

Come Lord Jesus!

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[0 : 00] Chapter 22 of Revelation And he said to me, These words are trustworthy and true.

And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. But he said to me, You must not do that.

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers of the prophets, and with those who keep 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 evildoers still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.

[1 : 42] I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Outside are the dogs and sorcerers, and the sexually immoral, and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.

I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The spirit and the bride say, Come, and let the one who hears say, Come, and let the one who is thirsty come.

Let the one who desires take the water of life without price. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away 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, Surely I am coming soon. Amen.

[2 : 48] Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Now, there are moments in life when we are challenged by what we see.

This week, the world saw hundreds of thousands of Afghans desperately trying to leave Kabul as the Taliban assumed power. After a 20-year absence and a brutal war, they have taken control of the capital and the country.

They continue to be arresting images. I have seen families scrambling to board military planes to escape. Babies handed to troops over barbed wire fences.

Gunshots fired to disperse crowds with thousands fleeing in panic. Caravans of soon-to-be Afghan refugees rushing for border crossings to exit the country.

Some have managed to get out. Their faces have spoken of relief, but also of despair for what happens in their lives next.

[3 : 53] Many have died. The Taliban were able to capture Kabul in just one day. I read one account this week.

The Taliban entered the village of a Christian and took away from a father, his 14-year-old daughter. For the men who took her, she is now their property.

What if you could tell the father, confronted with that reality in Kabul, that he has real hope? Not in a flippant pat on the back way, ruffling the hair, saying things will get better soon.

But total certainty that this isn't all there is. And all will be made good. What if the words we've just read in the Bible together could help him and you in your lives this week?

This morning, I want to talk to you about hope and also about cities. The one place in the Bible where we'll be able to be in full relationship with our Heavenly Father is in a garden city which is described in the book of Revelation.

[5 : 04] It's a city which we should be encouraged to look forward to and one which we should be desperate to enter. It's one which we'll never leave. My name's Warren and I'm a member of the church family here at Grace Church Dulwich.

If you could please keep your Bibles open at Revelation 22. As just told to us, it's very defined at the very back of your Bibles. Now, in Revelation chapter 21, which Michael preached on last week, he spoke about the heavenly city which is revealed to the Apostle John in a vision.

Revelation 21 provides a portrait, a picture, if you will, of what we can expect the heavenly city to be like from the outside. Not an exact schematic, but think of it as being a helpful artist's impression.

I'm hoping that you would have come to appreciate the overarching theme for the talk from the words we've been singing this morning. On several occasions in Revelation 22, it's repeated that Jesus is coming soon.

Jesus and our Heavenly Father don't want us to miss this central point. In Revelation chapter 22, through John's vision, we get to learn more of what is promised to Christians at the time by seeing what's inside the city gates.

[6 : 22] I hope that by the end of this morning, you'll come away feeling excited for what's in store for Christians when we see the city for ourselves, knowing that Jesus will return. Because if we can't be excited by what we're going to see there, then I'm kind of worried for us.

As Christians, we're longing for the day for Jesus to come. And we have the certainty of knowing that he definitely will. To help us this morning, I'll be focusing on three areas during this talk.

How we'll experience the heavenly city, our call to worship, and finally, the invitation that they're for others to freely accept. We want Jesus to come. It's helpful to be reminded of John's ambition when he wrote the book of Revelation.

He sent his letter to seven churches in Asia Minor, that's modern-day Turkey, for a number of reasons. Mainly to support and challenge Christians who were being persecuted at the time, to wake sleepy Christians who were being apathetic and falling away, and also to admonish churches that were promoting or supporting false teaching.

We should remember, too, that it's Jesus who's speaking directly to John in these visions. It's Jesus' words that matter most. Inside the letter, we regularly see Jesus depicted as the Lamb.

[7 : 43] We see described visions of battles between Satan and heavenly forces. A helpful image which Jake used last summer when studying Revelation was of John being summoned to the supreme headquarters to view the battle that our heavenly Father is waging on sin.

John can see the various stages of the different battles. He can see that victory has already been achieved. He can see past battles whilst also witnessing the continuing futile skirmishes.

We know that thanks to the cross, God has already won. The final chapter which we're looking at today is all about what ultimate victory looks and feels like, where Christians will finally be able to find and enjoy rest.

Now let's go back to look and see how chapter 22 opens. Then the angels showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the streets of the city.

The term the river of the water of life is a phrase which is used throughout the Bible. The prophets Joel, Ezekiel and Zechariah each use it in the Old Testament and it's a phrase which is used to signify that we'll be fully connected and in relationship with our Heavenly Father in Heaven.

[9 : 10] If you want to look for yourselves, you can see Joel 3.18, Ezekiel 47.1-9 and Zechariah 14.8. There are no longer any barriers in place to separate us.

We see that this river flows directly from our Heavenly Father together with the Lamb in the middle of the city. God and the Lamb are prominent and central to life there.

John goes on. Also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

It's interesting, isn't it, that in the very last chapter of the Bible we have references to creation which we find in Genesis. But there's a crucial difference.

This time there's a need for the world to be healed. God is remaking and remodeling the world because of our choice to sin. But now in the Heavenly City, we're able to live alongside Him in His presence despite all of what we've done.

[10 : 21] In Genesis 3, we're shown away from the tree of life. In Revelation 22, the tree of life is central to our existence. So here is a sneak peek of what our world will be like and what we can look forward to.

It's a physical place on earth we'll experience. So will it be an actual river? We don't know.

We do know what the river signifies and that it's in the Heavenly Garden City which has matured from the Garden of Eden will be in constant relationship with the throne of God and the Lamb.

We'll be constantly supplied with life through Him. Charles Spurgeon, no less. Maybe you've heard of him. Provides a helpful summary of the significance of this.

He wrote, It is a throne of righteousness but no less a throne of grace. The altar and the throne have become identical. From that throne, no fiery bolt can ever again be hurled against the believer.

[11 : 27] For it is the throne of the Lamb as well as the throne of God. There's a clear difference between the desires and priorities that we have right now compared to what they'll be in the Heavenly Garden City.

The clearest difference is what and how we'll worship. Many tears have been shed this week for the fall of Kabul and for the millions who now face an uncertain future.

In 20 years, Kabul's population has grown from 1.5 million to 7 million. More people than ever before have been choosing to live there and you can understand why.

Kabul's become a major centre of commerce, a place to make money, find a home, start a family, all with a degree of safety. And now?

Well, we don't know what the future holds, but there have already been troubling signs. Already there are reports of people being killed by the Taliban for reasons that would sound absurd to us.

[12 : 38] Although we're right to pray for the lives and safety of those in Kabul today, we should be challenged by the thought of wanting everyone there to instead enter a city that surpasses the hope and aspirations that they had for a city they're currently mourning.

It's one which is wildly better than anything that they or we could even imagine. Now let me be clear about this. There's nothing wrong with striving for a better life and the things that come with it.

Instead, though, we should be reminded that our ambitions can be so much greater. Looking at verses 3 to 5 gives an idea of what we're going to be doing in the new city. Verse 3.

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads and night will be no more.

They will need no light or lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever. There's nothing here about how big our houses will be.

[13 : 53] Nothing about how beautiful wives or husbands will be. Not a line about how much more free time or how many dates you'll have if you're single. Nothing about how we'll have more money than we'll ever need.

Nothing about getting the best exam results ever. The ideas contained in these short verses are so much bigger than that. In 1 Corinthians 13 verse 12, the Apostle Paul wrote about seeing the face of God.

He wrote, For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then, I shall know, just as I am also known.

we'll be fully able to see and experience Jesus for ourselves because sin is no more. Because our worries are gone and because the idols that occupy our time and attention are gone too.

Is there any surprise that we'll be serving and worshipping? We'll be able to know our Heavenly Father and Jesus in a way that we have never done before. It's a life that can't be bettered.

[15 : 04] Now this week, I spoke to a friend of mine who was recently stationed in Kabul as a diplomat for several years.

He told me about the endemic government corruption which he credits as one of the main factors for holding Afghanistan back from greater prosperity. Many Afghan people were forced to live with this reality as being part of everyday life.

It was better than life under the Taliban but it still wasn't good in the way that many wanted. In the heavenly city there's no compromise.

There's no longer a curse. God in his infinite holiness and perfection will be alongside us. There's no place for sin or corruption. Energy and light itself will be provided by him and will serve and reign alongside him.

I want to tell you about another city now. Citizens go out of their way to help you. There are towering buildings and gardens which seem to disappear into the endless distance.

[16 : 19] Transport networks are dizzying in their scale and efficiency. It seems to be a place where past, present, and future all meet. I was there in Tokyo for most of the last month.

As the biggest city in the world with more than 37 million people it seems this is the best humanity can offer when it comes to cities. It makes London seem provincial.

The thought I had as I stood in the Tokyo Skytree which is the second tallest building in the world and surveyed the skyline was wow.

But just think this is nothing compared to the privilege and gift we receive when being in the heavenly city forever. Sometimes we can be confronted with greatness and fall into the trap of setting our sights too low.

In the heavenly city there's another privilege that we shouldn't overlook too. We'll finally be able to see our heavenly father's face. This was something that even Moses wasn't allowed to experience.

[17 : 34] This and the image of God's ownership over us demonstrated with the idea of his name being on our foreheads should give us further comfort too. Even if there isn't a literal sign branded on us isn't it warming to know that the creator of the universe wants it to be known that we belong to him.

Slowly we're building a picture of a level of joy that we've yet to reach in humanity. We have all the reasons to worship him and none of the barriers to prevent us from doing so any longer.

So come Lord Jesus and now you sit enthroned with him our God reigns he is king of all the earth our God reigns and he's seated on the throne.

They were some of the words we sang just a few moments ago. They could be taken directly from the book of Revelation because they describe what it would be like in the heavenly city.

In the very last chapter of the very last book in the Bible on three occasions we hear that Jesus is coming soon. Let's look down again to our Bibles at Revelation 22.

[18 : 49] Verse 7 And behold I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Verse 12 Behold I am coming soon.

Bring you my recompense with me to repay each one for what he has done. Verse 20 He who testifies to these things says surely I am coming soon.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Whatever's happening in our lives now these words can give us hope today. I'm not sure about you but I find that idea quite hard.

After all how soon is soon. Biblically we're confronted with countless examples of believers and prophets waiting lifetimes for answers to prayers.

Can this really provide comfort to those facing life challenging situations right now? Unsurprisingly I'm going to say yes.

[19 : 55] Maybe from the privileged position of being in this room with you in Dulwich that comes across as easy. But it's not my words that are important. It's Jesus' words that matter and we choose to trust them.

When John was addressing the seven churches in Asia Minor with this letter they would have been able to relate it to the persecution that they were enduring then. The message repeated throughout Revelation and here at the very end would have been I know this is hard but believe Jesus is going to win.

Satan has already lost. That remains true for Christians around the world who have been persecuted today and even the trials and difficulties that we face in our lives too whatever their size, difficulty or complexity.

This promise is open to anyone who chooses to follow Jesus. As well as the assurance we have from Jesus coming soon we can point to the invitation that is open to anyone that they too can enter the heavenly city.

Let's look down at verse 17. The spirit and the bride say come and let the one who hears say come and let the one who is thirsty come and let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

[21 : 24] Now I was struck when reading this passage that a few things are made explicitly clear at the end of the Bible. It's a recap of all that we've been told. You don't have to bring anything with you.

There's not a price. All you have to do is accept the gift which is an offer to you. You're not forced to come either. Even to the end our loving God gives us the choice.

He never forces us against our will. When Jesus tells John not to seal the prophecy of the book he even points to the that he'll give the freedom for evil to carry on doing evil even in these final skirmishes.

They have freedom now and that freedom for them to not choose him will continue outside the gates of the heavenly city. Verse 13 Jesus uses the letter to confirm that his message is for the church whilst also confirming his identity as both the creator and descendant of David.

A fulfillment of all prophecies. The Messiah he's the one not Satan who will shine throughout eternity. He's the one who has the ultimate victory.

[23 : 01] Come Lord Jesus that's the cry that John has at the end of Revelation. He's in part of the promise that's available to us and he was longing for the day of Jesus' triumphant return.

And so at a time when it seems that all is lost, when it seems from our vantage point that Satan is winning, we can remember that our heavenly father has secured the ultimate victory which we can continue to trust in and which we'll soon see in full.

You pray for us. Heavenly father I just want to thank you for these words. I want to thank you for the fact that we have this promise and I pray Lord even in difficult moments when confronted with situations which seem important that we can trust in you.

Amen.