

The Last Words of Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Oh, good morning, everybody. Well done on getting to church. I set my clock backwards one hour last night and woke up feeling pretty good about myself.
- And I looked at my watch and I thought, this is great, I can sleep in front of the two hours. But the iPhone realized my mistake and started screaming at me. So yeah, congratulations to me too on being here.
- Well done, Aram. So my name is Aram. If you are joining us for the first time, I'm one of the ministers on staff here. And you have come at a fairly interesting time because we are looking at, as Sarah told us, this is the last page of the whole Bible.
- So this is where it all sort of ends up. We've been in a series looking at this amazing book of Revelation. And we've been in it for months and months and months. I would love to know how it's impacted you, what you've got out of it.
- So please, if you feel like sharing with me at the end of the service as we're walking out the door, just tell me what you thought of it all. I know for me, I found it just tremendously, a tremendously helpful book.
- [1 : 0 8] And let me just give you a few things that I've found have sort of, you know, like if you listen to a piece of music, there are these kind of notes that sort of stick out to you, these kind of soaring notes that stick out to you.
- Let me tell you some of the soaring notes that kind of stick out to me. First of all though, like I feel like the book for me personally has been reclaimed as a functional piece of the Bible as opposed to the really baffling, bizarre book that you don't read.
- When I was growing up and, well, actually, no, let me tell you this. When I first moved to North America about 10 or 11 years ago, I became addicted to watching TV evangelists because it was so, I found it so odd.
- And some of them are probably really good people and some of them I think are crazy people. And some of the ones that were a bit different, they loved Revelation.
- Those guys loved Revelation. They loved talking about Revelation. But they would come to some weird conclusions and I think they would treat it like a crystal ball. Like it's this, they treated it like a predictor of the next horrible thing to happen in the world.
- [2 : 1 8] We're just going to decode the things in there and we'll know why troop movements are happening in Serbia. You know, something like that, for example. And of course, that's not the way to interpret Revelation in this book. But at least they're kind of reading it, I guess.
- I mean, most of us were sort of like terrified to look at it because we didn't have any idea to get our head around it. It's completely baffling. I mean, do you remember the passage with the dragon chasing the baby?
- And like, what do we do with this stuff? Well, now I feel like, yes, we can actually read this stuff and go like, I understand it. It's rich, it's beautiful. There's depth here. We should drink from it deeply. So that's one of the things I kind of really jumped out at me and what I've really appreciated about Revelation.

I've also really appreciated the stuff that was very difficult to hear as well. You probably remember what felt like about two months speaking about God's anger and wrath and judgment.

There was a really big middle part of Revelation where that is a fairly significant theme. And I'm glad we didn't rush through that.

[3 : 22] A lot of folks like to rush through that. I'm glad we didn't. It was hard going. It's completely culturally offensive to talk about this because people who do have a sense that there is a God don't like to think about God being angry about ideologies or people hurting his will.

So they might think of God as like the kindly grandfather who kind of winks at your indiscretions and naughtiness. Whereas the Bible says, No.

God actually hates sin. And he hates things that hurt his creation. I found that very sobering. And I'm glad we spent a lot of time in it. It's a very serious business.

We need to have the right attitude towards sinfulness in the world and darkness in the world. It needs to be uncovered. The veil needs to be peeled back. And we need to actually be able to call something for what it is.

For me also, and I hope for you, I hope it's renewed your vision of who Jesus is. Jesus is not just the nice guy in the Bible. No, he is the king.

[4 : 31] He's the king of kings. I hope it's renewed your vision as it has mine of what the church is. As weak and ridiculous as the church might look sometimes from the outside, it is central to God's purposes.

I hope you've seen that the God and the Lamb is enthroned at the center of the universe, that God is in control. In the midst of a world that it's hard to wrap your head around why some of this stuff happens, that God is actually in control.

And I hope you've been encouraged in your faith to endure. This book was written in such a way as to ignite our imaginations with these vivid images. It's like these...

Flannery O'Connor talks about shouting, shouting words. Like she paints these satirical images, these big portraits of people in her work, which is, I think it's called like Southern Gothic style of writing.

Revelation is kind of like that. It paints these huge pictures that you won't forget. It's supposed to ignite our imaginations. And those things are supposed to stay with you, to help you enjoy, to help you endure, to stick with Jesus.

[5 : 44] Lastly, I hope as you've been studying Revelation, it's made you think a lot more about Christ's return. I am eager for many things in my life, as you are eager for many things.

And Revelation has said, be eager for the return of Christ. Be eager for him to come back and make all things new. Anyway, that's a few thoughts. Those are a few of the things, some of the high points of the book for me.

I'd love to hear what you got out of it. Now, let's get into the passage that was just read, though. Right, so we're in the final chapter of the Bible. You've heard it read. And I wonder if, as you heard it read, you thought, goodness, that feels a bit haphazard.

Feels a bit like John's just chucking a whole lot of things at the end there, just to tidy up a few loose ends. Well, that's what it feels like. It's actually not. It's not haphazard. There are three major themes.

They're just going to interlock. So there are three major themes, okay? The first theme is this. Christ will return. That's the big point. Christ will return. The second major theme of the passage is, how can we be sure, though?

[6 : 50] I mean, that's a fairly outrageous claim to make. And the third, if Christ will return, and we can be sure of that, what are the implications of that? So Christ will return. How can we be sure?

What are the implications? That's my sermon right there. So let's get into it. First point, let's start with the promise of Christ's return. So it says it three times in the passage.

Remember, this is a piece of literature. It says it at the start. It says it in the middle. It says it at the end. It's probably the major point. It is the major point of the passage. You might think, yeah, it's the major point.

I agree. But it's really only the kind of the major point of revelation, though, isn't it? I mean, the rest of the New Testament, it's all about being kind and stuff like that.

No, you know, the New Testament actually talks about Christ's return 300 times. This is a central Christian doctrine. However, as I sort of gauge Christian culture right now, I think that it is a doctrine that has become a bit embarrassing for people.

[8 : 00] It's a little bit wacky. It's a little bit out there. Not something I won't talk about that much, perhaps.

I mean, Christianity is great when you're talking about social justice. It's great if you want to talk about engagement and culture. We should talk about care for creation.

We should talk about kindness and forgiveness. These are all. We should talk about these things. Absolutely. These are important things. But talking about Jesus returning and there's a cloud and a sword and a horse, I don't know.

It's all a bit much. But fantasy land stuff. So what I have to say to you now is, folks, do not let the idea of Christ's return become a marginalized doctrine.

It is essential to our faith. So we can't be relegated to the little closet, our little mind closet where we keep the other doctrines we don't know what to do with, like speaking in tongues and anointing oils and all that kind of stuff we're not quite sure about.

[9 : 02] Don't put it in. Don't marginalize it away. Don't not think about it. Let me tell you why it's so important. Do you... I heard a guy talking recently about...

Have you ever seen those guys that hold the signs that say the end is nigh, right, on the corner streets? I mean, you know, good on them. So this friend of mine said, this guy I heard talking about them said, have you always noticed they always have beards?

Because why do they always have beards? They always look unkept. And he said this. He goes, you feel like it's because they don't really care about what happens to the world because they think it's going to end at any minute.

And is that true? If we believe that Christ is returning, does that mean we should stop caring about the world? Martin Luther, the story goes.

Martin Luther was asked, what would you do if you knew Christ would return tomorrow? He said, ah, I'd plant an apple tree. I thought, what a wonderful response. The point is, if Christ is returning tomorrow, live as well as you can now.

[10 : 18] If we really believe Christ is returning, and it could sort of just happen at any point, it doesn't mean we stop caring about the world. No, it means the exact opposite. In fact, the Bible teaches the exact opposite.

I said there's about 300 references to Christ's return. Almost every time when it mentions it, the point that follows it immediately afterwards is think soberly and passionately about your life.

Think about how you're living right now because Christ will return. That's why it's so important to reclaim this doctrine because I think our nature is the drift towards spiritual laziness.

Now, just as an aside, the term for Christ's return, the technical term is the parousia. So when I drop that in, you know what I'm talking about.

So if we have the parousia in the front of our brain, it's not just to give us sort of nice thoughts every now and then. It should change how we live now. I'll give you three ways.

- [11 : 17] There are a million ways it should change us. Let me just give you three ways just to sort of think about. First, alertness. Alertness. Alertness. If you really believe Christ will return at any point, if that shifted from becoming fantasy land stuff to like, oh yeah, that could actually happen, wouldn't you be more spiritually alert?

Wouldn't you be very attentive to how you are living? 1 Peter 4, a passage in the New Testament, talks about the parousia, and after explaining it, Peter doesn't say, he doesn't say, right, Christ is returning.

Right, let's try and work out when it's going to happen. Let's sort out a timeline. He doesn't say that. Here's what his takeaway is. He says, Christ is coming again. Be more hospitable.

Look it up for yourself. Christ is coming. Be more hospitable. Folks, Christ is returning. He says, I'm coming soon, which means I'll be coming at a point where it's unexpected. So let's think about, let's think less about timelines and more about how you're living now.

Alertness. Next, priorities. If the parousia was something that you gave a lot of thought to, wouldn't it change your priorities? Wouldn't it change the way you spent your money? Wouldn't it change the way you use your resources?

- [12 : 31] Wouldn't it change the way you spent your time? Thirdly, hope in suffering. Really believing that Christ could return at any point, goodness, wouldn't that be, wouldn't that give you incredible hope?

I mean, if you live a very unhappy life, if you're feeling ripped off, if you're lonely, if you know a lot of pain in your life, Jesus says, I'm coming soon.

Lift up your eyes. Because no matter how dark your life is, that's a source of immense hope, isn't it? One scholar put it really succinctly. He said this, he goes, the return of Christ is good news for people whose lives are filled with bad news.

Maybe your life isn't terribly bad, but you have perhaps daily struggles, daily addictions. Maybe you're addicted to your phone, to Instagram likes, pornography.

Maybe you're addicted to, or maybe you just have a deep sense of unworthiness. Maybe you have a very unhealthy relationship with your body, and you think your body is so unworthy.

- [13 : 43] Perhaps you question your intelligence and feel very insecure about that. Perhaps you have some significant regrets in your life that sort of pull down on you. Folks, Christ is coming.

And when he comes, you will be free of those things. You will be completely free of those things. You'll be free of addictions.

You'll be free of insecurities. You'll be free of your regrets. So all that to say, if you relegate the parousia, Christ's return, to the bottom drawer of your mind, what are you doing?

You're relegating hope. I'm reading the Chronicles of Narnia. It's my daughter, who's six years old at the moment. It's fantastic. I love it. And the last book of that series is called The Last Battle.

Let me read the last paragraph from that last book, The Last Battle. Here it is. The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them.

- [14 : 44] And for us, this is the end of all the stories. And we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world.

And all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and total page. Now, at least, they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

When Christ returns, this will be our reality if we trust Christ. Isn't that a wonderful hope? Why would we relegate that? Why would we marginalize that?

Why would we be embarrassed by that? So in summary of this first section here. So the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, its focus is on the return of Christ. Why? Because without hope, what do we do?

We hedge our bets. And we live with one foot in the world just in case. And straddling these two worlds is just a miserable way to live. It's a sellout way to live. And this is why we can't afford to think of Christ's return as the embarrassing, sort of uneducated, cousin of real Christian theology.

[15 : 56] No. It's essential to our faith. It's central to our faith because it's the source of our great hope and it's the foil to spiritual laziness. And of course, it's a pretty major clue to its importance given that the last chapter of the last book in the Bible, it's this that it wants us to remember.

Okay, it's point one, point two and three. And very quickly now, point two. You may be thinking, yes, but how can we be sure that Christ will return? The passage does put a lot of emphasis on the words of Christ.

You see it says, keep these words, keep these words, don't seal up these words, don't mess with these words. You're in trouble if you mess with the words, right? But you might go, but they're just the words, right?

They're kind of... How do we believe what anyone says? That's probably a good question to ask, right? How do we believe what anybody says? Well, usually we trust or we don't trust someone based on who they are.

There's a big difference between Winston Churchill once said and Donald Trump once tweeted, isn't there? Depends on who you're asking, I guess, but there are some credibility issues.

[17 : 08] But this person here, like, oh, we all love Winston Churchill. If he says it, it must be true. It's fantastic. It's fantastic. The guarantee that Jesus will return rests on who Jesus is, isn't it?

We trust who Jesus is. We trust that what he says is true. Now, the identity of Christ is a major, major concern of this passage. How does Christ describe himself here?

He calls himself the Alpha, the Omega, the First, the Last, the Beginning, the End, the Root and Descendant of David, which is the Ancestor and Descendant of David, the Bright Morning Star, and twice in the end he's called the Lord.

So let's have a look at a couple of these titles. The Alpha, the Omega. It's the first and the last Greek letters of the alphabet. Beginning and the End. Those are tremendous things to say, remarkable things to say.

They're made more remarkable by the fact that these are the same words that God used to describe himself in Revelation chapter 1. There's this kind of folklore going around that Jesus is a great guy, good teacher, got crushed by the world, saw the will of history though, and a few hundred years into the Christian faith they decided to make him into a God just to give the faith a bit of a nudge.

[18 : 30] Well, it's not really true, is it? I mean, you can't say that from this passage. Christ is clearly saying here that he is God. Let's dig a little deeper into this.

So there's this little triplet, Alpha, Omega, First, Last, Beginning, and End. It sounds like it's saying three things twice, but it adds beginning and end to the description that God gives himself at the start.

So what's going on with the beginning and end there? What does that add to the meaning? Well, it's not just the beginning and the end of a sequence, like 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The Greek word for beginning is archa.

It means source or pattern. We get the word archetype or architecture from this word, right? So it's saying that Christ is the source of all things. All things were made through him.

The Bible teaches that in other places, doesn't it? And the end, that's a Greek word telos. Not just the end of a sequence, but the end purpose, the end goal of something.

[19 : 29] So Christ is saying he was there at the beginning of all things, here's the purpose of all things at the end. Those are big words.

Those are big claims. We can trust Jesus. We can trust the person. We can trust this Jesus when he says, I'm coming soon, I think. Another way Christ describes himself is the bright morning star, and I find this fascinating.

This is the last of the great I am statements. It's the last name Jesus gives himself. Think about that. The last name Jesus gives himself. I would think, like I would have expected, if I'd have said, what is the last thing that Jesus describes himself as?

You would think, well, you know, king of kings, lord of lords, something pretty big like that. But this is a bit obscure. The bright morning star, his last self-designation. Now why is that?

What does that mean? Well, you probably already know. The bright morning star is the star that comes out sort of the early, early morning. It's Venus. But why would Jesus call himself that? Well, the best I've read was from a guy who is a Christian and an economist from the Netherlands, whose name is Bob, Bob, Bob, Goodsvod.

[20 : 45] There's lots of A's all in a row. That's exactly how you pronounce it. So a very clever man. He wrote a book called Idols of Our Time. Idols of Our Time.

Let me just quote just a tiny little paragraph from this book where he talks about this. It says, The biblical image of hope is the morning star. The morning star often appears between two and three in the morning when the darkness is complete and the faintest sign of morning is not yet visible.

When you see the morning star, you know that the night has been defeated. For the morning star pulls the morning in behind it just as certainly as Jesus pulls the kingdom in behind him. I am the morning star.

These were Jesus' last words to us. They appear on the last page of every Bible. So the very last name Jesus gives himself is invested with the idea he's coming.

He's returning. The darkness is over. The day is coming. Dawn is upon us. Isn't that wonderful? You can trust Jesus, folks. You can trust him when he says he's coming again.

[21 : 47] Now finally, if Jesus is coming again and we can trust him, third point, what are the implications? Well, it's very sobering actually, the implications mentioned in this passage.

The implications are this. There is a judgment, a welcoming, and a separation. Verse 11. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.

It's sort of a confusing verse, isn't it? Because it feels like it's kind of saying, hey, evil people, keep going. Keep doing it. Holy people, you as well.

It's not saying that. It is a declaration of what eternity will look like. Remember the beginning of the Bible.

Let's go right back to the beginning of the Bible. God said, let there be light. It's a declaration. Let there be light. Here the declaration is, let the evildoer still do evil, let the holy still be holy.

[22 : 54] What is this talking about some more? Let's dig a little bit deeper here. So after Christ comes, he will make a new heaven and a new earth. He will renew everything. But before that happens, he will judge.

He will judge. He will destroy evil. And when he judges, there will be a separating of people. And after that, change will be impossible.

People will be in a permanent state of righteousness with Christ for eternity, or people will be in a permanent state of unrighteousness away from God for eternity.

That's what a verse 11 means. So there's no opportunity to repent in hell. Hell is a place where people's, a person's desire to be without God.

That desire, it's almost like God is honoring that decision for eternity. So there's not going to be people in hell going, oh, look, I should have repented, I should have followed Jesus.

[23 : 58] No. Eternity will be full of people. Hell will be full of people still shaking their fists at God, angry at God, not wanting anything to do with them. You will exist in that state eternally. So Christ will return.

Christ will judge. He will separate. You'll be in the city gates, the passage says, or you'll be outside the city gates. That's verse 14 and 15. So this, this promise of Christ's return, the implication, it's good.

It's very sobering, isn't it? I mean, it's a warning for us that aren't following Jesus. It is a warning. But it's also a promise to those who do belong to Christ that once you are with him, you can't fall out of heaven.

So I think that's the big implication of the second coming. Verse 14 is very helpful here. It reminds us how we become people who are inside the gates because that sounds better than the other option, right?

Now you can do a couple of things on judgment day when you meet God. You can present your good works to God and say, I've lived a really good life.

[24 : 58] I've, well, I've lived, I mean, obviously there's a few things, but I've done pretty, I've done above average. I've done above average. I'm pretty good. Folks, you'll be facing the holiest of holiest beings that's ever existed.

And you're pretty good won't cut it. How do we get into heaven? What do we present to God? We present Christ's goodness, not our own.

That's what the verse says when it says, blessed are those who wash their robes. What does that mean? It's not like, blessed are those who kind of get dressed up for Jesus like we might do on a Sunday morning. The robes in Revelation refer to the righteousness of Christ.

So it's saying when you meet God and you do it now, you wrap yourself in the goodness of Jesus. You wear his goodness. You trust that Jesus lived the life that you couldn't live. You trust that Jesus died for the things that you did wrong.

It's like a coat you wear. It's like a robe you wear. You trust in your own ability to get into heaven. It won't fly. It won't work. You trust in the life and death of Christ. That's what you do. That's what that's saying.

[26 : 09] That's what that's saying. Now, before we finish here, we are not in that permanent state yet of unholiness or holiness. There is time to change.

There is the time to make a radical change in direction in your life. God is immeasurably patient. So in the meantime, before Christ's return, there is this wonderful invitation right at the end there, verse 17, to come.

An opportunity to change the direction of your life, to change your eternal destiny in doing so. Actually, there are four invitations if you read it. Let me read it to you, verse 17. And the spirit of the bride and the spirit and the bride say, come, and let the ones who hear say, come, and let the one who is thirsty come, and let the one who desires to take the water of life without price.

So the first two are prayers for Jesus to come. Jesus come. Jesus come. The second two are invitations directed at Christians to come to Jesus. So we pray, Christ, come again.

And in the meantime, we keep coming to Jesus. That's what verse 17 is about. It's a model for Christian hope. Now, let me conclude. Main points of our passage, you heard them, Christ will return.

[27 : 20] We can trust him because of who he is. And there are sobering implications of that return. So, let's live well. Now, I'll finish here with just a few remarks on just the final sort of verse and a half here.

And I love the way the passage ends. Verse 20, 21. Surely I'm coming again soon, says Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. That's how it ends.

That's how the whole book ends. I love how Revelation finishes, actually, because it ends like the start of the book. There are no visions here. We're back in the real world. It's like we're kind of, you know, John's finishing up the book and he's in a room writing it and it's going to be read out in somebody's living room and he's writing to these small, struggling churches in what is modern-day Turkey.

And right at the end, he doesn't finish the book by sort of, you know, here's the final piece of the puzzle to unlock the code to work out a time. No, none of that. He, it ends with a promise.

I'm coming soon. Our great hope. It ends with great hope. It ends with a prayer. A prayer that we should pray. Come, Lord Jesus. And it ends with a blessing. Grace. In the meantime, endure.

[28 : 34] I will give you the strength to do that. There you go. That's revelation. Amen.