

When I took a class on eschatology, which is the study of the last things, in seminary, I hoped that I would understand it all afterwards. When the class finished, I knew more, but I still didn't even know what I thought about it. When we started going through this book earlier this year, I hoped I would understand it by the end. I definitely know a lot more of it, but there is so much I don't get, and I barely know how to explain.

Maybe this is still some of you. We are finishing the book and you have forgotten almost all of it. Or you feel like you don't understand it at all. Maybe you are even more confused now than when you were when we started.

What I want you to hear this morning is that I think most people don't understand how we are supposed to understand Revelation. That our very idea of what it means to comprehend, to study, and to read the book are flawed. And so as we close the book on Revelation together. I want us to see how Jesus wants us to feel about the book. How we are supposed to think about the book? And ultimately how we are supposed to understand Revelation?

Turn with me to Revelation 22:6-21

### **I. Truly understanding Revelation means obeying it (v. 6-11).**

This is what we need to understand.

Understanding Revelation is not about mental insight.

It is not about being able to unpack or receive all of the mysteries.

It is not about being able to put it all together in a coherent system.

In the Bible, true understanding means obedience.

Verse 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."**

The letter is wrapping up and we are at the end.

So, we are reminding that these are the words of an angel.

This is the Word of God.

It is the words of Christ sent to the church.

And yes, it is about things in the future.

It is partially to prepare and tell us about the future.  
But it is not so that we can know about the future.  
It is so that we can obey and change how we live now.  
If I learn that tomorrow night will be a massive hail storm,  
And I don't put my car in the garage to prepare.  
Then knowing it was coming didn't matter.  
We are to know what takes place, not to inform but to transform us now.

Verse 7, **"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."**

This is the words of Christ.  
They may be red in some of your Bibles.  
This is the most important thing in the future.  
Jesus is coming.  
He is coming to bring resurrection and to judge the living and the dead.  
His coming is our hope.  
It is what we look forward to.

And we see that we are blessed if we keep the words of this book.  
There are many blessings in the book of Revelation.  
Many different kinds of behavior are blessed.  
Many kinds of different actions are blessed.  
No one is blessed for comprehending the mysteries.  
No one is blessed for mastering the text intellectually.  
But there is a blessing for those who keep the book.

Keeping means obeying it.  
It means applying it to your life.  
It means being transformed by the book.  
It means keeping the book in your heart.  
Meditating not on the order of the plagues, but on the commands.  
It was given to us to obey.  
We are meant to live out and practice the book, not just study the details  
and fight over the particulars.

Verse 8, **"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,"**

John reminds us of this incident again.

How when seeing the visions,

Seeing the angels and all of the glory, led him to wrongly true and worship the angel.

Because he could not help it.

He knew he needed to do something and it felt like the right response.

Verse 9, **"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."**

But the angel rebuked him.

And told him not to worship him, but only to worship God and Jesus.

Because even the apostle John himself struggles and can get things wrong.

The visions and greatness of Revelation could distract him from doing what is right, which can happen to us.

It is not just the rebuke.

He acknowledges that he is with those who keep the book.

To act like angels, to do the work of angels,

To be a partner with the angel's work on earth is to obey the book.

It is to apply Revelation to our lives.

Verse 10, **"And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."**

The prophet Daniel was commanded to seal up his prophecy.

Because it was not time for them to be fulfilled.

But also it was a very different kind of prophecy.

Daniel's was to tell the future.

Here, the focus is on us obeying.

We don't know when these things will be fulfilled or take place.  
Maybe they will be soon.  
Maybe we are wrong to see this literally and they are being fulfilled now spiritually.

But either way the time is now to obey the book.  
The time is now to keep it.  
And that is the way to truly understand.

Picture someone who is not the smartest person in the room.  
Maybe they struggle to understand and can't even really read.  
But they have heard parts of Revelation.  
Almost none of it makes sense to them.  
But one part they hear that they are to pray for Jesus to return and they do so everyday.  
And they look forward to Christ's coming.

Picture another person who is a seminary professor and a pastor.  
They have written not just a commentary on Revelation but several different books.  
They are the most respected scholar in the world and they have better answers to every question than anyone who has ever lived.  
But they are hiding an alcohol addiction and they are having an affair.

Which of these two understands Revelation?  
God's Word tells us blessed is the one who keeps the book.  
The one who obeys it.

I do not care if you understand this book intellectually.  
I do not care if you think my interpretation is all wrong and you fall into another camp.  
I do care that you obey this book.  
That you apply this book to your life.

This is why I get frustrated by people who want to send me articles about blood moons and every latest development in government or in politics. Or who obsess over how the economy will work or the mark of the beast and the antichrist.

Because none of that has anything to do with obeying the book. You can intellectually understand everything in the book and not obey it. And if you have done that, then you have missed the entire point. True understanding means that we obey it.

Verse 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."**

This seems weird, but it is telling us to be who we are.

Do what you want to do.

Evil people want to do evil.

Holy people want to be holy.

It really is an encouragement to be holy.

That we should not want to be filthy and evil.

But we should want to be righteous and holy.

So, how can we keep the book?

How can we apply the book?

By repenting of our sins.

By being holy as Christ is holy.

Let me remind of some of the things the book has called for.

Read aloud the book and listen to the book (1:3).

Remember your first love (2:4).

Do not fear any suffering or persecution ahead (2:10)

Be faithful unto death (2:10)

Hold fast to the faith (2:13)

Resist sexual immorality (2:14)

Resist false teachers (2:21)

Hold fast to the apostles teaching (2:25)

Don't have a reputation of being a Christian, but actually be one (3:2)

Remember the gospel (3:3)

Patiently endure even in trials (3:10).

Accept God's discipline (3:19)

Listen to God's voice when He speaks (3:20)

That is just in the first three chapters and I didn't mention everything.

That is more than enough to keep us busy I think.

Maybe after we master those areas of our lives, we can come back to try and understand the rest.

## **II. Truly understanding Revelation means preparing for it (v. 12-15).**

Truly understanding this means that we are living today, as if Jesus is coming tomorrow.

That we need to be living each day by changing how we act.

That we need to prepare as if Jesus really is coming to judge the living and the dead

Verse 12, **"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."**

This here tells us that Jesus is coming soon.

He is bringing the recompense.

It means that he is bringing judgment and justice

Every single person is going to be judged for how they live

Every person is going to have to answer to Jesus.

All of the people who have claimed to do things in God's name will have to answer for them.

Every pastor and prophet and would be grifter to a stood in front of people and said God told me this. We stand before God to answer for that.

So since this day is coming since one day, we will have to answer to God for what we have done that should change what we do.

We should be living today is if Jesus is going to come.

And you don't need to understand all of the intricacies.

You do not need to know if there will there won't be a rapture.

To understand the millennium or the different ways that Jesus is coming will unfold.

You do not need to understand all of the talk of reward and judgment. But you need to understand that one day we have to stand before God and so we should live differently because of that.

It's like when I am driving and I suddenly see a police car behind me the way I drive is very different because I am aware that someone is watching and the judgment could be coming

If we are nice to see and could look ahead, we would see the Jesus is coming and we need to not just drive differently, but do everything differently as if one day we have to answer

Verse 13, **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."**

This is a beautiful verse that reminds us of who Jesus is.

He is the beginning and he is the end.

Our story in the Bible begins with God and it will end with him.

Our story is humanity begin with God creating us, and it will end also with God remaking us.

We are not the ones in control of our stories. We heard not the main character.

And so we need to live as if this is the one we have to answer to.

He is worthy to be our judge.

Verse 14, **"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."**

Here this is a blessing.

This is the positive encouragement to live like Jesus is coming.

Begins by telling us that we need to wash our robes.

This is not God telling us to do our laundry.

This is symbolic language because our robes in our garments our works and who we are.

Since God says to clean ourselves up to repent turn from our sins to do what is right.

To clothe ourselves in Righteous instead of sin.

If we do so

Then there was a great reward.

Is the reward that we have heard about it is that we get to eat from the tree of life that we get to eat and live forever.

Those who put on Christ will never die.

They'll be resurrected and they will get to see that tree.

And they will get to go into the city into new Jerusalem into the new creation and the new heavens in the new Earth.

The kingdom of God and the world that God is making we're all things are new and every sad thing has come untrue. That is their inheritance. That is their future.

So this is our encouragement as we try to follow Jesus try to embrace Jesus as we try to live as if he is coming.

Remind us that we don't just do it because it's right, but there is a reward on the other side

Verse 15, **"Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."**

Those who are not prepared, and who continuing their sins, will regret it.

They will have to face the consequences of their disobedience

They will be left outside the city and they will go to eternal death.

Not everyone will be saved not everyone will be with God not everyone will experience the blessed resurrection to new life.

There will be those who face punishment

It says dogs don't think it's just being mean or rude.

It seems to me that this is talking about sinners and idolaters.

I also think of those it is said in proverbs to repent, and then return to their sin I like dogs who eat their own vomit.

We are like dogs when we keep going back to our same sins.

The sorcerers, those who think that they can manipulate God.

There certainly are those who believe they can do spells and control the universe. They will be judged.

But so will those who think that if they use the right words, they can make God do what they want.

Will be thinking if they give the right amount of money now God has to bless them.

Or you use the name of Jesus as a magic word they will not in the city and they will be judged.

Those who are sexually immoral.

Our world is rampant with this kind of sexual idolatry.

Of our maintenance of the world is that you can do whatever you want sexually and no one can tell you know and you should fulfill your heart desires because that is good and right.

They will be judged by God

Those who are idolaters.

An idolater is anyone who loves something instead of God.

We may not sacrifice children for gods of wood and stone.

But plenty of parents ignore their children for drugs and alcohol.

Or to stare at a screen instead of being present.

Or when we sin in order to get things.

We have plenty of idols and things we worship.

And so will all liars and those love lies.

We might not wanna call ourselves liars, but all of us have struggled with lying and we love lies.

Many of us love lies because we love other things more than the truth and more than Jesus.

They studies that people will deny the truth if it disagrees with something they love.

Doesn't matter if you have proof doesn't matter if it's right doesn't matter if it's true, they will love their lies more.

We need to prepare for the coming of Christ.

This does not mean turning into doomsday preppers

People who stockpile food, weapons and gold.

Then build elaborate bunkers and train so they can survive in an apocalypse.

Instead of stockpiling gold, you should stockpile good works.

Instead of hoarding food, you should fill your life with love and grace.

You should be filled not with fear but with hope that Jesus is coming and it will all be right.

We prepare by following Jesus.

We prepare by proclaiming the gospel and evangelizing to our neighbors.

We prepare by loving the kingdom that is to come more than our own nation.

That is what it means to prepare.

And that is what it means to understand Revelation.

### **III. Truly understanding Revelation means coming to Jesus (v. 16-21).**

It is impossible to understand Revelation if you do not know Jesus.

If you do not come to Jesus.

If you do not want to follow Jesus.

If you do not want to be with Jesus.

Then you do not understand this book yet.

Because the way you understand the book, is by placing yourself at the feet of Jesus.

Verse 16, **"I, Jesus, have sent my angels to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."**

Jesus tells us again that this book is from Him.

He sent the angels.  
He wants us to hear and to understand these things.  
And they are for the church.  
This book was not written for the prophets.  
It was not sent just for eschatology experts.  
It was not just for pastors and elders.  
It was for the churches.  
For the well-educated churches filled with the rich.  
And the poor and illiterate churches.  
It is for the church to hear.  
So that we can come to Jesus.

And Jesus reminds us of who He is.  
Because we are forgetful.  
He is the root and we are the branches.  
He is the descendant of David and the rightful king.  
He is the brightest star.  
How can we do anything but run to Him?

Verse 17, **"The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come."**

There are two parts here.  
First, the Holy Spirit and the church call for Jesus to come.  
This is a declared longing for Jesus to return.  
It is the prayer "Come, Lord Jesus."  
This is what the Holy Spirit prays when He groans on our behalf.  
This is what the universal church cries out in every language.

And we as those who hear should join our voices to the chorus.  
We should raise up and pray that Jesus would come.  
We should do so not just because it is right, but because we love Him.  
Because we long for Him to come.  
Because we want to see Him.

**"And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."**

We do not just pray that Jesus would come.

We make the effort to go to Him.

We hear that any who are thirsty may come to Jesus.

Any who thirst.

Any who have a deep longing in their soul to be made right.

Any who have felt the sting of sin and know that there is something wrong with them.

Any who know that they are in need of redemption.

Any who know that they are a sinner and want to be holy.

There is a fountain.

And anyone who thirsts can come and drink.

We should come to Jesus.

This is what it means to understand the book.

We come to Jesus seeking salvation.

We come to Him seeking rest.

And we can find it because He paid the price for our salvation on the cross.

Verse 18, **"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,"**

Then we get two warnings.

The first warning is that we are not to add to the book.

We are not to try and add our own thoughts on top of God's Word.

This does not mean anyone who preaches it.

Because I do not dare add my own opinions.

I am just trying to explain what these words mean.

But those who try to manipulate God's Word.

Who try to change it to fit their agenda, they will face God's wrath.

Verse 19, **"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."**

The same is true for those who try to remove things.

This is the more common temptation in our world today.

People will try to remove and take away the idea that Christ is coming.

They will try and tell us God couldn't possibly send some people to hell.

Or that not all wicked people will be punished and everyone will be saved.

Or they try to lesson the commands and demands of Jesus in the book.

Those who do so, show that they don't know Jesus.

They reveal that they do not love His words.

And they love their own words more.

Those who do so will not be welcome.

Verse 20, **"He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus!"**

One of the last words of the book is the reminder that Jesus is coming soon.

We might focus on the soon part, but we should focus on the surely.

Jesus' coming is a certainty.

We may quibble over how and when.

But He is coming.

There is no cause to doubt or wonder or dismay.

And because He is coming, we can say amen!

And we pray that He would come knowing He will.

We are only asking that He will come soon.

Verse 21, **"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen."**

I love this closing and this benediction.

It is a prayer and blessing that the grace of Jesus would be with us.

This is where the book ends and lives us.

Not with a warning but with a benediction.

It leaves us with the hope of grace.

Grace can be with you.

If you are willing to come to Jesus.

Because the gospel is the gospel of grace.

Coming to Jesus does not mean cleaning ourselves up or having to get our lives together.

It means we can come to Jesus in all of our rags and our mess.

We can acknowledge the truth about our lives that we are broken, lost, and dead in our sins.

We can come like beggars begging for a drink.

And He will show us grace.

There is forgiveness at the foot of Jesus for all who ask.

If you understand the book of Revelation, then you will come to Jesus.

You will come to ask for His grace.

And you will find it.

Where have we been this morning?

I want you see the that truly understanding the book of Revelation means obeying it, preparing for Christ's return, and coming to Jesus.

I want you to remember this the next time you read this book.

When you open it on your own, or hear it brought up.

Don't let yourself get confused or distracted by plagues, marks of the beast, or the wild images in the book.

Remember what true understanding means.

Because if you have the Holy Spirit, you can understand this book, even if you don't know what it means.