

REVELATION 22

Introductory Comments:

- This last chapter of Revelation (and of Holy Scripture) continues to describe the eternal glory that awaits all believers in Christ. Just as the story of humanity begins in a garden, so we have it culminating here in a garden. In other words, all of human history can be seen as moving away from one temporary garden (Eden) to an eternal garden (the New Eden of the New Heavens and New Earth). All of human history is, in effect, God's work of bringing His people back into the Garden, where He can dwell with them in perfect love and harmony forever. Many theologians like to refer to this as the Restoration of Eden (or Paradise Restored), but it's even more than that. The first Eden was good – even very good, as God declares – but it wasn't perfect and eternal, for there existed in Eden the temptation of the serpent (devil) and the potentiality to fall into sin (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), which, as we know full well, is exactly what happened. In the New Eden, there will be no temptation, for the devil will be gone, and there will be no potentiality for sin, for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil will be gone, and our resurrected and glorified bodies will be incorruptible and imperishable, like that of our Lord's resurrected and glorified Body. In other words, everything very good about Eden will be there, but it will be way better than Eden. This is the whole point of everything there ever was. This is why our Lord became Incarnate to suffer, die, rise, and ascend, that He might elevate our human nature to dwell with God in perfect love and harmony forever, so that we will finally live life to the full, the way God always intended for us to live. All of human history is marching toward the culmination of His eternal will to live and dwell with us in glorified perfection forever!

Rev. 22:1-5

- “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life . . .” – Just as Eden was adorned with rivers, so the New Eden has this living river that contains the water of life and flows from the very throne of God and of the Lamb. This should call to mind the “living water” Jesus spoke about with the Samaritan woman at the well. This “water of life” contains the everlasting grace, mercy, and love of God, and all who drink from it will never thirst and never need to draw water again, but will be sustained and perfectly satisfied by the eternal life that flows from God into them.
- “. . . also, on either side of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month” – You'll recall how Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden after they fell into sin, so that they would no longer have access to the Tree of Life. It was not God's will that they eat of that tree and live forever in their sinful flesh. The New Adam, Jesus Christ, restored the Tree of Life at Calvary, recreating man in His image with His perfect Sacrifice on the Cross. The first Adam did his own will, not God's, in the Garden of Eden when he ate of the forbidden fruit, but the Second Adam, Jesus, prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not My will, but Thine be done,” and went to the Cross willingly to take away the sin of the world and remove its curse upon all the descendants of Adam and all of creation. And the fruits of the restored Tree of Life, the Cross of our Lord Jesus, are the source of eternal life for all who receive them in faith. You simply cannot miss the Sacramental imagery on display in the New Eden. The water and blood that flowed from Christ's pierced side on the Cross flows into the fonts and chalices of all Christendom giving eternal life to all who are baptized into Him and all who partake of His very Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, and we see the water and the Tree of Life on display in the New Heavens and New Earth to come. The fact that the river of the water of life never stops flowing and the tree of life never stops bearing its fruit is a beautiful picture of the eternal life believers have already entered into via Christ's Holy Word and Sacraments here on earth and will enjoy forever in the New Eden to come.

- Just as in the previous chapter, we're reminded again that "no longer will there be anything accursed" in the New Eden, for sin, death, and the devil will be gone forever. The eternal abode of God's people will be a place of perfect holiness and righteousness, for His very throne will be in its midst, and we will worship Him.
- "They will see His face and His Name will be on their foreheads" – This calls to mind old Job, who, after declaring that he knows that his Redeemer lives, says that, at the last, he will stand upon the earth, and after his flesh has thus been destroyed, his own eyes will behold Him (cf. Job 19:23-27). Job is, of course, pointing to the Day of Resurrection, which is here depicted for us in Revelation. As St. John tells us, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." Now, we see Christ by faith, but we will see Him by sight when we are resurrected and glorified and brought into the New Eden of the New Heavens and New Earth on the Last Day. Then, it will be evident to us that we were, indeed, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked upon our hearts and foreheads with the sign of the Cross as those redeemed by Christ the Crucified. We bear the Divine Name upon our foreheads already now, but it will be visible to all on the Last Day. This is where all of our Christian hope is directed. Our hope is not to be found in this world, which will be destroyed and remade on the Last Day, but in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, as we rightly and regularly confess in the Nicene Creed. We long for the Day when we shall see Christ with our resurrected and glorified eyes and dwell bodily with Him forever. Like old Job, our very hearts should faint within us as we anticipate this glory to come, where there will only be Light, for all darkness will be swept away, and we will reign with Christ forever!

A Note on Rev. 22:6-21

- This final section of Revelation serves as an Epilogue. Just as the book began with a Prologue (1:1-8) describing the purpose of the book, so it ends with an Epilogue repeating the purpose of the book, namely that "the time is near" and that "Jesus is coming." In other words, the book ends as it began, exhorting the Church, as our Lord Jesus does in the Gospels, to be ready and stay awake and keep alert, for the Day of our Lord's Return is imminent and could happen at any moment.

Rev. 22:6

- The words contained in this book are "trustworthy and true." St. John made this clear in the Prologue and the angel confirms his testimony here. Thus, the revelation of our Lord Jesus to St. John will most definitely come to pass, culminating in the immanent return of Jesus and the final judgment.

Rev. 22:7

- Our Lord Jesus chimes in with an urgent interruption of the angel speaking to St. John, reemphasizing the point that the words of this book are true and that He is, indeed, coming soon, with the additional blessing being pronounced upon all who keep "the words of the prophecy of this book," i.e., all who cling to Him in faith. The eternal glory of His kingdom will be theirs!

Rev. 22:8-9

- So you have the angel testifying that this book is "trustworthy and true," then Jesus Himself confirming that, and now St. John adding to that confirmation by telling us that he is the "one who heard and saw these things."
- St. John is so enraptured by the things he heard and saw throughout this glorious vision that he inadvertently falls down before the angel and begins to worship him. He is immediately and

sharply rebuked: “You must not do that!” the angel snaps at him, going on to remind St. John that he is but a servant, like all other angels and believers, and worship should only ever be directed to God Himself. This is a good reminder that the holy angels exist to serve God and us. They are never to be worshiped, for they worship God alongside of us, always directing us to sing His praises, not theirs. Thus, all this nonsense so prevalent in Pop-American Christianity today about us going to heaven, getting our wings, and becoming angels is not only wrong, but heretical and even blasphemous. We do NOT become angels and angels do NOT become human. Angels and humans are both created by God, but eternally distinct species. The irony lost on so many is that to become an angel (if that were possible, but it’s most definitely not) would be a demotion for us, as they exist (and quite gladly so) to serve God by serving us, and the Son of God forever sits on the throne not as an angel, but as a Man.

Rev. 22:10-11

- “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” – First century Jewish Christians would have heard this proclamation of the angel and immediately thought of Daniel, who was told to keep the prophecy given to him a secret and to seal up the book until the end (cf. Dan. 12:4). The prophecy given to Daniel would be fulfilled in the distant future and should be sealed up until that time, but the vision given to St. John should not be sealed, “for the time is near.” Again, this is emphasizing the immanence of our Lord’s Return and the Final Judgment. The angel is saying, in effect, “Don’t seal this up, John, but make sure to share this with everyone, that they may repent and believe!”
- This is reemphasized by the next verse, in which the angel remarks that the evil and filthiness of people would remain alongside the holiness and righteousness of Christ and His Church until the Day of Christ’s Return and Judgment, the message being that the age of grace, where there is still a chance to repent and believe, is quickly slipping away, which is all the more reason to make the words of the prophecy of this book known far and wide. The sad reality is that, when the Day of Judgment comes, it will come like a thief in the night to most and they will be caught in their evil and filthiness, no longer having the chance to repent.

Rev. 22:12-16

- Our Lord Jesus chimes in again to remind us that He is coming soon to judge the living and the dead. He brings His recompense with Him and “will repay each one for what he has done.” Whenever Holy Scripture speaks this way about the Final Judgment being based on works, you always have to remember the chief article of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and how that chief article relates to works. Believers are clothed in Christ’s holiness and righteousness and God remembers their sins no more, for their sins have all been taken away by the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus. In other words, they will have zero sins and only good works when they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are not clothed in Christ’s holiness and righteousness and will have only their own righteousness and works to show for themselves on Judgment Day. It matters not how nice and decent they may have been during their lives on earth, for even the best of their works were tainted with sin and were nothing more than “filthy rags,” as Isaiah prophesied. That the Final Judgment is based on works should not worry the Christian, but it should definitely worry the non-Christian, for, in the end, the difference between those who enter the glory of the New Eden and those who are cast into the Lake of Fire will be whether or not they were washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb, i.e., whether or not they had faith in Christ Jesus. That will be the only thing that matters on that great and terrible Day.
- “Alpha and Omega, first and last, beginning and end” – Christ refers to Himself in a Trinity of Titles here. That He is the alpha and omega indicates that He is the eternal Son of God. Like the

Father and the Holy Spirit, the Son has existed forever. He is also the beginning and the end, which refers to Him being the One through Whom all things were made, the very Word of God who spoke the universe into existence, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The unique title of this Trinity of Titles is the reference to Christ being the first and the last. This is a unique title given only to the Son, not to the Father or the Holy Spirit. This is in reference to His Holy Incarnation. Only the Son became Man, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Son is the “firstborn of the New Creation” and the “end goal (telos, or last) of God’s people.” Jesus, the eternal Word of God, is the first perfect Man, who fulfilled God’s will and Law perfectly and completely. God’s will and Law find their end in Christ. He is also the “firstborn from the dead,” for He died the perfect sacrifice for all mankind on the Cross but rose from the tomb on the third day. And when He ascended into heaven in His resurrected and glorified flesh on the 40th day, He brought God’s eternal plan of salvation to its perfect culmination by exalting humanity to live with God forever in perfect harmony – more than that, to reign over all things forever as the perfect God-Man. All who belong to Him will likewise be raised to live and reign with Him as perfect human beings forever.

- “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and so that they may enter the city by the gates” – There is only One way to gain access to the tree of life and enter the eternal city of Christ’s kingdom, and that is by being cleansed in the Blood of the Lamb. This washing of robes business has been a constant theme throughout Revelation (and, indeed, throughout Holy Scripture). All human beings are conceived and born into this world as unclean, unholy sinners. As children of Adam, we all inherit his sin and come into this world spiritually blind, spiritually dead, and natural born enemies of God, in league with Satan. Nothing we do can change that. We cannot decide to be good or change our wills to align with God’s will. We are lost and dead. But our Lord can, and does, change our condition when He calls us forth from our spiritual tomb, as He called four-day dead Lazarus forth from his tomb, and baptizes us into His death and resurrection, so that we are born again from above via water and the Word and gifted with the Holy Spirit. At the font, we are clad in the robe of Christ’s holiness and righteousness, and we have our robes cleansed in His Blood when He absolves us of our sins, preaches His Gospel into our ears, and most especially when He gives us to eat and drink of His very Body and Blood from His holy altar, which is for us the very fruits of the Tree of Life our Lord restored at Calvary. Those who are brought by the Holy Spirit to receive Christ in His Holy Word and Sacraments are blessed now and eternally, for they will be welcomed into the New Eden of His Kingdom and live and reign with Him forever. The message is clear: Get to Church regularly to have your robes washed!
- Our Lord follows up His blessing upon all those who wash their robes with a warning about the dangers of this dead and dying world, which is filled with “dogs, sorcerers, the sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, and all who love falsehood.” The ONLY refuge for Christians in this world is Christ’s Church. That’s the only safe place, the only sanctuary, the only oasis in the wilderness of this world. Just as Noah and his family were kept safe in the ark during the worldwide flood that destroyed every other living thing, so it is that we are kept safe in the Ark of Christ’s Holy Church. Also, you either belong to Christ and His Church or to Satan and this sinful world. There is no middle ground. You are either of the Light or of the Darkness. And it has to be noted, especially in our day and age, that the Church is not some invisible and imaginary place that you access in your heart. Jesus is a real Flesh and Blood Savior and He meets us in the physical reality of His Church to dispense His Divine Gifts to us via His Holy Word and Sacraments. He is Truly Present in His Church when we are gathered together in His Name for Divine Service, just as He made clear in the first chapter of Revelation (v. 13), noting that He stands in the midst of the lampstands (His Churches). The popular teaching today that you can have some personal relationship with Jesus in your heart without ever going to Church, the only place He promises to

be among you to do His saving work, is nonsensical and dangerous. Again, the message is clear: Get to Church regularly, for that is the only place in this dead and dying world that our Lord Jesus Christ promises to be among us to dispense His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation to us!

- Jesus finishes this section by again noting that He is the One who has sent His angel to give this testimony to St. John. Revelation is not St. John's revelation to us. It is not the angel's revelation to us. It is the very revelation of Jesus Christ, our Lord, given to St. John by His heavenly messengers to share with His Church. The reference Jesus makes here to Him being the descendant of David is to drive home the point that He is the Promised Messiah who now sits on David's eternal throne and rules over all things forever. There could never be anything as trustworthy and true as the revelation of our Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. 22:17

- "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come' . . ." – The prayer of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, is that her Bridegroom would fulfill His promise to return in great glory and usher in the glorious New Heavens and New Earth, that she might dwell with Him in perfect love, peace, and bliss forever. This is the fervent hope and prayer of all believers in Christ, who look forward with great longing for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. The Old Adam in us, our sinful nature, may not want this Day to come, but the New Man in us, our regenerated spirit, simply cannot wait for it. We cannot even begin to fathom the glory that awaits us and thus we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come!"
- The eternal glory of the life of the world to come is available to all sinners. It is free of charge, the total cost being borne by the perfect life and sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The invitation continually goes forth from the Church to all sinners throughout the New Testament Age to "come and receive the water of life without price." The Holy Gospel will resound in all the earth until the trumpets blast on the Last Day and the invitation is rescinded. In other words, now is the day of salvation! Come and receive Christ, who is given to you freely, by grace alone, via His Holy Word and Sacraments in His Church!

Rev. 22:18-19

- The warning given in these two verses is not meant to scare the reader away from reading and studying Revelation. Neither is it meant to threaten anyone who misunderstands or misinterprets parts of the book. The warning is against those who add to or take away from the completed work of Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners, and that same warning can be extended to the entire canon of Holy Scripture. What is being warned against here is unbelief, which is the only unforgivable sin, and unbelief happens when you reject the revelation of God given in His Holy Word. For example, if God's Word reveals something to be sinful, and you willfully disagree and laud that sin as right and good, you are in a state of unbelief and in danger of eternal torment. You do not get to cheery-pick God's Word, keeping the things you like and discarding the things you don't, and remain in a state of faith. That is the very definition of unbelief. We see a lot of this in our day and age, where the Bible is treated like a book written to express the ideas and understandings of the human authors, rather than the inspired Word of God that it is. Of course, we need to remember that our Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He is not sitting on His throne just waiting for people to make a mistake interpreting His Word so that He might punish them. This warning is for those who willfully and purposely reject God's Word, or change His Word, so that their own wills and desires and beliefs become the authority over God's Word. The opportunity remains for even the most obstinate deniers of God's Word to come to repentance, but the warning here, and throughout Revelation (and, indeed, throughout all of Holy Scripture), is that the Day is coming when that opportunity will no longer be available.

Rev. 22:20-21

- The book closes with one final reminder from “He who testifies to these things,” namely our Lord Jesus Christ, who says, “Surely I am coming soon!” The faithful response to that is “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” This is the purpose of the book of Revelation, that the reader would heed the words of the prophecy of this book and joyfully and faithfully respond, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” In the hope that this would be accomplished, St. John concludes with the prayerful benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” For it is only by the grace of Jesus that sinners can be brought to, and kept in, the faith that clings to Him alone for forgiveness, life, and salvation and that longs for His glorious return on the Last Day. Holy Spirit, grant this unto us all, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen and Ascended King and Lord, who lives and reigns over all things forever and ever. Amen.

Concluding Thoughts:

- Revelation is probably the most misunderstood and misinterpreted book in the Bible. The main reason for that is that people today approach the book without understanding the genre of literature Revelation is written in, namely, apocalyptic literature, which is full of symbolic images and numbers and is not meant to be read as narrative prose. Another reason Revelation is so misunderstood and misinterpreted in our day and age is due to the popularization of what I call “Left Behind Theology,” which flows out of the false teachings of dispensationalism that originated in the mid-19th century and was systematized and made popular in the Scofield Reference Bible in the early-20th century. Whenever you hear about the “secret rapture” and “seven-year tribulation” and “literal 1000-reign of Christ on earth,” you are swimming in dispensational waters and should immediately jump in a lifeboat and get out of those waters. Holy Scripture nowhere teaches the nonsense of “Left Behind Theology.” God is NOT working out two different plans of salvation, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles, which forms the basis of the false teachings of dispensationalism. When you hear supposed Christian teachers telling you that current events, especially involving the current nation of Israel, are the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, you should stop listening and mark and avoid them, for they have no idea what they’re talking about. Christ has fulfilled everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. There is nothing going on the world today, and no future happenings in this world, that are left unfulfilled, save the glorious return of our Lord Jesus on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead and to usher in the New Heavens and New Earth of His eternal kingdom.
- When understood correctly, Revelation is one of the most comforting and beautiful books in the Bible, for it assures us that, no matter what befalls us in this world, our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome this world with His perfect life and sacrificial death, and that, we, who belong to Him, will live forever with Him in the life of the world to come. In other words, Revelation is really just a detailed exposition, full of symbolic and apocalyptic imagery, of what our Lord Jesus told His disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday: “In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” That is the true message and essence of Revelation. Therefore, rejoice, O Christian, for nothing shall prevail against Christ and His Church. Sin, death, and the devil have been thoroughly defeated by Jesus Christ, and all those who are clothed in His perfect holiness and righteousness will live forever with Him and all the saints and angels in Paradise. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! Amen!