

## Revelation 22:12-21 May 8, 2016 Important – Clear – Reminders

Kids, before you get to the end of the school year, you have to make it through something that your teachers and principals are constantly talking about! [what]? EOGs – End of Grade tests. And what do you do to get ready for them? Review. Don't worry, kids, I don't have a test to give you this morning.

Adults, it's **your** turn for a test! Let me get it out here... [act it up] No, just joking. No test taking today. But one way we might look at our time spent in the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation ch.22, is: a *wonderful* review. And the importance of knowing the answers given here [the Bible] is greater than any test's importance. Test scores will sometimes determine what schools you can make it into next, or they may help you one day land a job opportunity. But understanding the truths of God's Word makes the difference for where you will spend eternity: eternal life with God, or an eternity of hell. Friends, it's too important of a matter to get too busy with other things or distracted from this message and what it means for us. Let's review today. And not only today – but every day.

What are the goals of a review? You've heard these truths before. But to remind you of what you've learned, to make sure you've got the facts and you've got them all clear... you review. And if the subject being studied is something you love? Then the review isn't work – it is wonderful!

### Revelation 22:12-21: read verses

<sup>12</sup>“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. <sup>13</sup>I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

<sup>14</sup>“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. <sup>15</sup>Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

<sup>16</sup>“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you <sup>17</sup>this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

<sup>17</sup>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.

<sup>18</sup>I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. <sup>19</sup>And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

<sup>20</sup>He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

<sup>21</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

**Let's pray as we get going:** Lord, as we study your Word, impress ever more deeply and richly into our hearts and minds the answers to the most important questions of life. Increase our appreciation for you, the Giver of all that is true and good, and strengthen the grip (of our faith) with which we hold onto your lasting treasures, so that we never lose them. Amen.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> review question to be answered in these verses is... **What is the way to eternal life? (How is one saved?)**

As we answer this from Revelation ch.22, I want you to have in view a couple of the most important principles – rules we follow – in order to properly understand the Bible:

- “No part of the Bible will contradict any other part of the Bible.” All of its words are in agreement with each other. “The Word of the Lord is flawless.” And so it follows...
- “We let the Bible explain the Bible.” That is to say: if there is a passage that seems hard to understand, we use other Bible passages, to make sure we’ve got it straight.

I put these out here to you because we come to a phrase, right away in vs.12, that if taken out of context could easily lead to a wrong answer for our 1<sup>st</sup> question. Do Jesus’ words, “I will give to everyone according to what he has done,” mean that we have to do something, in order to gain eternal life with God? God’s answer is clearly and emphatically: No! How do we know that? No part of the Bible will contradict another; & we let the Bible explain the Bible. So let’s do this...

Starting at vs.12, what words in this very verse indicate that we aren’t saved by what we do? Jesus says, “My reward is with me.” His reward isn’t what WE earned. It’s what HE earned for us by His perfect life and death. Isaiah 40:10 tells the same: “His reward is with him.” That’s in a section where God also says, “I am your Redeemer. I save you. I, only I, am he who blots out your sins, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

Look beyond vs.12. What words in the rest of this section confirm that we are saved only by what God has done for us? Look at vs.17: The Holy Spirit’s message is: “Come! Take the gift of the water of life. Gratis! It’s free to you!” “Water of life” stands for the eternal life which Jesus gives. How much do you have to pay or do, in order to get it? Nothing. It’s a gift.

Look back to vs.14: we find a description of those who have received this gift: “blessed are those who wash their robes; they have access to the tree of life and the city.” “Access to the tree of life” and “to the city” of God are again descriptions of eternal life. Notice: everyone in this group is pictured as washing their robes. What does this tell you? Every individual in this group is admitting the sins that stain us each day. And we recognize the only way for our sin to be washed from our record is through what Jesus has done for us.

That confession of sin and trust in Jesus is the thing that separates us, believers, from those left out of eternal life with God. In vs.15 we’re told about those who have been separated from God: Note the type of sins listed here.

- Sexually immoral acts: Don’t stop with those who cheat on their spouses, or “hookup” with someone. Jesus says: “Whoever looks at another person lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart.” Every impure thought about God’s gift of sex or sexuality is sin.
- Idolatry: Don’t think this just pertains to those people/cultures who bow down to the Buddha, or call on Krishna, or superstitiously worship spirits of nature or spirits of their ancestors. Anything in life that becomes more important than God is an idol. We can make idols of our money, our activities, or... our children, our spouse... and we can even make ourselves our idol when we elevate **our** will and reasoning over God’s. Failing to give God the love, trust and honor he deserves is idolatry.
- And Lying: it’s so easy to deceive ourselves into thinking there is such a thing as “a little white lie” or that the lies we tell “don’t hurt anyone.”

Every one of us must confess: we are guilty of such sins.

So what distinguishes those kept out of heaven and those allowed in? No one is excluded from God’s invitation to eternal life. The only ones left out, left to face hell, are those who don’t admit their need and those who don’t want Jesus as their source of forgiveness and life. Basically – those who lie to themselves – and even make God out to be a liar when he says, “**All** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” & “Jesus is **the Way**; there is no other.”

Admit your sin. Trust Jesus for the washing and eternal life that come to you through Him. Revelation 7:14 describes such ones: “our robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.”

So now that we've answered our first review question... How important do you think it is to be alert for people bringing a different message than the Bible's message (even while claiming what they're bringing is the Bible's message)? The "father of lies," the devil, is a master at mixing up God's Word – taking some of it, taking it out of context, poisoning what he spews out while trying to masquerade it as truth. He's got a ton of popular people to pedal his poison.

Even in the first couple decades after Jesus' ascension, as the New Testament books were being written, we hear of spiritual attacks directed at the faith of Christian individuals and groups. Such attacks challenged the heart of God's saving message: 1) groups claimed a person must contribute their own works, in order to be saved (check Galatians); 2) other people attacked the identity of Jesus as fully, truly God (Colossians ch.1-2 answers this attack).

That leads to our 2<sup>nd</sup> review question answered in our verses ... **Who is Jesus Christ? (And how does *who he is* meet our need?)**

Did you realize? The creeds – the Apostles, Nicene & Athanasian – in large part were a response to errors attacking the truth of Jesus' identity.

Don't think, "Ach! That was dealt with long ago then. That's stuff I'll never have to face." All over you'll find attacks on Jesus' identity. One such claim is: Jesus never said he was God. Ever heard that error? In fact, there's this highly paid, highly sought-after speaker, a New York Times best-selling author, and that's all just his "night job." Days he works just up the interstate at UNC Chapel Hill in the Religious Studies Department. He's considered a New Testament scholar, and he goes around telling whoever will listen to his lectures or read his books: "During his lifetime, Jesus himself didn't call himself God and didn't consider himself God, and ... none of his disciples had any inkling at all that he was God." You might guess that someone in his type of position is going to make an educated, reasonable sounding argument for their claim. What if someone who reads his books comes to you? What do you have treasured up here [mind] and in here [heart], so that you're not shaken?

The devil is a master at appealing to our human reason. He calls out how sensible it is to follow what **you** think, rather than what God's Word says. So here's an important thing to keep in mind: we always place God's Word above our human reason. Are we all in agreement that God knows more than us? Yes. His Word is 100% trustworthy and true. And He is able to do more than we can comprehend.

Look at what Jesus says about himself here in Revelation ch.22. Who is He? In vs.13... think of what Jesus is claiming when he says: "I am the Alpha and Omega... the First and the Last, the Beginning and End." He is saying: "I was there when nothing else existed." What He is laying claim to is the title eternal. He is saying, "I am God."

He again identifies himself as God in vs.1. Now he says: "I am the root of David." Put this in perspective: David lived at about 1,000-900 B.C. And yet Jesus was David's Creator, his source. In the very same breath, Jesus identifies that He is: "the offspring of David." When just the right time came, God the Son took on human flesh - conceived and then knitted together in Mary's womb. He became fully human, in order to save us. Jesus taught this same truth during his ministry. This isn't suddenly new in the last book of the Bible. He explained the prophecies about the Christ, the Savior: how the prophecies foretold that the Christ would be David's descendant, but also clearly identified Him as David's Lord (Matthew 22:41-46). So who is Jesus? He is True God & True Man in one.

This is all directly tied to our first question: how are we saved? He meets our need: "He had to be made like us in every way... in order that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). But no mere man could make the payment to free us from sin and give us eternal life. Psalm 49 after stating that goes on to conclude: "But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself" – i.e. God will make the payment to take away my sin and give me eternal life. You see how important Jesus identity is? If he is not truly,

fully God, His life/death can't count for the whole world – and we would be lost. If He is not fully, truly human like us, He can't take our place – and we would be lost. But He did take our place. And He is true God.

Can you already guess the devil's next move (if we've got the truths so far clear)? Can you hear his next appeal? "Right. Right. There are certain truths of the Bible that are non-negotiable. But when people fall into errors about less important teachings of the Bible, we should just let some things go. Those who are sticklers about every teaching of the Bible just divide and cause problems. Jesus after all talks about unity among his followers." Do you see the tricky point in this devilish line-of-thought: Who are the ones whom you'll hear stating such things? You'll hear this from within "Christian" circles.

How would you answer the claim, "We all believe in Jesus. So what difference does it make if some among us don't believe that the earth was created in 6-days (because the scientists they listen to say life evolved up over millions & billions of years)? Does it really matter if I don't believe that Jonah was swallowed by a large fish and spit up alive 3 days later (because that sounds impossible)? This is what you'll hear from others. But what does God in His Word say? Review question #3 today is:

### **How dangerous is tampering with God's Word – this book [Bible]?**

Kids, let's have you come up and help show the answer to this one. Vs.18-19 tell us: "Don't add to or subtract from" what we have in the Bible. How important is this? Let's try out some examples of what can happen even if small changes are made to the message.

- What does it say? "Sing a lot!" Can I have volunteer? I'm going to direct your hand, we're going to cover up just one letter. Now what message do you see? "Sing a lot!" ["g" is removed] Is that a big change? Would you agree with "Sing a lot to the Lord"? Yes. Would you agree with "sin a lot"? No.
- Another example: "Learn my love." Obviously God wants us to learn about His love for us. Can I have a volunteer? I'm going to have you tear at the line here, now what message do we have? "Learn my love." ["L" is removed] Does our God ever tell us we have to do things to earn his love? No. That can't be, because as we've heard again today: the Lord freely gifts to us the water of life, which means eternal life with him in heaven. It would be a lie to say, "We have to earn God's love and forgiveness." Trust Jesus only.

Is it just as dangerous to add anything to God's Word? Let's use an example again:

- What does our example say? "I ate a lot." You may say this after a family gathering, where everyone brought different dishes to share. Can I have a volunteer? I'm going to have you hold this up, right here. Now what's the message: "I hate a lot." ["h" added]

Our examples show how small changes – additions or subtractions – can make a huge difference. [Ok, kids, you can get back to your seats. Thank you for your help.]

God doesn't think any changes to His Word are insignificant. Why? He explains errors/false teachings are like gangrene. They are always harmful. If they are allowed to remain, they spread - they grow. So they are always deadly dangerous to our faith in Jesus. He says for us to: 1) warn those who make changes to God's Word; 2) don't join with them; in fact, separate from them. Why? God loves you. He doesn't want you hurt by the influence of the false teachings. And God loves them and others, so He doesn't want you or me to indicate any kind of approval or support for false teachings. God's love is at the heart of all he tells us.

### **Final question to be answered in our verses: What comfort does our God leave us with? What's the subject of the last sentence of the Bible?**

"The grace of the Lord Jesus." That is His undeserved love given to you. The grace of the Lord Jesus is with you, dear child of God. And may it remain with you. The Spirit's message to you is: Come! Do you know your failures all too well? Are you drained from your daily struggle with sin? Come, weary one! Bring all your guilt and sin. Are you thirsting for the righteousness you lack, the righteousness Jesus has and gives you? Come! Keep on drinking in this refreshment of forgiveness and life in Jesus! It's God's gift to you! Amen.