

**Final Preparations—Revelation 22:12-15—3/11/2018**

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Open to Revelation 22 & let's read the closing section as we continue our study—I'll start reading in verse 6—Revelation 22:6-21. [READ]

Eschatology is the study of end times, of last things, & that's what we've been immersed in through the book of Revelation.

I pray this study is having a lasting impact on our daily lives.

At times I've noticed how future promises can be misapplied or missing altogether in their influence on our normal practices.

Sometimes the future is viewed as a far off security of heaven that we want & that we know is free by faith in Christ, but that's it.

In that view, people want to be sure they are going to heaven, but that forward faith doesn't touch daily living.

Many people hesitate to think of living for reward, as if it's too selfish & not honorable to serve God with a view to future reward.

You may feel bad admitting that you serve somehow because it makes you happy or it secures a better future for you.

But what does the Scripture say about that—should you want rewards?

Should you serve & give & with a view toward reward?

How does that gel with the free gift of salvation through Jesus' work?

Putting all that together sheds light on how every day matters.

Scripture extols the grace of God, but it also holds us responsible.

These are just some of the issues we encounter in Revelation 22:12-15 as we continue responding to the future prophecy.

Revelation 22:6-21 form the closing exhortations & invitations.

From verse 10 last week we considered the need to release this final book from God so people know its promises & warnings.

Then from verse 11, we noted a call to resolve the final state of your soul, to continually practice righteousness & stay set apart to God.

Make no mistake that your life will be changed & changing if you know & follow Jesus & are headed to heaven with Him.

You will not be perfect & Scripture is replete with examples of saints who were far from perfect.

From Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to even the best kings of Israel & Judah, every faithful life included its failures.

Every life except Jesus', of course, who was sinless & perfect.

So be sure you know who He is & what He has said.

Know not merely what I say of Jesus or what others think of Jesus, but what the reliable record of the Bible says of Jesus.

As He closed this final book of Scripture, He gave some very clear promises that we want to respond to.

So this morning we'll outline 4 responses to what Jesus said in verses 12-15, 4 points of application from Jesus' promises.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of those is to reserve your final rewards.

Point #1 today is to reserve your final rewards.

Yes, Jesus said to live for, invest in, store up, & want future rewards for yourself.

Jesus said to prepare now by what you do in this life so that you will receive eternal rewards in the future.

That's not wrong to want & it's not sinfully selfish to seek for.

Read verse 12 again to see this. [READ]

Jesus broke in again here after the angel had spoken with John.

In an attention-grabbing announcement, Jesus built on what the angel had said with an urgent call to look, to stop & see & hear & consider.

Just as the angel had said at the end of verse 10 & just as He had said in verse 7, Jesus repeated that He is coming quickly.

That means suddenly at any time, certainly & surely without a doubt.

This is urgent because Jesus' coming is imminent, meaning nothing else has to occur before He returns to get His church & begin the Tribulation that quickly rolls toward His kingdom.

His coming will be with His reward, His wages, His due recompense.

That reward is His to give & it is coming with Him.

And He will pay back each one as his or her work warrants.

Jesus will give back & discharge what is due to each one.

That is the language Jesus used here in verse 12—language of merit-based pay, of wages in response to work, of reward for what's done.

And this is not only a promise for judgment on unbelievers for the sins they have committed. [cf. 2:23; Romans 2:6]

It is true that Jesus will bring justice for evil for all those who did not trust His punishment on the cross as their substitute payment.

So this does include the recompense against Christ's enemies according to their deeds as Revelation 20:13 stated.

But this reward is more than that because this context has warnings & promises also to believers.

So this also includes reward for believers for their work.

It is individual reward—literally to each one.

And it is in direct response to personal work, to reward or pay back or return.

Literally it is 'his work', singular, meaning a whole life's work, the overall weight of each person's deeds, for what he or she has done.

That's what Jesus promised for His people.

And that does not mean Jesus taught works-based salvation.

This is not a merit-based forgiveness earned by good deeds.

This is not laboring for your good to outweigh your bad as a means of getting God to accept you.

This is not wages-for-work to get right with God.

That's clear in verse 14 that we'll see in a minute.

And it was clear in verse 6 of chapter 21 that He will give freely to drink from the spring of the water of life without cost.

It is clear throughout the entire Bible that no man or woman can be good enough to get right with God.

We have all sinned & fallen short of the glory of God, as Romans 3:23 puts it.

And that's after Romans 3:10 & 12 stated that none are righteous, not even one, there is no one who does good, not even one.

We are all sinners deserving God's just punishment & no one of us can atone for our sins to satisfy God's wrath.

It is only by the infinite God-man Jesus living perfectly & dying sacrificially that we can be forgiven & declared right with God.

And God only gives that freely as a gift that cannot be earned.

We know that from Romans 3:24ff & Ephesians 2 & many passages.

So the promise of Revelation 22:12 cannot refer to Jesus rewarding work with forgiveness or a right standing with God.

All of that is only given freely from God as a gift by His grace.

So if you want your guilt replaced with a righteous record that warrants God's welcome, you can only get that as a gift from God based on what Jesus has done.

We can only be right with God by turning from self to trust in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus Christ.

His work for us, not our work for Him, is what gets us to Him.

His grace to us & our faith in Him is what begins a right relationship.

But then, in that right relationship, He gives His Spirit to motivate & empower faith-based, good works.

And by faith-based, I mean we exercise faith—meaning we trust—in God through Christ to supply the motivation & action for good works.

We seek after God's promises to help us serve Him & we do so knowing He freely gives because Jesus provided for it.

As 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:11 puts it, we serve in the strength that God supplies.

As Ephesians 2:10 says, we walk in the good works God has prepared beforehand for us.

That's the kind of work that Jesus will reward at His coming.

It's the work of faith, the work produced by faith, as 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:3 describes it.

The kind of faith that is a saving kind of faith that produces good works, as James 2 explains.

And the joy & wonder of that is that God is the One who freely supplies what's needed for us to serve & do good works.

The matchless grace of Christ is that He provides everything we need to get right with God & He gives His Spirit to transform our hearts & empower us to love Him & obey Him.

Then for all the good works we do by His grace in His Spirit's power, He will reward us!

That's crazy!—that's lavish love & generosity.

It's like the dad who gives his child money to buy a candy bar for the child give back to dad as a birthday gift.

The dad is the source & supplier & guide & giver in it all, but the child gets to be involved in the receiving & giving & reward.

The child even gets the rejoicing & affection of the father, especially if the candy bar is chocolate, right?

The dad likely also ends up sharing the candy bar with the child.

That's a tiny comparison to how God provides all believers need to be saved & to serve & then He rewards their service.

That reward is what Jesus promises at His coming in verse 12.

Think about how that breathes eternal significance into every choice we make every day for the rest of our lives.

And think of how free & gracious & loving our God is!

As we serve Him, we're going to fail because we are not yet glorified, but we are forgiven for those sins if we trust in Jesus.

Yet as we strive to be faithful & bear good spiritual fruit & God works in & through us, we store up eternal rewards.

As we serve & give & love & invest & counsel & care & pray & share, we reserve rewards.

Jesus said He is coming to give a return on our investments.

And that means we should want His reward.

It is not only ok, it is good & right & glorifying to God to believe what He says & want what He promises.

We honor Him as we give & serve to store up rewards.

Of course, it's vital to do so trusting Him to supply by His grace & to be sure we never base our acceptance with God on our works.

We must seek reward by grace through faith with thanksgiving.

And we shouldn't think our efforts or achievements will ever be so pure & perfect that we actually deserve the best of payments.

We want Him to reward, not because we are so good, but because He is so good.

Then He is glorified in showing His goodness for us to enjoy.

In that way we honor Christ's love & grace & power to bless both in us working & in Him rewarding.

All of this exalts God's sovereignty & grace while also emphasizing human responsibility.

And this tells us that what we do does matter.

How you spend your money—every cent of it—does matter & it will matter in the reward you receive forever.

It means that every opportunity to serve or meet a need or reach out or pray or give or encourage or rebuke or give thanks or whatever else has the potential for eternal payback.

So you don't need to be bashful about going hard after eternal rewards.

It's not selfish in a wrong kind of way.

You should want reward & live for reward by faith.

In Matthew 6:19-20, Jesus warned of the danger of earthly investments & extolled the superiority of heavenly investments

Matthew 6:19-20 says, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth & rust destroy, & where thieves break in & steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, & where thieves do not break in or steal.*"

Jesus said—DO store up for yourselves treasures in heaven!

So Jesus was not against seeking reward for yourself.

He wanted to be sure you knew where & how to seek reward.

He even told parables about rewards like the talents in Matthew 25.

Matthew 25:14-30 indicates that part of our reward will be further capacities for joy serving of God in the future.

So we need not blush in admitting that we're living for reward.

This promise of reward is consistently given as a motive for being pleasing to the Lord day by day.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:9-10 says we "*prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*"

Paul said we have ambition to please the Lord because we'll be judged & rewarded one day.

We should have ambitions, aspirations, strivings, longings, goals, passions, pursuits & priorities to be pleasing to the Lord.

We should want to walk in the Spirit's power by God's grace.

We should want to be rewarded for what we do while in this short life with its inevitably decaying health & limited energy.

We must build all our labors for Christ on the Gospel, on His grace to us based on His finished work.

And as we do so, we anticipate reward.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3:9-15 says "*According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be*

*revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*"

So build on the foundation of Jesus Christ by God's grace & prayerfully seek His reward.

Reserve your final rewards.

Jesus said He is coming with His reward.

So believe Him, seek Him, & live to honor Him.

He is surely worthy.

Look at verse 13 to recall that. [READ]

Point #2 today—revere the final Ruler.

We said 1<sup>st</sup> to reserve your final rewards.

Now #2, revere the final Ruler, meaning give reverence & honor & fear & respect & trust to Jesus as the ultimate King.

Jesus again identifies Himself as the One who exists outside of time & the One who governs all time.

He is the planner & orchestrator, the starter & finisher.

Alpha & Omega are the first & last letters of the Greek alphabet & so the 3 phrases in verse 13 restate the timeless sovereignty of Jesus.

He existed before time & He is the final climax of history.

He is the beginning of the existence of all things & He is the end of as the centerpiece of eternal life in heaven. [Colossians 1:17]

He is the first as the Creator & the last as the goal of all glory.

Jesus is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity, coequal & coeternal with the Father & therefore worthy to be worshipped unlike the angels.

He sits on the throne & has these titles in 21:6. [cf. 1:8]

He is the Governor & Guide working His plan as the 1<sup>st</sup> & the last here & in 1:17 & 2:8 as the Lord is in Isaiah 41:4 & 44:6 & 48:12.

So His Word is to be trusted & His authority honored.

He is to be rightly feared & followed by faith in His promises.

Listen to His last beatitude promise in verse 14. [READ]

This is the Creator & Consummator, the Savior & Judge, offering the blessing of happy peace & rest in Him.

This last of 7 Beatitudes in Revelation comes as a reminder for believers & an offer for unbelievers.

Some manuscripts have this on those who keep His commandments, which is stated elsewhere but is not the better reading here.

So that's why most translations have this blessing on those who wash their robes.

This gives us a 3<sup>rd</sup> response today—to receive the final blessing.

Point #3—receive the final blessing of this book.

Blessed means happy or peaceful & that is pronounced on those who wash their robes as their way into heaven.

That means they cleanse themselves of the defilement of the sins in their lives.

And that can only be done in the blood of the Lamb.

This robe-washing was depicted earlier in Revelation 7:14 as the way to make them white & clean in God's presence.

As we said earlier, entrance into heaven comes only by faith in the Person & work of Jesus Christ, only by trusting His life as our righteousness & His death as our payment for sin.

That washing clean of our record is depicted in the robe washed clean in the atoning blood of Jesus' sacrifice.

That's an excellent picture when you ponder how sin can make us feel dirty with guilt & shame.

Sin makes us want to run & hide like Adam & Eve did in the Garden after they sinned.

That's a natural human impulse to sadly pull away from God & distance ourselves from Him & even from His people.

People run from God with all kinds of vices & escapes & treatments trying to feel better about themselves or to punish themselves or feel pain or quiet their conscience.

But none of those methods bring lasting peace & joy.

That blessing only comes to those who come to Christ trusting His bloody death as the way our sins are washed away.

The amazing miracle of the death of Christ applied to us is a full cleansing to forgive us & free us from sin's guilt & punishment.

We will still feel bad when we sin but we can always return to the happy wonder of the washing work of Jesus.

That's why we sing about being washed in the blood of the Lamb!

Many OT & NT verses point to this picture of cleansing & the blood of Christ & we can praise God for this blessing. [1:5]

But verse 14 projects forward beyond the blessings of this life to the riches of eternal life.

The right or authority to the tree of life likely means access to eat of the tree of life.

Since Jesus ate in His resurrection body, we must also.

Yet this food must not be necessary like food is now in these mortal bodies that grow weak & can starve to death.

Somehow the fruit of the tree of life must grant or sustain life forever as it could have done with Adam & Eve after they had sinned.

But God graciously drove them away from the tree & forbid them from this tree that would leave them in sin forever.

Then God will restore this tree to people who are glorified & sinless in His heavenly city.

Verse 2 of this chapter speaks of this tree of life as a connected grove of trees on both sides of the river of the water of life.

It's in the middle of the city & so the right to enter by the gates into the city pictures the free access to & from the tree.

So the picture is that those washed in the blood of Christ belong in this city—if you are in Christ, then you belong there.

You belong in the new Jerusalem & it is your final home.

However much you feel unsettled or unwelcome in this life, if you are washed in Christ's blood, you have a home that is forever settled for you to feel always welcome.

You have the freedom & authority & right to eat at the tree of life & go in & out of the city's gates.

You belong there & you can rest with assurance in that prize.

So receive this final blessing.

Then 4<sup>th</sup>ly & lastly, repent before the final exclusion.

We said, #1, to reserve your final rewards; #2, to revere the final Ruler; & #3, to receive the final blessing.

Now point #4 from verse 15—repent before the final exclusion.

After verse 14 extols the blessing of being free to enter the heavenly city's gates, verse 15 laments those who are outside.

Verse 15 tells of that final exclusion outside of God's grace, separated from God's light & everything that is good.

This is exclusion from every experience of joy & pleasure & peace.

To be excluded is to be outside of God's good presence forever, finally & eternally suffering in the lake of fire.

Read verse 15 to see that final exclusion. [READ]

These sins characterize the lives of those forever outside the heavenly city, eternally separated from God.

These are not the only sins that will be punished because every sin against an infinite, holy God is worthy of an eternity of punishment.

These are representative sins, particularly wicked in their expressions & desires.

The first in the list are dogs & that does not refer to Clifford or Fido.

These are not real or imaginary dogs.

It refers to those whose sins defile them so badly that they were referred to as sickly street scavengers.

Dogs were not household pets in the 1<sup>st</sup> century & the Ancient Near East, so we have reorient our thinking a bit here.

Dogs were unclean, dangerous & abominable animals.

So any person referred to as a dog was a vile character with vicious influence. [Philippians 3:2]

Deuteronomy 23:18 is the first use of this term in the Greek OT in reference to homosexual male prostitutes among other abominations.

Since the abominable are listed in Revelation 21:8 with the other sins in this list, it's likely this is a reference to such sexual abominations from Deuteronomy 23:18.

The idea is that those whose lives are characterized by such sins, who self-identify in today's terms as being given over to these sins, will be outside the heavenly city.

That exclusion also applies to sorcerers, those who practice witchcraft or occult practices that may include drug abuse.

Next in that list are the immoral, those who engage in porn as the word is transliterated, meaning any & all sexually immoral practices.

Those are sexual relations outside of God's good & wise & happy design within the marriage of one man & one woman.

Murderers are listed next as evil enemies outside of God's city.

That includes murder of adults as well as children, including babies in the wombs of mothers.

Next are idolaters, meaning those who worship anyone or anything other than the true God.

Then finally listed are everyone who loves & practices lying.

So everyone—kids—get this—see how serious lying is.

Lying is of the devil who is the father of lies.

God will never allow those who tell lies to get what they want, who manipulate & twist the truth for selfish gain, into heaven.

All those in these categories of sin will be outside the gates.

They will never to come near the heavenly city but rather will remain in outer darkness in the pains of hell forever.

So if you have committed these sins, then what do you do?

First you realize that we all have committed most or all of them at least in our private heart desires or thoughts.

Then here's what we do—we repent.

We turn away from believing that those things are acceptable & we change our thinking to know those things are all evil against God.

As our thinking changes, we direct our hearts & lives away from those sins & run to God trusting in Christ.

We give up the rule of self & sin over us & yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as our Savior & Ruler.

We trust Him as our only hope to have our sins washed away.

And we treasure Him as our righteous new spiritual clothes that make us acceptable to God & welcomed forever.



Then we trust & follow Him in a new life by the Spirit of God where we are set apart as holy & we grow in holiness.

We love God & trust what He says & want to increasingly practice the righteous ways He commands in His Word.

Then we are no longer characterized by sinful life patterns.

We will still struggle & battle & fight sin, but we will not be controlled by it indefinitely as its slave.

We respond to the warning & experience the blessings of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11, which names similar sins not allowed in God's kingdom that can be washed & changed.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11 says, *“do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”*

Those categories are similar to the ones in verse 15 that represent those excluded from God's kingdom & presence.

But they can be washed away & we can be made new in Christ.

So to have your sins paid for & your life changed before it is too late, repent & come to Jesus now.

Repent before the final exclusion.

God has been amazingly gracious to come seeking you today with another opportunity to hear His Word & hear Him calling you to turn from sin to faith in Christ.

He has blessed you beyond measure with promises telling of final blessing & eternal rewards.

What will you do in response?

I pray you are responding to the Revelation of Jesus Christ for the good of your own eternal soul.

If we can help you to respond rightly, please let us know after the service & we'll be glad to do so.

I've been praying that you will be reserving your final rewards, revering the final Ruler, receiving the final blessing, & repenting before the final exclusion.

And as you seek to respond rightly, I've been praying you will remember that others need to hear these promises & warnings.

So please be sure you respond to these truths by sharing them.

Our God in Christ is worthy to be spoken of boldly & the urgency of these truths compel us to love others by telling them

So let your daily life be powerfully impacted by these future realities.

Recall that what you do each hour of each day does matter.

You are either investing in eternal rewards or you are wasting your life & damaging your soul & draining eternity of potential reward.

Embrace God's promises in Christ & take each day seriously for your own joy now & forever.

It is right to seek your own happiness & reward in knowing & serving the only true God who is glorified as we do so.

Pray with me that we would honor Him as we seek Him.