**FAMOUS LAST WORDS**

**CHAPTER 22**

One of the joys of being a Christian is looking forward to the bright future that we’ve been studying about the last few weeks. Based on what the Bible tells us we know it’s going to be wonderful. But our minds just can’t fathom how wonderful it’s going to be. I’m reminded of the story of the 1st grade teacher who asked her class, “How many of you all want to go to heaven?” Everyone raised their hand except for one little boy. The teacher asked him, “Billy, don’t you want to go to heaven when you die?” He looked up with a sense of relief and said, “When I die? Yeah. I thought you meant right now?” We all want to go to heaven, to be sure, but we’re just not in a big hurry to get there. I believe that if we could grasp the majesty of heaven and the joys of our eternal existence, we would find ourselves looking with eager anticipation and excitement for that day.

In Chaps 21 & 22 we’re shown the surroundings of the new heavens and the new earth - our eternal home. Ch 21 portrays in glorious detail the beauty of that great place – the pearly gates, city of pure gold, walls of jasper and foundation adorned with a dozen precious gemstones. The city is naturally lighted with the radiant glory of God, the ever-presence of Jesus. Our earthly minds tend to want to focus on the pearly gates and streets of gold, but without a doubt the most incredible thing about our life in eternity will be seeing Jesus and having the privilege to be in His holy presence. Somehow I don’t think anything else will matter at that point. How glorious it will all be! One day we will see it with our own eyes. Until then, as Bart Millard of Mercy Me put it, “I can only imagine what it will be like when we walk by His side.” Rev 22 continues this same thought and gives us a few more details of our eternal home.

V 1-2: Then the angel 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 street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The angel to give John a tour, to show him visions of grandeur. The “river of the water of life” originates with Jesus, the Lamb. He’s the giver of eternal life. In Rev 21:6 Jesus told John, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” Eternal life is a free gift. It doesn’t cost us anything. That doesn’t mean it’s free. The last time you received a birthday present it was a gift. It was free to you. However, it was not free to the one who gave it to you. In the same way, our salvation cost us nothing but it cost Jesus His very life. It was a price He was willing to pay. Why? Because He loves us so much. So the river of life flows from Jesus.

V 2 mentions the tree of life. Where have we seen the tree of life before? Back in the Garden of Eden, Gen Ch 2. When God created man it was His desire that man live forever in perfect fellowship with Him in a garden paradise. That’s what God wanted. The tree of life was placed there to eat. Man was told he could eat of it and by doing so, by eating its fruit, man could live on indefinitely. But then Adam and Eve sinned and ate of the one tree that had been forbidden by God to eat, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God sent them out of the garden and stationed a cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Banished from the Garden of Eden, mankind no longer had access to the tree of life or to the direct fellowship with God that he enjoyed before. Natural death came to all mankind and to all living creatures.

In the new heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the tree of life is reintroduced. It is a new and improved version of the original tree in Genesis. It is now bearing not just one, but twelve kinds of fruit. Also, it will bear fruit all year not just in certain seasons. So tell me, what is the purpose of fruit? To look at and admire? No, fruit is to be eaten. Even though the tree of life is spoken of in the singular, we know there will be more than one tree of life because it says it is on either side of the river. Eating of the tree of life, as was the case in the Garden of Eden, sustains life indefinitely. This fulfills the promise Jesus made in Rev 2:7: “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

For me personally, eating is one of this life’s pleasures. So I’m glad there will be eating in heaven. We already knew there would be eating in heaven because back in Rev 19 just before His return, Jesus invited His bride to sit down with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Also, let me remind you that when Jesus was in His resurrected, glorified body soon after His resurrection He sat on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and ate breakfast with His disciples (John 21:9-13). So even in our glorified, eternal bodies we will have the ability and desire to eat.

The last part of verse 2 mentions that the leaves of the tree of life will be used for the “healing of the nations.” That does not mean there will be any sickness in heaven. The word healing here is better translated as “health.” The fruit of the tree will provide life and the leaves, which are also edible, will provide good health.

V 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.

The curse that God placed on mankind because of Adam and Eve’s sin is completely removed. The unlimited potential that God had for His creation can now be realized. We will be servants of God for an eternity. No longer will men and women have divided loyalties and be sidetracked by the pleasures of this fallen world. We will be completely focused on Him. *[note: I believe this verse debunks the notion of a repeat of the Fall of man]*

V 4: They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Two glorious thoughts here: First, we will be able to see Him. Today He is the invisible God. Oh yes, we sense His presence and we know He is real and we know He is near. But we cannot physically see Him. That is something that not even Moses could do while he was in his earthly body. God told Moses, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live” (Exo 33:20). In eternity, however, “we shall be like Him for we will see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). As Sandi Patti put it, “we shall behold Him in all of His glory!”

The second thing we see in v 4 is that we are going to be given a new name. God’s family name will be on our foreheads. This is an action by God mentioned back in Rev 7:3. What is this new name? We don’t know yet. It’s a mystery. This fulfills the promise Jesus made to the overcomers in Rev 3:12: “I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and My own new name.” We call ourselves “Christians,” meaning we identify ourselves with Christ. However, even though we call ourselves Christians we go by a variety of names, names like Aldridge, Nowakowski, Sudbury, Mountain and Wilcox. In the eternal kingdom we will all have a new name – His name. We will be so identified with Him that we will literally bear His name as a bride takes on the family name of her husband.

V 5: And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

As we discussed last week in Ch 21, God Himself who is light will be the eternal light source. There will be no need for the sun, moon or stars or any artificial light. The radiant glory of God will be sufficient.

So we see water, trees, fruit and light mentioned here in Ch 22. They exude a sense of beauty and warmth. As nice as the pearly gates, streets of gold, stone foundations and great expanse of the new Jerusalem mentioned in Ch 21 sound, I must admit they leave me with a rather hard and cold image of our eternal home. I am thankful for the softer and warmer balance given here in this chapter.

Yes, the place that God has prepared for us will offer a wonderful life, a life of fellowship with Him, a rest from our labors here on earth, a life of full knowledge of God, a life of holiness, a life of service, a life of abundance, a life of glory, and a life of worship. What awaits us will be far beyond our wildest imagination.

Well, with that the vision of heaven and eternity concludes. Now John awakens from the vision and he finds himself back in his present reality, on the Island of Patmos, once again a prisoner of Rome. And so it is with us as well. We are stuck here on this old earth. We’re not home yet! The angel who had been John’s tour guide into the future now offers John some words of encouragement. They are words of comfort to all of us.

V 6: 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.”

Then the angel reminds John of what Jesus told the church at Philadelphia in Rev 3:11. The angel quotes Jesus…

V 7: “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

There may be a lot we do not understand from Revelation. But one thing is made clear. This book is the only book that promises a blessing to those who read it. Though the images may be a little bit foggy in places, the message is clear: “Get right with God while there is still time, for time is running out. JESUS IS COMING SOON! Whether it be by the rapture of the church or thru death, Jesus is coming soon to take us home.

V 8-9: 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 the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

This is actually the second time John forgets himself and begins to worship an angel. It happened back in Rev 19:10. Again, he is commanded not to worship angels. There is only ONE who is worthy of our worship and that is God Himself – Father, Son and Spirit. Angels, mighty and awesome as they might be to us mere mortals, are merely God’s messengers. Like us, they’re servants of the Most High.

V 10: And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”

This book has an important message that must get out to all people. People out there need to hear it! The reason for the urgency is stated: “for the time is near.” The clock is ticking. The sands of the hour glass are slowly falling. The countdown to eternity is winding down fast.

V 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.”

Simply stated, when Jesus comes to get us, and He will, there will be no more opportunity for repentance. He will come to get us in the twinkling of an eye via the Rapture or physical death. Psalm 23:4 promises us, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for Thou art with me.” Whatever and whoever we are when our time here on earth is up, whether we are good or bad, filthy or righteous. Whatever we are at that moment, we will be for all of eternity. I cringe to think how many procrastinators there are in hell right now simply because they said, “Maybe next week” or “Let me think about it some more.” What’s there to think about? The choice is simple – an eternity with the Lord described in Chaps 21 and 22 or an eternity in fiery torment.

V 12-13: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Every person will one day be held accountable for how they have responded to Jesus. It won’t be a judgment where God weighs our good works and our bad works and whichever way the scale tips determines our eternal destination. That’s a lie from Satan that most of the world believes. There’s really only one thing that will matter – what did we do with Jesus?

V 14-15: 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.

Remember, John is back in the reality of his present time. The vision he received of the eternal kingdom and the heavenly city are over. If you want to enter the heavenly city you must have your robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (placing your faith in the work of Jesus). If you don’t then, bottom line, you will not be able to enter the heavenly city.

V 16-17: “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.

Right up to the very end Jesus issues His invitation to come to Him. This is the same message that we the church are telling the world. The wedding feast has been planned. The price has been paid. The table has been set and the food prepared. There is plenty of room for everyone. The invitations have been and continue to be sent out to everyone… “Come.”

But not everyone who gets an invitation will say “yes.” You’ll hear every excuse in the book why they can’t make it. “Sorry, but I am just too busy.” “No, not today. Maybe some other time.” “Not interested,” “Too many hypocrites will be there.” To come or not is everybody’s personal choice. But the invitation is wide open… for now. That will not always be the case.

The Book of Revelation has a warning label attached to it. Here it is:

V 18-19: 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.

As a Bible teacher I have tried to be very careful how I taught this book. I read this warning before I began the study. I knew what it said. I have tried very hard to focus on the all-important central message of the book. Those mysterious hidden meanings and symbols found in this book can be debated until the cows come home. The most important thing is that we are prepared for eternity. It is my prayer that you are.

V 20: He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The last words of our Lord this side of eternity are contained in this verse. His famous last words are simply, “I am coming soon.” To which a hopeful and expectant John basically replies, “Hurry back, Jesus!”

V 21: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

A traditional closing to a most remarkable book. What a journey it’s been. May God bless the reading and study of His holy Word!