

A reading from the book of Revelation 22, verses ten through 21.

And he said to me do not seal up the words of the prophecy of the book. Time is near. Let the evil doer still do evil and the filthy still be filthy and the righteous still do right and the holy still be holy.

See, I am coming soon. My reward is with me to repay. According to everyone's work, 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 will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony. 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 everyone who hears say Come and let everyone who is thirsty come. Let everyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. I warn everyone who hears the words of this prophecy of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, god will add to that person the plagues described in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, god will take away from that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book. The one who testifies to these things says surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Please stand for the reading of the Gospel. A reading from John 17:20 through 26. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them glory that you gave me that they may be one, as we are one, I, them and you and me, so that they may not be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those who have given me to be with you where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know you and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them.

And that I myself may be in them. The word of the Lord.

Would you join me in prayer for our young people as they get ready to go off to Kids Alive? Father, we thank you for the children. Thank you that they're our brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you that their growth, their enthusiasm, their joy reminds us of the joy we have in you and spurs us on. We pray also that we would spur them on. Lord, bless their teachers today in every possible way. In Jesus name, amen. All right, kids, you are dismissed. To Kids Alive. We really look forward to you coming back, though. I'm going to grab my water. And, Father, now we pray as your word is opened, that the full impact of it would find its way into our hearts, that the purposes for which it was written would be fulfilled, that you would be honored and glorified, that our lives would be changed and shaped more and more into the image of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Really is a beautiful day, isn't it? But it's not been a beautiful week. It's just been a hard reminder of the darkness of this world. I think Ford Jordan really summed it up well in a letter that he sent to his pastoral letter he sent to his congregation this week.

He says, as a pastor, it's always a little hard for me to figure out which tragedies rise to the level of requiring acknowledgment and pastoral care and which tragedies don't. The reality is that there are devastating things that happen every day in this fallen and broken world, all of which deserve to be grieved. Some get picked up by the news. Many don't. If we acknowledged and lamented them all, we'd be swept away by a flood of devastating brokenness. It's more than our souls can bear. I think a flood is actually a really good image for the devastation that results when tragedies like this occur in an instant, lives are swept away. In the aftermath, families and communities that have been destroyed are left to pick up the remnants of their ruined lives. It has been a hard week for Uvaldi and for all of us. Sums it up well. It's a hard week, but tragedies give particular relevance to the commands of

Scripture. In Ephesians five, Paul writes and exhorts the Christians to live as wise in this dark world, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. And today we come to the final page of the final book in the Bible, the Book of Revelation.

And here, in some sense, we receive similar counsel. Revelation, as I've told you, is a book about worship. But how can you worship unless you truly believe that God ultimately will bring the victory over sin and death and darkness and evil? And we believe that John believed that. And so the Book of Revelation rightly ends with a prayer. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. It's a prayer of invitation. It's a prayer saying we long for the day when all this darkness is completely swept away, when we never have to hear of another crazy person, evil person, snuffing out life. Come, Lord Jesus. That's our prayer. It's a prayer of every true and believing Christian, and yet it's a prayer that we pray, I think, with some conflicting emotions, right? I have those conflicting emotions when I think about Jesus coming and my desire for Jesus to come and to come soon, yet I also want him to wait a bit, right? There's still so much life left to live. I believe I've got grandkids that I want to see grow up. I'd love to be at their weddings, love to see them have kids of their own.

And I imagine if you have children, you feel the same way about them. I want Jesus to come and to come soon. But, Jesus, we're also planting a church here. We want to see this church take full root and bear full fruit. We want to see you, Lord, use this church to be a light in the world and to draw many people to you. And so I'm conflicted as I call for the Lord to come, yet I want the Lord to wait. What's that all about? What God, the scriptures say, has said, eternity in our hearts. He said, eternity in our hearts. And yet perhaps there is also a purpose for the temporal purpose, for the here and now, a purpose that God has for us to live during this dark age. And that seems to be one of the great intentions of God's inspiring the Book of Revelation in the first place. The Book of Revelation takes place during a period in history known as the PAX Romana, that is, the Roman peace, a state of comparative tranquility throughout the Mediterranean world, from the reign of Augustus Caesar in 27 BC to the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD.

About 200 years of relative tranquility in the ancient world, which is saying something, because it was preceded by 800 years of almost non stop bloodshed at the hands of the Romans, who would eventually become an empire. The Punic wars, wars between them and Carthage of North Africa, wars that would largely determine which of them would be. The empire has produced a death toll estimated at over 1.5 million. Pax Romana, the Roman peace. It was a bloody peace. And yet, in the time of Revelation, when it was written, although the ancient world was experiencing this relative tranquility, no more enemies and more big enemies really left to fight or to conquer. Still the Romans demanded that you bow the knee to the emperor. The Romans demanded that you worship their pagan gods, which did not sit well or forebode well for the Jews, nor for the Christians. And so persecution was amping up and ramping up, and Revelation was given in part to help encourage the Christians to persevere in the face of that growing persecution. And it actually helps us today it helps us today to comprehend the struggle between good and evil that continues to this day.

And whatever persecution we may experience. Mild as it is in this country, horrific as it is in Islamic countries, in communist countries, revelation is given for our encouragement. So this last section in Revelation is marked by promise and prayer and invitations. Invitations issued at every possible angle. In verse seven, Jesus says Look, I'm coming soon. In verse twelve he says it again, look, I am coming soon. In verse 17 it says 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. And then in verse 20, it says he who testifies to these things says yes, I am coming soon. To which the church responds amen. Come Lord Jesus. But woven throughout those promises, prayers and invitations are exhortations that help us understand what it means to live into these invitations, into these promises and into these prayers. And that's what we're looking at today. If you turn to Revelation 22 and look with me at verse seven, we didn't read there, we started at ten. But here Jesus says, look, I am coming soon.

Blessed. Remember that means happy. Happy is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll. Keep does not simply mean to obey. It means to treasure, means to guard, means to consider. Jesus says one of the ways we truly become a people who live into the invitation,

who live into the longing for his return, who call for Him and who receive his call, is to be a people who treasure the word of God, who hold a deer, who honor it, and who worship truly. For what happens in this moment is I. John. He writes in verse eight I'm the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and seen them, awesome as they were, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel had been showing them to me. But he said to me, don't do that. I'm a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll the angels, the prophets and you, you are no less valued in God's eyes and in fact even more so than the angels. And we're called to worship in spirit and in truth, to worship God and God alone.

That's what we have to lean into to become the people who respond to the invitation of Christ and who call out and invite Christ into our life to come. Lord Jesus, verses ten through eleven, we see some more. Then he told me, do not seal up the words of this prophecy of this scroll because the time is near. This book is written. It's a mystery, but it is now an open mystery, a mystery that God longs to share with everyone who comes. It's no longer sealed up, but it's opened through the Gospel. Jesus Christ, giving his life, unfolded the mystery to his disciples and to all who would come. And he told me, don't steal the scroll because the time is near. 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. So there is an acknowledgment of the evil in this world. There's a theological phrase called the Odyssey. It signifies that struggle to understand how God, a good God, can allow suffering. Many believe that that's not possible.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus, 300 years before Christ, claimed that the existence of evil proves that there is no God. He claimed that if God cannot stop evil, then he's not all powerful. But he then argued that if God can prevent evil but does not, then God is not good. It's a powerful argument that many people believe today. But, you know, perhaps our perspective keeps us from fully understanding it. If you think of a little child, you sometimes have to do things for that child that hurt. Sometimes it's discipline, but other times it's medicine. It's an inoculation. It's something that a child who has not yet learned to speak can't understand why Mommy and Daddy are allowing this pain to come into their life. But we know better. It's for their good. Now, I have no way of understanding how God will use all the suffering, as horrific as it is in this world, for ultimate good. But the promise is that he will, that God is so much bigger than us, so much wiser than us, that he alone can comment how he can turn evil into good and use evil for his ultimate purposes.

As evil as it is, God is good. And that's the promise. And we can only trust as children, as children trust their moms and their dads. But when he says, let the evil person continue to do evil, what's going on there? If I can find it? The one who does wrong continue wrong. Let the vile person continue to be vile. It's not that God is saying, I will this, I want this, but I permit this. I will not force people to love me. I will not force people to do right. The choice is there. And in one sense, he's saying it as an encouragement to us, to the Christians in the time of Rome. Let the Romans continue to persecute. Let them continue to do what is vile, to burn Christians alive, let them continue that. But you, my brothers and my sisters, continue to do what is right. You who are holy, who have been made holy by my Son, continue to be holy. That's the exhortation to us. And Jesus promises it's worth it. Look at verse twelve. Look, I am coming soon. I am going to deal with all of this. My reward is with me and I will give to each person according to what he has done.

Note that. He says it's my reward, not your reward. Jesus comes with his reward. The victory that he won at the cross over sin and death and evil is his. But like a conquering king, he shares the spoils with his children, with those who have believed, and he gives to each one according to what he has done. Now, sometimes Christians look at this and they go, oh, there are some things I've done that I'm ashamed of. What's God going to do with those? You know what God's going to do with those? Jeremiah, the prophets saw it. He said, I will forgive their iniquity and their sin and I will remember them no more. At the judgment day, when true believers stand before the throne of God, there is not one sin that will be brought up into your face, not one remembrance of failures or habits or things you couldn't shake. But what will be remembered there is this your worship, your ministry, your life of faith, your response to the invitation of the Lord Jesus that you drank from the water of life and that you sought to share that water with others, to refresh them, to raise your children in the Lord.

He will give according to what you have done. He will say, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison, you visited me. That's the promise. His reward is with Him. And some people say, well, isn't that just a license for us to sin? Right? If all is forgiven, then I can kind of sin with impunity, can't I? Far be it, far be it from our minds that we would think that instead the invitation is come, follow me, come be like me. And out of sheer gratitude that all our sins have been washed away and we've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb we follow, and by God's grace we become more and more like Jesus in this world. That's why it's written in verse 14 blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. That's what takes place in worship every Sunday. As we confess our sins, as we come to take the body in the blood, as we remind ourselves that we are cleansed, that we are washing our robes in the blood of Jesus, and rather than being bloody, they're washed pure and clean.

That's the promise. Blessed are those who wash their robes, for outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. Verse 15 is not intended to be a warning. It could be, should some unbeliever read this, god willing, it would be. They'd read this and say, I don't want to be on the outside. But what it is is it's encouragement to believers. It's an encouragement to parents in Uvaldi, right, in Uvaldi, Texas, who believe in the Lord Jesus, that their children are with Him, that they no longer have to face the evils of this world, and that when the parents come through those evils, they'll come through the gates and see their children there. And what a glad reunion it will be, will be the murderers. Outside will be the bloodthirsty who put to death by the sword, those who believed. But inside, all will be safe and good and true. And this promise is sealed for us by Jesus, who died for us. In verse 16, he says it, I, Jesus. This is emphatic. I, Jesus, have sent my angel. By the way, it's the only time Jesus refers to himself by his name.

You read through the Gospels, he never says, I Jesus. This is the first time he says, It's me. I Jesus. I want you to know the Jesus you walked with, John, the Jesus who sweat and bled among you, the Jesus who you saw weep eye Jesus, I'm telling you, the Jesus who bought for you salvation upon the cross, I've done it. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David and the bright morning star. He calls to mind Psalm 34, or Psalm 110 rather, where David writes, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. And the rest of that psalm goes on to talk about the might of the Lord and his power. And now he's going to trample down his enemies and crush kings on the day of his wrath. And he'll judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. And it can cause us as a church to have a very violent picture of the end, right? But what do we see in the Book of Revelation, Jesus rides out on a horse, ready for war, and there's a sword coming out of his mouth.

That sword is the word of God. And Jesus, unlike the Caesars, never triumphed with an earthly sword. He triumphed by the word of his mouth. The Caesars demanded the blood of others. Jesus gave his blood. So I don't know how it's all going to work at the end. I trust that the dogs will be on the outside and the people of God on the inside. But I think we have to understand that when we see the Scriptures talking about that sword, that we wield a sword today, you and I, have been given the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And it's with that word that we triumph and conquer. It's with that word that we cut down the enemy, Satan. It's with that word that hearts are pierced and lives are changed and our own lives are sculpted and crafted more and more into the image of Jesus. So now hear the invitation in verse 17, the spirit of the bride say, come. 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 to which the Church says at the end, amen.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. So I want to close with these words from an old retired pastor named Lee Eklov. He tells the story of Dr. Joe Stowell talking to a friend of his, Ben Wood, who had founded the Shepherd's Home in Wisconsin for boys and girls with developmental disabilities. He said, I remember Bud asking me one time, hey, Joe, do you know what our biggest maintenance problem at Shepherds is? I have no idea, I replied. Dirty windows, he said. Our kids press their hands and faces against the windows because they're looking to the sky to see if today might be the day that Jesus will return for them, take them to his home, where they will be healed and complete. So Pastor Lee writes, let us run to the window lest we lose heart. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud

command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we are still alive and are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

At the signal of the Father, he writes, Jesus Christ will rise from his sapphire throne, pass through the arches of glory, pass the altar of sacrifice stained by his own blood, pass the altar of incense fragrant with the pleading prayers of the saints, past the awesome living creatures who worship Him night and day and summoning a great archangel and the angel hosts to accompany him. He will cross once again the great gulf fixed between heaven and earth and step through the curtain of the sky. No need for a star to point Him out this time. No need for shepherds or wise men to spread the word this time. No disguises this time of baby flesh or swaddling clothes. This time there will be no missing his coming. Perhaps he will shout as he did when he summoned Lazarus beloved, come out. The shout of the archangel, and the trumpet call will be enough to wake the dead. Those who sleep in Christ will burst forth from their robing rooms in the earth. That's how I imagine it rising instantly through the sky to Jesus as exultant victors to their champion. Those still alive will likewise be reclosed.

And we will all be together, finally and forever. We will be caught up and away from the heavy gravity here that draws tears from our eyes and bends our souls beneath the weight of sin and sorrow, away from crippling memories and sorrows, from habits that have hobbled us and weaknesses that have hindered us. And in that moment we shall see Him in his glory, his eyes ablaze his face like the sun shining and all its brilliance. And we shall contribute to that glory more than all the angels of heaven. For we are those whom he has redeemed. We are the trophies of his treasures, of his grace. Philip Yenzi writes I know a woman whose grandmother lies buried under a 150 year old live oak tree in the cemetery of an Episcopal church in rural Louisiana. And in accordance with the grandmother's instructions, only one word is carved on the tombstone waiting. Amen. We are waiting. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.