

REVEALED

**Part Fifteen: *Revelation 22:12-21*
"Epilogue"**

1. Exegesis

2. Epistle

3. Ethic

love.learn.live.

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West Valley Church
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**Revealed:
Uncovering the Mystery of Revelation
Part Fifteen: Revelation 22:12-21¹
“Epilogue”**

The human mind is a wonderfully complex part of the machine that is our bodies. Our brains can actually process a group of words, even if the words themselves are spelled totally incorrectly. For example, see if you can read the following:

The hmuan mnid is a wndoreullfy cpoemlx oargn. You see? It deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod aearpr, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is that the frist and lsat ltteer are in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the human mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig isn't it?

Did you finish it? Everyone done? Isn't it amazing how your mind can read that? It's like life: oftentimes our lives, and the world around us, don't seem to make sense. There are even times when everything seems to be totally out of order. But when we take a step back and remember that God is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last we can make sense of things and rest assured that one day it will all be put back in order. That's what Revelation does for us, and that's kind of how we read the book of Revelation. When we look at it closely, seeing every image and number and symbol, it is hard to decipher. But when we step back and read it as a whole, there begin to be patterns that form and we begin to understand what it is saying. That's what we've been hoping to help all of us do in this series in Revelation.

Today we are in the last part of our fifteen part summer sermon series through Revelation, called “Revealed.” Many avoid Revelation because it seems like a book of cryptic messages that elude us and frighten us. It can be confusing, especially with all of the contradictory and competing self-proclaimed experts. But when we read Revelation as it was intended, it provides inspiration and application to our Christian lives today.

So our goal has been to help us learn how to read it, to better understand what it says to us today (and what it does NOT say), and to allow the book to speak to us

¹Sources: Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (2012, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO); Richard Eckley, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (2006, Wesleyan Publishing House, Indianapolis); Scott Daniels, *Marked by the Lamb: Paznaz Study on Revelation* (<http://drtscott.typepad.com/markedbythelamb/>); Michael O'Neill, *Revelation 21:9-14*, Biblical Theology BIBL7560, Northwest Nazarene University; George Lyons, *Revelation 21-22*; John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

and transform us into Christlikeness, because that is, after all, what God's Word is for. That's why on the website we have given you a reading plan that goes along with the passages we've been looking at each Sunday, and we've given you three questions to ask yourself, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you and prepare you for our time together. We've also given you several ways to submit questions that you have about Revelation that we haven't answered for you. Next Sunday during our pastors' panel discussion we'll answer the questions you've submitted.

I'd encourage you to open your Bibles or your iPhones or iPads or digital Bible to Revelation 22 starting in verse six. We are going to go through the verses to try and explain the apocalyptic parts; we are going to see what it has to say to us as a church, and then what it says to us as Christians.

So let's start with...

1. Exegesis

Exegesis is a word that means, "to explain." In theology, it is the process of gaining and then explaining, the *meaning* of a passage of Scripture. This involves understanding the original language, the original context in which it was written, who wrote it, to whom it was written, and what for. A good theologian or Bible student will do diligent exegesis. Exegesis is a careful study of all those things in order to get the meaning out of the passage. What you do *not* want to do, and what you must be very careful *never* to do, is *eisegesis* (eye-suh-jee-sus). If exegesis is getting the meaning out of a passage, eisegesis means to "add meaning to" the passage; to add meaning that is not in the original passage, to insert meaning into it that isn't already there. Cult leaders do it in order to twist Scripture and control people. Bad pastors commit eisegesis because they are lazy, if not worse. Unfortunately Revelation is a book of the Bible that a lot of people commit eisegesis with all the time! They'll add meanings to times and dates and numbers and symbols that were never intended. So we've been, and always are, extremely careful to exegete Scripture properly for you. Now that you've had your theology lesson, let's exegete this passage for today. I'll only hit the significant issues because of the time we have.

First of all, I want you to see that this passage is an epilogue. An epilogue is a section or speech at the end of a book or play that serves as a comment on or a conclusion to what has happened. And if your memory is good you'll recognize that this passage ties the beginning (or the prologue) and the end (or the epilogue) of Revelation together, like tying a knot around it or like bookends on it. It repeats some of the same form and content material. We don't have time to run through the comparisons, but if you download the manuscript of this message, you'll see some of them in the footnotes.²

² Rotz writes: "The Apocalypse is genuine prophecy (1:3; 22:6, 9-10, 18-19) that comes from God (1:1; 22:6) by a true prophet (1:1, 9-10; 22:8-10) through an angel (1:1; 22:6, 16). It is for God's slaves (1:1; 22:6) to be read in the churches (1:3, 11; 22:18) as a blessing for all who read and obey it (1:3; 22:7), with a curse for those who attempt to seal up or change its words (1:2; 22:10). It comes

Three times in this epilogue Jesus declares emphatically, "I am coming soon!" There are a couple of reasons why Jesus tells us this three times: first, to declare something three times meant it was certain – it was for sure. "Three" is one of four numbers that represent certainty in the Bible (3, 7, 10, 12). Remember that Jesus prayed *three* times in the Garden that God would allow the cup of his suffering to pass (Matthew 26:36-56), and Paul prayed *three* times that God would heal him (2 Corinthians 12:8-10). There are many other examples in Scripture (for instance, Jesus died at 3pm, was in the grave for 3 days...), but here, there is one story specifically that John wants to remind us of and connect this to. John penned Revelation, but John also penned the Gospel of ... John (along with 1, 2, 3 John). In John's Gospel account, he recorded the story when Peter denied that he even knew Jesus...*three* times (John 18:13-27). John ended the Gospel story with the account of Jesus *restoring* Peter by asking him...*three* times... "Peter, do you love me?" (John 21:15-25). John ended the Gospel story and *also* Revelation with these "threes." In the Gospel, Peter wrestled with the uncertainty of his relationship with Jesus, but then Jesus assures Peter that he loves him. In Revelation, we wrestle with our uncertainty of whether or not Jesus has abandoned us, whether we are left alone, whether he will return, but then Jesus reassures us that he still loves us. Jesus says to us three times with certainty, "I DO love you and I WILL return for you." Jesus, through John, connected these two stories intentionally for you and I, for the Church. When Jesus says, "I am coming soon," he means "I AM, coming," as in, "I did, I am, and I will. The I AM is coming." He is always present with us and will one day come back for us. This doesn't just refer to Jesus' final advent, but *all* of his arrivals in our lives and throughout history. He is always present, the I AM. His intimate presence is real for *every* generation, but every generation also waits for his final return and eternal presence in the New Jerusalem (that we saw last week).

In verse seven we are given the sixth of seven "beatitudes" that are found in Revelation (they too are in the footnotes of the manuscript online).³ Jesus says...

"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll." (Revelation 22:7, niv)

"Blessed is the one who *keeps*..." Your Bible might say, "heeds" or "obeys." What does it mean to "keep the words" of Revelation? To "keep" this message is not just to believe it, or accept it, or protect it, or even to cherish it. It does *not* mean simply to believe that Christ will come again along with the rest of what Revelation says. It means to *adhere* to it, to *obey* it, to *live* it. "It is to constantly be ready for Christ's return by repenting of known sin, living a holy life (of love for God and others), resisting the pressure to compromise with the world's (sinful and) perverse value system, and worshiping God alone."⁴

from a man named John (1:1, 4; 22:8) for the encouragement of the faithful (1:3; 22:7, 12, 14)." Pg 309

³ 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; and the seventh is later in this chapter: 22:14

⁴ Lyons

That is what the next section of this passage is about: worship. We are called to live lives of worship: constantly repenting of known sin, living a holy life of love for God and others, resisting the pressure to compromise with the world's (sinful and) perverse value system, and worshipping God alone. We are reminded of that in this passage because of John's temptation to worship the angel who is delivering the message: once again, John fell at the angel's feet to worship him. You might wonder why John fell for that again (as he did in Revelation 19:9-10). John is willing to be an object lesson for us in order to help us keep our priorities straight, and that priority is given to us from the angel:

“Worship God!” (Revelation 22:9, niv)

This is fitting that it is given to us in the epilogue – the summary of the book of Revelation, because there is worship all throughout the book. And *that's* because the book is all about God's work in the world and for people through lion-Lamb Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God deserves the worship; there is none higher. And the appropriate response from us is worship. But, again, just like we said about “keeping the words of this prophecy,” worship is about more than simply acknowledging whom Jesus is. Worship is far more than simply coming to church and singing a few songs. Worship is *a way of life*; we live our lives for Christ, loving God and loving people enough to introduce them to Jesus – *that* is worship. The Bible says...

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—*this is your true and proper worship*. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:1-2a, niv, *italics added*).

Do you see that? Live your lives for Christ, and don't allow the world around you to conform you into its self-seeking way of life. I love how the Message Bible says it:

“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” (Romans 12:1-2, tmt)

So when we are told in this epilogue to “keep the words” and to “worship,” it is about living our *entire* life, every moment we are awake and while we sleep life, living it entirely for Jesus Christ, not allowing ourselves to be seduced by the prostitute that is this world's culture.

Then John is told in verse ten not to seal up the words of this book. This is interesting, because it is the opposite of what Daniel was told to do in the Old Testament when he was dealing with this prophecy (Daniel 8:26; 12:4-13). Why would Daniel, in the Old Testament, be told specifically to seal it up, but John in the

New Testament be told specifically *not* to seal it up here? Here's why: because Daniel's prophecy could not be fully understood at the time, but Jesus has inaugurated it and will continue to fulfill God's plan until the final consummation. Jesus *opened* it (remember: only Jesus could open the scroll – Revelation 5:4-5). The reason John needs to keep it open is because the time is near. This is both a call for us to be watchful and an encouragement for us to continue to be hopeful and faithful.⁵

Then we see something interesting in verses 10 and eleven; it says:

“Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.” (Revelation 22:10-11, niv)

Now this seems strange; think about it: up until now, we have seen repeated warnings for people to repent and to avoid all the plagues and disasters and death and hell, and to turn to God. But here it sounds like its saying, “Don't repent. Just keep on sinning.” But that would be inconsistent, and that's not what it means. It is *not* saying, “You aren't going to change anyway, so just keep on sinning.” It is actually a warning to those who keep putting it off. It is warning that over time, behaviors become habits, habits become patterns that become permanent, and permanent patterns become a formed character that becomes virtually impossible to change. And once Christ returns, the opportunity to repent is over. (Matthew 25:10; Luke 13:25; 2 Peter 3:9-15). That's why this says “the time is near.” The time for you to change your ways is almost over; you are almost out of time.

Stop, pray, repent before behavior becomes habit, pattern, character.

The time for you to change your ways is almost over; you are almost out of time. Christ is coming soon:

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Revelation 22:12-13, niv)

The combination of these three different all-comprehensive names of Jesus make the statement that Jesus is God, with an exclamation point! Jesus says what he means and he does what he says; Jesus is coming soon!

In verses fourteen and fifteen we get the final beatitude of Revelation, and yet *another* warning to those who have not repented and turned to God – a reminder that those who don't will not be allowed into the New Jerusalem – but it says those who wash their robes will. “Washing their robes” means that they have repented of their sins and accepted Christ's forgiveness, and then they *keep* their robes clean. In the original language, when it says “Those who wash their robes,” it is written with what's called a “present participle,” which means it is a continual activity; they *continue* to keep their robes clean. The one who is a Christian is not just saved, but is in a *continual* state of being saved. The Christian is not just sanctified, but is in a

⁵ Rotz

continual state of being sanctified. Christians aren't perfect; they are simply forgiven and getting better.

Then, in verse 16, Jesus bookends his messages here at the end with the beginning of Revelation and his messages to the seven churches, by reminding them that this *entire* message of Revelation has been from him. It is all from him and about him.

And then we get this amazing call to *everyone*:

“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” (Revelation 22:17, niv)

In verses 12 and 16 Jesus promised to return, so there are two people who respond to His promises: 1) the Holy Spirit, and 2) the bride (or the Church). They both say, “Yes, please come quickly, Jesus!” Then the Spirit and the Church invite *everyone* who can hear them to answer the call to come to Jesus. That's our job, West Valley Church: we partner with the Spirit, to invite *everyone* to come to Jesus, and we are to do that until Jesus returns.

In verses 18-19 Jesus gives a warning that no one should add or subtract from this book. Some people think that this is a warning about the entire Bible. While it is true for the entire Bible that is *not* what is meant here; here it refers specifically to the book of Revelation. This is important for a couple of reasons: one is, for all those who add meaning to the book of Revelation by claiming it means things about specific events, who try to pinpoint it to a specific time on the calendar, you are already violating this command! But it also means something else: Jesus is saying that the words of this book are *already* true. You don't get to decide if they are true or not; your opinion about Revelation will not change the truth of it. You do not get to decide if it's true, but you *do* get to decide if you will believe and accept it. Because...

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’”
(Revelation 22:20, niv)

He is coming soon. When? We don't know for sure. But we know it's sooner than it used to be! You see it is true. So you'd better decide if you're going to accept it and live it.

Now, remember that we said that this book is not only apocalyptic literature, it is also an...

2. Epistle

There was a little boy in Children's Church who was asked what an epistle was, and he said it was a wife of an apostle. Well, an epistle is a sacred letter written to a church, from an apostle. And Revelation is an epistle. That means it was written with instructions for the church – for us together at West Valley Church, as well as all the churches and the Church altogether. Does Revelation still hold meaning for

us today in the 21st century? Absolutely it does! What is the Spirit saying to us today?⁶

Well, for one thing, we are called to be a holy people together – a people who are like Christ. And our call to holiness comes from our vision of the holy God who is seated on the throne. It is God, and his holy and just character and not any human standard that gives us both the example and the motivation to be holy. We are to be like Christ.

It also means when we come together to worship Christ, *he* must be the central focus of our time together, and we must remind ourselves during these times that he is to be the central focus of our *entire* lives. Jesus is on the Throne! We must not take our gathering together lightly, and this worship means we put Christ before anything the world has to offer.

It means we are the Lamb's community. So a significant part of Christ-likeness only happens when we are worshipping him and loving and serving each other. You cannot be holy all by yourself and you will not be standing before the throne all by yourself.

Revelation also tells us, West Valley Church, that since we are the bride of Christ, we are one with him, which means we are to be like him here on earth. That means that our focus is the same as his: to love people sacrificially and to seek and save the lost. All that we do as a church must be done with the deepest desire that our unchurched friends find out about Jesus. There is no higher ambition for a holy, Revelation Church. Every event we plan, every action we take until Jesus returns, is to introduce people to Jesus. Everything!

As a Revelation church we are also relentlessly called to come out of Babylon, to stay out of Babylon, to not be like Babylon. But our Christianity is not a long list of rules and don'ts; it is about what we DO. (*repeat*) We are to love the people around us without being seduced by the world's systems and priorities and pleasures.

Revelation gives us our hope. We don't just hunker down and circle the wagons and protect the women and children until Jesus and the cavalry come. We have the certain hope of the One on the Throne and the New Jerusalem. We uncircle the wagon and we walk confidently *into* this world, standing up as faithful witnesses for Christ all of the time, every where we go, even if they kill us for it. We will never be ashamed that we love Jesus! We will not deny it or make excuses for it or downplay it. We love Jesus.

Church, Revelation gives us our hope and our mission.

But Revelation's message is for you, individually, too. God loves you as if you were the only one in all the world to love. God would have given this incredible vision to John if you were the only one to read it. That means that it not only has something to *say* to you, it also has something for you to *do about it*. It expects a response from you, an action from you. Revelation gives you an...

⁶ Rotz

3. *Ethic*

An “ethic” is a moral principle that results in a moral action. You and I cannot have gone through the book of Revelation over these last 15 weeks and still act the same way we did before.

So how should our lives be different?

Well for one, if you haven’t accepted Christ yet, I have no idea why not. How long have you been sitting here, seeing your future? You have two futures in front of you. You don’t get to decide if it’s true; it already is. You get to decide which side you will be on. The side of God or the dragon? Of Christ or the beast? Of plague or of blessing? Of disastrous ruin or divine rule? Of hell and death or heaven and life? Of the slaughtered hordes before the beast or the 144,000 before the throne? Of the great harlot Babylon or the Great Church, the New Jerusalem? You *do* get to choose which side. You don’t need me to wait for you. Choose *now* because Jesus is coming back soon.

While you do that, let me turn to you, church – the ones who are continually seeking forgiveness and cleansing. We are expected to focus every bit of our lives on Christ. The warnings to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3 should be ringing in our ears, too. The commitment to be faithful witnesses for Christ is our priority. We are to live every day for him, every moment with him in mind, living lives of worship for him. We expect him to return any moment, so we should have a profound urgency for our friends, neighbors, and family members who don’t know Jesus. If we don’t have that, we should pray and ask the Spirit for it. We live today as citizens of the New Jerusalem tomorrow (*repeat*).

We have a hope, a certainty, that is more real than this place we are sitting in. Everything around us is temporary – *except people*. Everything around us pales in comparison to the reality that will be ours. So we live for *that* place (Hebrews 11:10, 13-15). Our hope is more than a wish; our hope is a reality that simply hasn’t happened yet. We live for a home we haven’t seen. And we live for that home until we die or until it arrives, whichever comes first. And we will endure anything and everything in order to get there.

If you are the Church, whether you’ve been in the church for only a few minutes or all your life so far, stand with me church. (Worship team; join me up here, please.)

I want us to respond like the early church did. So we are going to repeat these closing verses – I’ll read part of it and you’ll respond with your part. You’ll read the part that follows where it says in parentheses, “everyone” okay?

“The Spirit and the bride say,

(*everyone:*) “Come!”

And let the one who hears say,

(*everyone:*) “Come!”

Let the one who is thirsty:

(everyone:) "Come!"

and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

(everyone:) "Come!"

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

(everyone:) Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.

(everyone:) Amen!