

All Things New: Whoever is Thirsty, Come
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 55:1-7; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:13-21

[Jesus said,] "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. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. 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 words 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. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Some journeys are meant to end. I don't think anyone would mind if our Coronavirus crisis were just to disappear. Most of us would be happy if our journey to the November elections was already over. Difficult and painful journeys are something we'd prefer to be in the rear view mirror rather than staring at us from up ahead.

Yet some journeys are ones that you really don't want to end. There's a reason why a number of folks I know have spent weeks traveling west to see all the sights in an RV. Each stop brings more beauty, more history, more perspective. The beauty and wonder of God's creation is on display in ways they've never seen before. Me, I'm not sure I could do the trip without hotel rooms across the way, but I can understand the desire to see this great land of ours.

And while parts of our journey through the book of Revelation have been scary and harrowing, seeing the judgment of the world and the persecution of the faithful, the last several weeks have been full of joy. We've seen the picture of the holy city prepared like a bride for her husband. We've witnessed God wiping away the tears from every believer's eyes and taking away mourning and pain. We've journeyed through the immensity of the new Jerusalem where heaven and earth meet and God lives among us again freely and forever. It's been a simple glimpse, a foretaste of what is to come. We've seen the teaser trailer for eternity in the Kingdom of God, and we can hardly wait until we get to experience it all for ourselves.

Today marks the end of the journey, the final epilogue to John's vision and the final words we hear from Jesus until He comes again to take us to our eternal home. This journey through Revelation ends here, and yet even as we hear many of Revelation's themes repeated here, we get a final glimpse at what lies ahead.

Jesus repeats and adds onto a concept He has mentioned before during John's vision. He says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Later, He adds a similar assurance that He is "the Root and the Offspring of David." While in His earthly life He came after David, in reality He was there long before David and was actually the root on which David's line was built. If there is any question that Jesus is in very nature God, that the Trinity is true and that in the wonderful mystery of God, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, completely separate from one another but so fully unified that they are indeed just one God, that question ends here. Jesus uses these titles that describe the Father and describes Himself.

But more than confirming that Jesus is truly divine, these words give comfort. In a world where we do not know how long we'll be wearing a mask, where everything from politics to groceries are topsy-turvy, where stability seems out of reach, Jesus has always been here and always will be here for us. Nations rise and fall; one crisis leaves for another to pop up; generation after generation comes and goes; yet Jesus is a constant.

Jesus is trustworthy because, as part of the Trinity, there's never a point in history that He has not been around. He is in eternal communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is reliable and dependable. When you hear that Jesus came to save us from our sins, you can rely upon it, you can know it still works, because He's been around before time began and will be with us long after this world has had its last sunset.

I need this kind of stability in my life, and I believe you do too. I long for it. I'm not a terribly scheduled person in that I don't need a lot of structure to get through my days; I get my work done and I don't feel bad if I start a little early one day and the next day get to it all an hour later. But my days start with prayer and, during our current crisis, they often end with playing a game of baseball on our gaming console. (It's a really good day if I get time for two games!)

But virtual baseball doesn't give me personal security. A paycheck and a home aren't as stable as we'd like to think. The real stability comes through that time of prayer knowing that God is with me and stands alongside me, and that He has stood beside the faithful in every single generation. My ancestors in the faith, the vast majority of whom I don't even know their names, Jesus has led them into His presence, and He will do the same for me and all who believe. That's true stability. My days are best when I take enough time in prayer to fully know that security in Jesus. Because He is the beginning and the end, He can get me through the middle.

Now Jesus gives both a blessing and warning echoed earlier. "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." What does this mean? There are two ideas here. First is that all who go into the city of life have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb. This is described in Revelation 7. In that passage, it's in the past tense. Here, it's in the present tense.

And here's why it matters. You might remember in John 13 when Jesus washes His disciples' feet. Peter objects until Jesus warns that he must be washed to have a part in Him. Peter jokingly says, "Wash my head and hands too!" Jesus says, "Everyone who has had a bath is clean; the only thing that he needs to do is wash his feet."

Christians have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, without exception. You can't be a Christian if you haven't been washed by Jesus and had His blood cover your sins. At the same time, though, the Christian life doesn't end when we come to know and trust in Jesus. It's only beginning. And after we come to Him for salvation, because we are human, because we have not been perfected yet, we still sin.

We are clean; God has promised us that. Yet we keep needing to wash off the dirt on our feet. We come to Jesus regularly to be cleansed and healed. A Christian strives not to sin, but knowing that it can and will happen, we wash our robes in the present tense. We continue to walk with Jesus, continuing to ask forgiveness when new sins crop up in our lives, continuing to live faithfully.

If you are ever concerned about your faith and your place with God, the question we ask is simply, "Am I still walking with Him?" He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end. He's not going anywhere. There is never the question of His abandoning us. There's only the question if we have decided to abandon Him. And even then, even if we've gone far astray, we still just need to wash our feet, going back to Jesus, the wellspring of salvation, to get the extra dirt of this world off.

Jesus then gives another list of the unfaithful, those who are not allowed into the Kingdom. We may be surprised that it is listed again, but repetition is the key to learning, and we need to hear these things. We might be surprised that the first people outside the Kingdom are "the dogs." Many of us like dogs; we keep them as pets. We don't like the reference. As it turns out, near the time of Christ, the people of Israel may have started keeping them as pets themselves. Dogs were used for shepherding and other tasks.

And yet dogs had a bad reputation. While not explicitly an unclean animal by nature, Peter's second letter puts them right up there with pigs. Dogs were unclean by what they did. Undomesticated dogs were directly related to wolves; they traveled in packs; and most importantly for the Jewish people, they feasted on unclean carcasses. When Jesus refers to "the dogs" in this list, He's speaking about those who make sport of the wounded and dying, the oppressed – which is what He condemned the Pharisees for doing over and over again.

And once again, while many of the sins listed are pretty common knowledge, the last one is the liar – the person who clings to falsehood. It doesn't mean that these sins can't be forgiven. All of them can. And yet, it's interesting that the list ends with liars because liars are the ones who justify themselves rather than admitting the truth and asking forgiveness. Revelation is a book aimed at the church, so we must be careful to examine ourselves to ask, "Am I living in the truth?"

Because the root of all of these other sins is a worldview based on a lie rather than the truth of Christ. We might come across a murderer in our day, definitely some sexually immoral people, but lying has become one of our chief past-times in our nation. It's so bad we aren't even sure what news is fake and what is true. As Christians, we must be dedicated to the truth. It is part and parcel of washing our robes and following Jesus.

Finally, Jesus confirms that it is His angel that has given John the vision. Jesus identifies Himself finally as the bright Morning Star. Once again, Jesus is providing us reassurance. Two different heavenly bodies have been called the morning star. One is Venus; the other is the star Sirius. During different times of the year, both shine brightly right before sunrise. But the key thought of the morning star is that when things are darkest – and have been dark for a while – that’s when the morning star comes out. The morning star is the promise that a new day is already on the way, that sunlight is coming to end another night. Jesus is our morning star. While all around may seem dark, His promise of a new day, a new world, a new Kingdom to enjoy forever, is just around the bend.

Then we get to the invitations. “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” The invitation is spread wide – spread by the Holy Spirit, spread by the church, spread by the individual who hears the good news of the gospel. Come and experience, taste and see that the Lord is good.

My friends, this is the promise of God to all the elect, to all those He will redeem, to all those who would come – the free gift of the water of life. This metaphor may not mean as much to us today because we have drinks everywhere – from the gas station to the drive-through window to the convenience store, everyplace has water. Not just water but sodas, energy drinks, muscle drinks, shakes, teas, coffees, row upon row upon row. We come by it easily, cheaply, it’s everywhere. Here in Michigan we’re even surrounded by freshwater lakes.

But in a dry and thirsty land, where you couldn’t buy bottled water at every corner grocery store, where pure water was precious, where drought brought famine and death, where you famously have the Dead Sea so salty that you can’t swim in it but only float and can’t drink a drop, water was life. An ever-flowing fountain of water is a dream. And here, from every corner, we’re being told, “Come to the fountain of living water! Come to the fountain of true life and hope called Jesus! Come to the fountain where you will find your thirst permanently satisfied! Come and experience this precious gift for yourself!”

We live in a world where some people who’ve been in church and done Bible studies and sung in choir say, “I don’t believe any more.” And sometimes those stories make us a little nervous. I pray for some of those folks, the ones I know. I pray that they might truly taste of the living water. Because if you’ve truly tasted it, I don’t think you can go back. Many people think they’ve tasted of the living water, but really, they’ve only heard about it. They think they have tasted eternal life, but all they’ve done is look at the fountain really hard. You can sing songs, you can lead songs, you can preach sermons, and still just be doing tours of the fountain. Don’t do that, friends. Drink of Jesus, drink long and deep, not just standing before the stream and gazing at your reflection, not just looking at the waters and wondering if they really are as clear as they appear. Dive in...come and experience the living water, and you will thirst no more.

John adds some warnings to the book, not to take away from it or to add to it under dangerous, perhaps eternal penalties. Now he’s not talking about editing the book or accidentally missing a letter or a line when making a copy. (In fact, we have ancient copies of Revelation that do indeed have mistakes the scribes made while copying the book!)

The warning is to take the whole counsel of God just as it is, without modification. This is where I get nervous as a pastor. I don't get nervous speaking in front of you; God's taken that pretty much away. I get anxious preparing the sermon trying to make sure to only elaborate on God's Word in a worthy manner. Because it's a very serious offense to distort the Word of God. And what we see today in many American churches – and it may be in other countries, but I can only comment on what I see – is that a lot of this is going on.

Churches are adding the idea that God wants you to be healthy and wealthy and free from pain and suffering in this life. I fear for those who teach this rather than teaching the biblical truth that the saints often suffer for Christ and suffer simply because we live in a world broken by sin that we ourselves have some responsibility for. Churches take away from the gospel when they teach that all you must do is “believe in Jesus” without the call to repentance and a holy life lived in a daily relationship with God. I believe that these are errors that, if we know the truth and compromise it, will be severely punished. And it's my prayer that I neither add or subtract from the Word, and I pray that if I do, I might be corrected so that I might myself repent and follow faithfully.

Finally, we reach the book's end and the Bible's end. “He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.” Not only do we have the repetition that Jesus will return soon, but John's total agreement with it and his simple prayer, his hope – “come, Lord Jesus.” That's a check on our hearts and a prayer that every Christian should be able to pray easily – “come, Lord Jesus.” Everything we want, we long for, we hope for in the future, is tempered by that one hope – “come, Lord Jesus.”

I used to think that Jesus should come after I'd had a long life...somewhere after the last Star Wars movie, maybe, or after I'd gotten to visit Japan. Once I'd gotten to do those things on Earth I wanted. Well, I've seen episode 9 of Star Wars, and I've got to tell you...not a bad movie, I guess, but not worth it. I'd love to see Japan, been interested in it all my life, I'm sure it's lovely, but it's a garbage can in comparison to the new Jerusalem. I'd love grandchildren, love to preach to more people, love to grow old with Catha, but you know what?

Come, Lord Jesus. Come end the sickness; come end the suffering; come end the injustice and oppression. My petty wants and desires mean nothing. Come, Lord Jesus and set things right. And for all of us, may we be willing to say the same. “Come, Lord Jesus.” May our hearts be so right with Him that it is not just our prayer but our heart's desire that He would come and bring His Kingdom in glory.

As we conclude Revelation today, I hope that you've learned a lot. But perhaps what I hope for most is that we've learned that Revelation isn't ultimately a book about marking out the timeline of the end of the world. It isn't ultimately about great plagues and horrific bowls of wrath. It's about faithfulness. The book is a call for us, believers, the church, to persevere, to stay faithful. God will set all things right. He has plans for a world to come we can't imagine in our wildest dreams. But there are miles to go before we reach our destination, before our journey ends. May we stay faithful in hope so that we experience all the blessings John has set before us in his revelation from our Lord Jesus.