

Revelation as Trilogy
The Return of the King
Chapters 22:6-21: Epilogue

Introduction: As with any good story there needs to be an epilogue in which all the loose ends are wrapped up and the main characters can deliver their final messages. This is what occurs in this portion of Chapter 22. We will hear from angels, God, Jesus and John. They will offer final thoughts which assist the reader in remembering who they are, what they are planning to do and what is required of the reader. These words will also offer a final word of hope for those who find themselves in difficult times because of their faithfulness to Jesus.

The Story: The first statement concerns the testimony that John gives in this book. Though we are not sure who is speaking to John (the assumption is that it is the Lamb/Jesus speaking to him) it is apparent that the message he delivers in this book is “trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.” In other words, people can stake their lives on the fact that God is in the process of saving the saints in the here and now and will one day offer them a place in the renewed creation. This first promise is followed by a second promise that God is coming soon and will bless whoever stays faithful.

The second affirmation of the truth of these words comes from John himself. In a sense he adds his byline to the text when he writes, “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them...” This statement is intended to carry weight because as an Apostle in the early church, and the supposed writer of the Gospel and letters of John, he is respected within the early church. Unfortunately, even at this point in the revelation process, he still does not fully understand what he has seen and heard because he falls down and worships the messenger (the angel) and not the one who sent the message. The angel then, once again, must remind John that angels, prophets and John are not greater than ordinary believers. That they are all comrades in this great salvation epic.

The angel then gives John instruction on what to do with the words and vision he has received. John is not to seal them up because people need to be reminded that of their call to remain faithful because God is at work and that God’s arrival is imminent. This affirmation is then followed by a rather odd statement, that the saints are to concern themselves with their own faithfulness and not the faithfulness of others, because people will be who they will be. All the saints need to do is to let others know what is in the book. The urgency of the letter is made clear when God, the Alpha and Omega says that he is coming soon and that only those who wash their robes (in the blood of the Lamb) will be allowed into the new city that contains the tree of life. This warning, however, is followed by an invitation from Jesus, the Spirit and the church. This invitation is for all to come and drink of the waters of life. Again, please note that Revelation is a book of both encouragement and invitation.

The book concludes with one more warning, promise and benediction. The warning is to not add anything to or take anything from the words John has recorded. To do so will cause a person to either receive the plagues in the book or to lose one’s share of the tree of life. The promise is that Jesus is coming soon. The benediction is that God’s grace goes with the saints.

Reflection: The church has long struggled with the book of Revelation. In many early editions of the canon (the official list of Biblical books), Revelation was omitted. John Calvin refused to write a commentary on it because he wasn’t sure what to do with it. Even today pastors often avoid it because of its images and ancient metaphors. The hope of this series has been to help readers see that this is a book of promise for the faithful intended to remind them that in the end God wins, and that we should never forget that reality.

Questions:

1. What do you make of the open-ended invitation to come to the water of life as a gift?
2. At the same time, what do you make of the idea that there are outsiders and insiders?
3. How do you reconcile the idea that Jesus is coming soon and yet he has not yet arrived?