

If anything should be elicited out of an understanding of the book of Revelation, it ought to be worship, right? I mean, when we see what God's going to do, where the world is going, what's it going to be like in the end and how it's all going to wrap up and Jesus will be glorified, and we see the millennial kingdom, at the end of the kingdom the uncreation of everything as we know it and the recreation, new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, and the glorious new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from God and settling in to the eternal state and the glory of God shining out from within that gold and diamond prism and all of its bejeweled foundations and all of that blazing through eternal glory and we're there in holy perfection like Christ forever, the only way to respond to that is to worship. And the angel just wanted to make sure that John knew you don't worship anybody but God.

Just as a footnote. The Roman Catholic Church advocates the worship of Mary, the worship of angels, the worship of saints, they call it veneration but it is indistinguishable from worship, is a violation of what the Bible teaches. Worship God. All that John felt should be directed to God alone.

And, you know, hasn't that been a theme all the way through this book? You go back to chapter 4, what are they doing in heaven? Worshiping God. You go back to chapter 5, what are they doing? Worshiping God. Go back to chapter 7, what are they doing? Worshiping God. Chapter 15, worshiping God. Chapter 19, worshiping God. So, the soon and sudden return of Jesus Christ demands immediate response. First, obedience not just to the commands of the book in chapters 2 and 3, but to the whole spirit of the thing, to heed it all and immediate worship. When we live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ, we will be obedient and we will be worshipful.

The third immediate response to Christ's imminent return is immediate proclamation....immediate proclamation. Verse 10, "And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near,'" again emphasizing the imminency of it, this is not a message to be hidden, it is a message to be spread. It is to be proclaimed to Christians for promised blessing. It is to be proclaimed, listen carefully, to produce obedience and to produce worship. That is its intention. The angel, most likely, is the one speaking here when it says, "And he said to me," and he says, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. Don't hide these things." Back in chapter 10 and verse 11, John writes, "And they said to me, you must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." This has to be spoken.

If you go back to the book of Daniel, for example, Daniel 8:26 and Daniel chapter 12 verses 4 through 10, there was a word from the Lord to seal up these things. Not to proclaim them. That prohibition is removed. Immediate proclamation is called for because now it is abundantly clear what is to come.

And because it is imminent in every generation from John until today, this book is to be proclaimed. And I just give you a note here. It says in verse 10, "Do not seal up the words...the words," plural, meaning the specific words of this book are not to be sealed up.

That reminds me again that we're not looking into this book for some kind of secretive meanings hidden behind what is obvious. If the truth is not in the words, then this command is nonsense. But the truth is in the words and we are not to seal up these words, we are to make them known. Way back in chapter 1 verse 11, John was told to write in a book what you see and send it to the churches. Spread it, spread this word, Jesus is coming and with Him comes blessing for His own and with Him comes horrifying judgment on the ungodly. To fail to preach revelation, to fail to proclaim revelation is not only foolish, because back in chapter 1 verse 3 it says, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things written in it for the time is near." Not only will you forfeit that blessing, it is not just foolish but it is sinful.

If ever there was a day to proclaim its truths, it is now. And tomorrow will be a more important day and the day after that a more important day, and next month, more important, and next year, more important as the coming of Christ becomes even nearer. Any Christian who fails to learn the truths of this book and to understand the words of this book which are not at all incomprehensible, as we have learned, is forfeiting blessing and any preacher who fails to preach this book of the glorious realities to come in the return of Jesus Christ is sinfully unfaithful to his mandate. And yet it is common, I suppose it is even normal in the church today to have this book completely ignored. As wonderful as the gospel record is, which tells us the story of the first coming of Christ, as marvelous as the epistles are which gives us the theology that comes out of His work, this is the book that exalts Him most. Not to preach the book of Revelation is to fall short of exalting the Lord Jesus Christ with that exaltation due to Him. It is not just a failure to teach the whole council of God and to give His people the love of His appearing, it is outright disobedience. The time is near. It is imminent. It is soon. This must be preached, don't seal it up.

A great church, a faithful church, a biblical church is always a Second Coming church. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 it was said of that Thessalonian assembly which was the noblest of all the New Testament churches to which letters were penned, it says of them that they had turned to God from idols, chapter 1 verse 9, to serve a living and true God in verse 10, and to wait for His Son from heaven. They were a Second Coming church, they were waiting for the Son.

And then verse 11 fires a jolting rocket into this idea of proclamation. "Let the one who does wrong still do wrong, and let the one who is filthy still be filthy and let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness and let the one who is holy still keep himself holy."

What is that strange statement? What is the point of it? What is the meaning of it? The meaning of it is when you proclaim the truth, people will respond to that truth and fix their eternal destiny. For the

one who hears the truth continues to do wrong, he is fixed in that. For the one who hears the truth and continues in his filth, he is fixed in that. That is his eternal destiny. For the one in hearing acts righteously, he is fixed in righteousness. For the one who responds with a holy response, he is fixed in his holiness. That's the intent of the statement. In fact, the word "still" some commentators think could mean "more." Let the one who does wrong do more wrong, let the one who is filthy be more filthy, let the one who is righteous be more righteous, let the one who is holy be more holy. And what it is saying is, if you are wrong in this life, you are more wrong in eternity where there is no good influence. If you are filthy in this life, you are more filthy in eternity. If you are righteous in this life, you will be more righteous in the next. If you're holy here, you'll be more holy there.

You perpetuate your response into an eternal destiny. When the sinner refuses the message, the warning, there is no cure for his wrong, there is no remedy for his filthiness. He will continue in it and even be more evil and more filthy. Once the Lord returns, or once he dies, his character is fixed forever in hell where wrong and filth are perfected. If the warnings of this book are not sufficient to move men to repent, then let them remain in their unrepentant sin. God's Spirit will not always struggle with sinners. The day comes when judgment falls and crushes those who will not repent.

It's a sobering thought. Reject God's warnings and you fix your eternal destiny. Respond to his warnings, and you set your eternal destiny in glory. Whatever you are in life, you will be more of in eternity. That's the point. And God may just turn His back. In the Old Testament, the prophet said, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." Jesus said about the leaders of Israel, "They are blind leaders of the blind, let them alone, they are fixed in their blindness."

On the other hand, when these truths are preached to the righteous and the holy, it confirms and strengthens their sanctification as well as being the reality which they enjoy in eternity. We could borrow from our study of 2 Corinthians and say to those who respond negatively to the gospel, the preaching of the gospel is a savor of death unto death. For those who respond positively, it is a savor of life unto life. Preaching the warning message of the book of Revelation can make the wicked more wicked, more blasphemous and ultimately fix their wickedness in a form of wicked perfection that will characterize life in hell. These same truths when responded to and believed make men righteous and more righteous and ultimately perfectly righteous.

Preach it, he says. Take the lid off. Proclaim it. Don't seal it. The time is near, preach it and the people who won't hear it, fix their destiny and so do the people who will. The first destiny is hell, the second is heaven. The sad truth is that when Revelation is preached, it has this great effect. It really draws the line. One who refuses continually the truth of this book and the reality of Christ as the sacrificial Lamb as He's portrayed in this book and as the coming King, the one who refuses to bow his knee to Christ and accept His sacrifice on behalf of sin sets his rejection in an eternal mold and only becomes more deeply and eradicably what he already is. So preaching the great truths of Revelation becomes either an instrument of salvation or an instrument of damnation. It is to those

who are perishing, Paul said, foolishness, but to those who are believing, it is the power of God unto salvation. So the angel said, proclaim the truth so men and women can hear it while there is still time. It certainly reminds me and perhaps you as well of Matthew 25 and verse 10, Jesus telling the story about the ten virgins with their lamps. It says in verse 10, "And while they were going away to make the purchase," they wanted to go buy oil because the bridegroom had come, "the bridegroom came, those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast and the door was shut." The point here is you can fool away your opportunity until you don't have an opportunity any more. Preach and warn people that what they do with the preaching of the book of Revelation and its glorious truths will fix their eternal destiny.

In Luke 13:25 Jesus said, "Strive to enter by the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." Then listen to this. "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door saying, 'Lord, open to us,' and then He will answer and say to you, 'I don't know where you're from.'"

The only thing that gives any sense to this is the reality of an imminent return. Every preacher in every generation since the Apostle John was to preach this because Christ could come at any time. And men needed to be ready. Immediate obedience, immediate worship and immediate proclamation are called for, and then one final responsibility or duty, immediate service, verse 12. "Behold, I am coming quickly and My reward is with Me to render to every man according to what he has done." Behold, I am coming quickly. Again, imminence is the issue. It's not describing the speed with which He leaves heaven and arrives, it's the suddenness, it's the imminence, it's the soon-ness of it. And He says, "I'm coming." In fact, back in Mark 13 Jesus said, "Take heed, keep on the alert for you don't know when the appointed time is." I'm coming...I'm coming and My reward is with Me to render to every man. What is that? Our complete, eternal reward.

Here He's talking to believers about our eternal reward. And we will be given that reward according to what we have done. Remember when we studied the judgment seat of Christ, we saw that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9, to receive for the things done in the body whether they are good or phaulos. And then we went to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verses 9 through 15 and we saw that our activities in life could be gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble. And wood, hay and stubble is not evil, it's not wicked, it's not sin, it just doesn't have any eternal value. It will just get burned up when the testing fire comes, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3. There will come a time when all of our works will be tested, and the fire will be put to them, and gold and silver and precious stones will survive the fire because they have eternal value. That's our service rendered to God. The rest is the trivialities of our lives that weren't evil, but had no eternal value. Only that which had eternal value survives. And it's on the basis of that test that we are rewarded. We will receive praise from God, 1 Corinthians 4:5 says. We will receive a reward for the gold, silver and precious stones. And I told you, and I don't want to go back over it all, but I believe that reward that we will receive in glory will be a capacity to worship God and a capacity to serve Him.

The more faithful we are here, the greater will be our reward there. And we will be given greater capacity for praise and greater capacity for service.

And so, there will come a time for reward and because we know that, because we look forward to the judgment seat of Christ when He will reward us, we serve Him diligently because we want to receive a full reward. The Apostle John said, "Look to yourselves that you receive a full reward." Look at your life and make sure your service is to the maximum, 2 John 8. Our eternal reward is based on our service that has eternal value. And again I say, I believe that eternal reward, it's not going to be a crown on your head while you're walking around in the New Jerusalem with a bigger crown than somebody else, I believe it will be capacities for service, capacities for worship and maybe capacity for joy. Jesus talked about a parable where people were put over greater and greater areas of responsibility based upon their faithfulness. Remember that? And I really believe that that's the essence of heavenly reward, as well as knowing in your heart of hearts that your life was well pleasing to Him.

So, Jesus could come at any time. And all of this that's described in this tremendous book could begin to unfold. In the light of that imminent reality we are called to immediate obedience, immediate worship, immediate proclamation and immediate service. As we come to the Lord's table tonight, those four things should be our focus. Not so much looking back, we've done that in the beautiful music that we've heard and sung. As we contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ and what He's done for us, let's look forward. What He has done for us is to give us a salvation that is eternal. What He has done for us is to put us in a position to be taken to heaven when He returns. What the cross was intended to do was to give us the hope of eternal life, which hope becomes reality at the return of Jesus Christ. And we are to live in the light of that. And as we come to the Lord's table tonight, let's dedicate ourselves afresh to obedience, worship, proclamation and service in view of the soon return of our Lord.

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