

What We Believe about the End Times
Revelation 22:12-17

Okay, here's the scenario. You are sixteen years old again. Whoohoo! And your parents tell you they are going out of town for a few weeks. Whoohoo!! The fridge is stocked and here's some spending money if you need anything. Whoohoo!!! BUT they have had cameras installed all over the house. Uh oh. And depending upon how you act while they are gone, you will be rewarded when they get home. So, what do you do? How do you act?

Do you go ahead and have that wild party, knowing you will get in trouble, but it'll be worth it? Or do you make your bed and do your homework and act like a normal human being hoping the reward will be worth it?

I ask these questions because that is very close to the actual scenario that we are all in right now. We live in a world where God is watching everything we do. He hears every conversation and even every thought. He sees what we do in the dark and in the light and one of these days, sometime very soon, Jesus is coming back and He will give us what we deserve. Does that scare you or delight you? It should do one or the other.

We have a lot to cover today so let's get right to it. Grab your Bibles and turn to the very last page. No, not the maps. The Book of **Revelation chapter 22**. It's the last chapter of the last book. You may have heard somebody say, *"I've read the end of the book and it's gonna be ok."* Well, here we are and they are right. But it's going to be more than okay if you are a true believer and follower of Jesus. If not, it is most definitely not going to be okay as we will read here as well.

The Book of Revelation is written by the Apostle John who was exiled to the island of Patmos as an old man for believing in Jesus. But here he is shown and told some amazing things by angels and by Jesus Himself about how the last days of this earth are going to be played out. He was told to write it all down and describe it the best he could and was given a blessing to pass along as well for all who read and study this amazing book.

If you have never read this before and never heard any of this before, it may sound like a crazy comic book that somebody made up after eating some bad pizza or something. But as you read it and study it you will see how it is all playing out right in front of our eyes and even more so in the crazy days we are living in now. So, buckle up and let's see what we believe about the end times as the Bible tells us.

Let's read **Revelation 22:12-17** to start but we will be all over the place so keep your Bibles handy. We pick up with Jesus saying these words, *"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 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. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16 "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." 17 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."*

With this whole series about what we believe, the hardest part for me, by far, has been trying to explain what we believe in enough detail without blabbing on for three hours. That's hard to do when you try to explain what we believe about God or salvation or the church but when it comes to the end times, it's impossible. The Bible speaks a lot about what to expect in the last days and it is way more than, *"When you die, if you are a good boy or girl, you will go to Heaven and wear a robe and strum a harp."* That's not it at all.

But the first question we need to answer is, are we really living in the last days? And how do we know? Well, scripture tells us what to look for in the last days. If you were sixteen and your parents had been gone a couple of weeks and you

heard the garage door opening, you would think, *“You know, maybe I ought to start cleaning this place up.”* Right? Well, that’s just about where we are in the history of the world.

Matthew 24 tells us that no man knows the hour when Jesus will return so don’t let anybody ever give you a date for it. If somebody sets a date for the rapture, you can be sure it will not happen on that date. But we have some ideas about what to look for. Also in **Matthew 24**, Jesus gives us a list of things to expect to see happen before the rapture. They include religious deception, false messiahs, wars, ethnic and racial problems, famines, pestilence and earthquakes, the persecution of Christians and the apostasy or falling away of the church. And there will also be world-wide Gospel proclamation. And we are seeing all of this with increasing intensity.

We also know that, as **2 Timothy 3** says, *“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy...etc.”* And we are seeing that with increasing intensity. What about what **Isaiah 5** says about, *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil”*? We have that like never before. We just got through June that was designated “Pride Month” by the homosexuals. They celebrate what God calls an abomination like never before calling it good and wonderful and normal. How much longer will God allow that? So, yea, we are in the last days. I think I hear the garage door opening up right now.

So, the next question is, what happens next? Well, according to scripture, the rapture is the very next thing to happen. There are no other events that need to happen or prophecies that need to be fulfilled. The very last prophecy was Israel becoming a nation again and that happened in May of 1948 as Isaiah and others predicted. So, now we are just waiting. But one of these days...someday soon...maybe today...maybe before I finish this message...you will be driving your car or maybe you’ll be asleep. Maybe you will be at work or having dinner and in an instant, poof! You will be caught up in the air with Jesus Himself headed to Heaven!

How do I know this? Paul told the Corinthian church in **1 Corinthians 15**, *“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed—52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”* He is saying not everybody is going to die. If God allows us to live a little while longer, some of us may actually not see death but will just be caught up. The word is “rapture” and it means to be caught up quickly, almost violently like you would snatch up a jack if you ever played that little game. (I know. I need a new illustration.) And that could happen at any moment and you should live your life like you expect it to happen at any moment.

Now, that long introduction brings us back finally to our passage this morning where Jesus says, *“Y’all watch out because I’m coming soon and I am bringing your rewards with me.”* Now, I don’t know how this is going to work exactly. I don’t know how Jesus is going to catch me up in the air and present me with my new bass boat and new pickup and the keys to my new mansion and all that other stuff. But Jesus is God and can do whatever He wants so I just believe it. The hard part for me to believe, honestly, is that He would reward me at all. But that’s another story. I need to move on.

Jesus said that He is bringing our rewards with Him but understand that He is not talking to everybody. He says the ones He is talking to are the ones who have washed their robes. I don’t know about you but I rarely wear a robe and I don’t know when I washed it last. But this is actually a symbolic way of describing true Christians. In **Revelation 7:14**, it talks about those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. If you truly believe that the death of Jesus paid the price for your sins, you are considered to have washed your robes in His blood.

But then Jesus gives us a representative list of people who will not make it to Heaven. In **verse 15**, He says those who practice magic arts. He’s not talking about people who do magic for entertainment. The word is “pharmacos” in the original Greek and we get our word “pharmacy” from it. Occultists and the drug addicts who go along with that are excluded from Heaven. So are the sexually immoral which means anything except a man and a woman in marriage. The murderers and idolators are out. As are the liars. This is not saying that anyone who has ever done any of these things can’t go to Heaven. He is talking about those who make that their lifestyle and are unrepentant of it.

So, what happens to those people who don't get raptured to Heaven? Well, what happens next is way different for those left on earth and for those of us in Heaven. I'll try to touch just briefly on what happens here on earth just so you know what scripture says about it. After the rapture, the anti-Christ will come on the scene and he will explain what happened to all us Christians with some huge lie but people will believe it. You can read about that in **Revelation 13** and **Daniel 9**.

I believe that the anti-Christ will come on the scene and usher in the seven years of tribulation. He will have all the answers to peace and hunger and inflation and everybody is going to love him and want him to be their leader. And he will become basically the leader of the whole world and things will be okay for three and half years. Then this man will claim to be God and will demand everyone worship him. This is when the mark of the beast comes into play and anybody that doesn't pledge obedience to the anti-Christ can't get the mark and so can't get food or shelter.

Anyone who decides to be a Christian during this time will be killed or persecuted horribly and then ultimately the whole world will go to war against Israel. But do you remember what God told Abraham wayyy back in **Genesis 12**? Speaking about the nation of Israel, God said, *"I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you."* And God never changes His mind, so I'll give you one guess as to how the Battle of Armageddon works out for those enemies of Israel.

Revelation 19 tells us that we who are with Jesus in Heaven actually get to come back to earth with Jesus and watch Him totally destroy those enemies. This is the Second Coming of Jesus and is way different than the rapture. The rapture can happen at any minute and nobody will see it happen except those of us that are involved. The Second Coming happens at the end of the tribulation and EVERYBODY will see it.

Matthew 25 and **Revelation 20** tell us that after this last battle, we will actually stay on earth for a literal thousand years in the Millennium and things will be great but very similar to the earth as we know it. But then after those thousand years, God will completely rebuild both Heaven and earth as it tells us in **Revelation 21** and **22** and we will reign with Jesus in the new Heaven as co-heirs with Jesus to all the good things God has for us.

Whew! That is a thirty-thousand foot view of the end times and does not come close to doing it justice but helps us all to remember the basics of what scripture tells us about the end times. We are living in the very end of the end times and you can expect these days to be different than what we are used to. You can expect the world to lose interest in things of God and you can expect it to be a difficult time to get people to listen to our testimonies and trust Jesus to be their Savior. And you can also expect to be persecuted for your faith. All of this should be expected by those of us that are living in the end times.

But let me just stop here and ask you a question. Have you ever been really, really thirsty? Have you ever been dangerously thirsty, like dehydrated and in desperate need of water? Can you right now feel how dry your mouth is? It gives you a headache and your lips are parched and it feels like you have cotton in your mouth, right? It's hard to think straight and all you can think about is getting some water.

Well, this world is thirsty. This world that claims there is no God; this world that marches in pride parades and riots to be able to kill babies; this world that is so angry and offended at everything acts like that because they are thirsty. They are literally, spiritually dying for lack of water and do you see what Jesus says in this last verse of our passage? In **verse 17**, Jesus 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."*

I think Jesus was remembering here talking to the woman at the well as is told in **John 4**. There we see a woman who was so spiritually thirsty she was looking for relief in the arms of husband after husband but nothing would satisfy her. And then she "just so happened" to meet Jesus and Jesus just introduced Himself and gave her the free gift of the water of life.

And do you remember what she ran back to town saying? *"Come! Come meet the Messiah! He changed my life and He can change yours!"* This verse in Revelation says the Spirit, which is the Holy Spirit of God says come. And the bride says it too. Who is the bride? The bride is the bride of Christ which is the church. That's us. That's what we are supposed to be saying to this mad and violent world who is so thirsty. They are dangerously thirsty and the only thing that will satisfy them is not winning the presidency or the congress. They won't be satisfied if the Supreme Court makes the decisions they want. They need Jesus and Jesus is coming back soon so we don't have much time to tell them and introduce them to Jesus.

So, that's what I want to do right now. I want to introduce you to Jesus if you don't already know Him. I am saying along with our church and all the other churches as well as the Spirit of God that is drawing you right now. I want to say, *"Come!"* I'm not saying come to our church although that's fine and good. I'm not asking you to come to religion. I'm not asking you to tithe or volunteer in the nursery or to DO anything. I am simply inviting you to come meet my Jesus. And do it right now because there is not much time left.

Aren't you thirsty? Don't you want some relief from the anger, the frustration, the lack of peace that comes from trying to do everything on your own? You weren't created to do it that way. Your body, your mind, your spirit are all crying out in thirst and only Jesus can satisfy that thirst. Ask Him to forgive you of all your sins. I know you have done some really bad things. God knows it too and says that if you ask, He will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Take Him up on that and then turn away or repent from that lifestyle and allow God to come into your life and change you and make you more like Him every day. Do it right now as the music plays.