**Revelation 20-22 The Final triumph of the Lamb**

**Introduction**

What difference does it make following Jesus - if I am an office worker or a joiner, a teacher or a plumber, or whatever occupation you have? What about a retired person –does it make a difference as to how I approach the last main chapter of my life and how I adjust my sense of perspective? What about a Christian serving as a politician? I hope that each reader and hearer of this message will give a firm ‘yes’ to my questions! It does make a difference. The ‘what’ we may do in practice might be very similar to someone else who is not a professing Christian, but our motivation will surely be different. For the follower of Jesus, knowing how this world as we know it will end gives a clear vision of what we are working towards at this time with the final triumph of the Lamb. Let me illustrate this from the life of Alexei Navalny. From this world’s point of view his life ended in failure as he was poisoned on the orders of Vladimir Putin on August 20, 2020. This was no surprise as many other opposition politicians were eliminated on the orders of the Russian president. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany 2005-2021, intervened and got permission to bring him to Germany for medical treatment which led to a recovery of his health and strength within five months. It is what happened next that surprised many people. Navalny chose to return to Russia. It was inevitable that he would be rearrested and imprisoned and probably murdered in the not too distant future. So why did he go back? Why did he resume being the leading opposition politician in his native land? Mark Greene, Mission Champion of LICC wrote these words in a recent blog post: ‘Navalny returned because he loved Russia, because he could do no other, because he believed that the only way to defeat a tyrant who trades in terror is to show that you are not afraid. Only when enough people refuse to be intimidated can you hope for freedom. Did his faith in Christ, the one who also set his face to go to a city where he knew he would die (Luke 9:51), make any difference to him? The answer is in his notes smuggled from prison. Navalny’s faith was deeply held but lightly worn. There’s no self-pity, no grandstanding. There’s his characteristic forthrightness in calling out lies, his irrepressible good humour, his humility, his gratitude for so much, and his infectious hope. Along the way, he rejoices in God’s tender touch in a brace of miracles. His books ends with these words: ‘I have always thought, and said openly, that being a believer makes it easier to live your life, and to an even greater extent, engage in opposition politics... you lie on your bunk looking up at the one above and ask yourself whether you are a Christian in your heart of hearts... are you a disciple of the religion whose founder sacrificed himself for others, paying the price for their sins? Do you believe in the immortality of the soul and the rest of the cool stuff? **If you can honestly answer yes, what is there left for you to worry about...?** Don’t worry about the morrow, because the morrow is perfectly capable of taking care of itself.  'My job is to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and leave it to… [God…He…] won’t let me down… [29 Nov 2024] Whatever our circumstances today, our lives are in His hands, I trust the final triumph of the Lamb will shape your perspective and mine today and in the coming days.

1. **The binding of Satan to the Final Judgement** (Revelation 20)

The final visionary perspective revealed to John comes after a section on the Final Judgement on the wicked people who fought against God and His servants on earth (Revelation19:11-21). But what about the one who was behind it all, Satan, what happens to him? Is there a risk of sin entering God’s eternal kingdom and another fall of humanity, a kind of spiritual ‘groundhog day’, the well-known 1993 American film in which a weatherman is condemned to live on repeat the day ‘2 February’ without escape. That was a fun and very successful film, but it had a serious point asking in a humorous way big questions about the purpose and significance of our lives. Revelation 20 informs us that the one who contributed so much to sin and evil in this world will no longer have an impact on humanity beyond this life. What was revealed to John about the devil?

(a)**The binding of Satan** (Revelation 20:1-3) *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.****2****He seized the dragon, that ancient snake, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.****3****He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.* How has God bound the evil One? The coming of Jesus to earth was the key. In a previous message on Revelation, I highlighted Jesus rejoicing with a group of disciples who had returned from a successful mission that included demons submitting when the name of Jesus was invoked against them Jesus replied to them: *I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven* (Luke 10:17-19). In Luke 11:17-22, Jesus explained to a crowd how the devil and his fallen angels were overcome by Him: *But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* ***21****‘When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.****22****But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.* What Jesus was implying was that Satan had blinded the eyes of the nations against the gospel of salvation entrusted to the Jews, but for the nations (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 60:1-3). However, Jesus overcame the temptations of the evil one at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11) and completed that in His sacrifice on the cross. Paul expressed it this way in Colossians 2:15: *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* From the time of Christ’s first coming, Satan has been bound and the impact of his hindering of the spread of God’s kingdom has been greatly lessened. It seems at times that the spread of evil around the world is overwhelming, but this perspective is incorrect. Hebrews 2:14-15 reminds us that we: *…have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death* ***He might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil****–****15****and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*John, in I John 3:8, summarises the purpose for Jesus’ coming down to earth: *The reason the Son of God appeared was* ***to destroy the devil’s work****.* Hallelujah! Jesus did that. Using the language of a football game, the final stages of the game are still being played, but the result is not in doubt! We are on the side of the One who has already won!

(b) **The reign of the Saints** (Revelation 20:4-6)*I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.****5****(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.****6****Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.* The same time period on earth in Revelartion12:1-3 is viewed from the perspective of heaven in Revelation12:4-6. Believers, when we die, go directly into Christ’s presence for the period of time described as *the first resurrection*. The same scene in heaven is portrayed in Revelation 6:9-11. Whatever has happened to them is described as *Blessed and holy…* We then read: *The second death has no power over them…*this refers to the Day of Judgement and the punishment of those who opposed the Lamb and God’s plans for His creation. But for the Christian who is united to Christ. Romans 8:1 declares: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. But ‘the second resurrection’ is when Jesus returns. Then we gain our new glorious resurrection bodies that will last for eternity. Paul summarises the ‘what happens next’ at Jesus return in I Thessalonians 4:14-17: *For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.****15****According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.****16****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.****17****After that, we who 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 for ever.* The numbers in Revelation are symbolic not mathematical statements. A thousand years represents a long time here. In Exodus 20:4 the extent of God’s love for His people is expressed as: *but showing love* ***to a thousand generations*** *of those who love me and keep my commandments.* The extent of God’s grace and mercy to sinners is expressed using this number in II Peter 3:8-9: *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day* ***is like a thousand years****, and a thousand years are like a day.****9****The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you,* ***not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance****.* In heaven there is no sense of time, only a joyous experience of eternity in God’s presence.

(c)**The final conflict** (Revelation 20:7-10) At the very end of the age there will be a final battle or conflict, pictured in the vision of Ezekiel chapter 38 as against ‘*Gog and Magog*’? Who are they in terms familiar to us? We do not know whether the forces of particular countries or empires are intended in Revelation, but in Ezekiel it refers to the terrible reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek ruler of Syria who was obsessed with destroying the Jewish race. He was miraculously defeated and the Jewish people liberated following the Maccabean Wars (167-160BC). That horrific time from the past provides the imagery for the final battle at the end of time, the battle of Armageddon, referenced in Revelation 16:16: *Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.* Also in Revelation19:19: *Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.* Then Revelation 20:8:  *Satan will be released from his prison****8****and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – and to gather them for battle.* From the human perspective, it would appear in the midst of this battle that the outcome was uncertain, but we remember the victory was already won by Jesus on the cross. Satan and his allies will do their worst, but will be vanquished for ever.

(d) **The great white throne** (Revelation 20:11-15) Here is another reminder of final judgement for those who turned their backs on God and served the evil one. The emphasis here again as in Revelation15-16 that God is just, no-one will evade being accountable for their choices and actions. Justice will be done. Satan and all who do his bidding are banished to their eternal fate and Revelation 21-22 focus on the people of God. It is all over. The final triumph of the Lamb has taken place. But what does that mean for us? Take a look at the comparison and contrasts between Genesis1-3 and Revelation 20-22:

2. **Genesis to Revelation –Comparison and Contrast**

**Genesis 1-3** **Revelation 20-22**

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen 1:1) *I saw a new heaven and a new earth* (Rev.21:1) *The darkness He called ‘night’* (Gen.1:5) *There shall be no night there* (Rev.21:25) *God made two great lights* (sun and moon) (Gen1:16) *The city does not need the sun or the moon* (Rev.21:23) *when you eat of it you will surely die* (Gen.2:17) *There shall be no more death nor sorrow* (Rev.21:4) Satan appears as the deceiver of humankind (Gen.3:1) Satan is banished forever (Rev.20:10) A world where impurity entered (Gen.3:6-7) A world where *nothing impure will ever enter* (Rev.21:27) Fellowship with God impaired (Gen. 3:8-9) Fellowship with God restored (Rev.21:3) The initial triumph of the Evil One (Gen.3:13) The ultimate triumph of King Jesus (Rev.20:10; 22:3) Pain and suffering increased (Gen.3:16)  *There will be no more death…or crying or pain* (Rev.21:4) *Cursed is the ground because of you* (Genesis 3:17) *No longer will there be any curse* (Rev.22:3) The rule of humanity impaired (Gen.3:19) *And they will reign for ever and ever* (Rev.22:5) The first paradise closed (Gen.3:23-24) The second paradise opened forever (Rev.21:25) Access denied to *the tree of life* (Gen.3:24) Access to *the tree of life* restored (Rev. 22:14) Humanity banished from God’s presence (Gen.3:23-24) *They shall see His face* (Rev.22:4) [based on ‘Applying the Alpha-Omega Principle’, *Walk Thru the Old Testament*, p.44]

**3. God’s new creation** (Rev.21:1-22:6) *a new heaven and a new earth*

(a)**The new heaven and the new earth**  (Revelation 21:1-8) *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.* ***2*** *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* ***3*** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,* ***for the old order of things has passed away.***

Once again John is seeking to express in ordinary words, something for which our human vocabulary is inadequate to express in all its glory. It will be perfect, absolutely glorious for our future home. This world, potentially so good, can be a place of heartaches and violence and a planet suffering the consequences of human sinfulness in all its forms. The list we could compile of human shortcomings is very long, and the last bitter pill to swallow is death itself, but because of Jesus vanquishing the devil himself through His sacrifice on the cross, reconciling us to God, and God to us; and on that first Easter Sunday triumphing over death itself through His bodily resurrection, because He overcame death so will we! On every believer’s tombstone, we could have inscribed by the stonemason: ‘to be continued’, because of what God has prepared for us. Just listen to these wonderful words: *Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,* ***for the old order of things has passed away.***

 This is not a new vision in the Bible. The wording of it has changed, but Isaiah’s similar vision of God’s plans for His people in Isaiah 65:17-25 has already given us a glimpse of the future. *‘See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.* ***18****But be glad and rejoice for ever   in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  and its people a joy.* ***19****I will rejoice over Jerusalem   and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more…*It ends with these words: *my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.* ***23****They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,   they and their descendants with them.* ***24****Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.****25****The wolf and the lamb will feed together,   and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy   on all My holy mountain,’ says the Lord*.The ‘new heavens and the new earth’ will be a physical world, in which we will have the ability to touch taste hear, handle and see the wonders of God’s creation. Notions of floating on clouds with harps all day fall well short of the mark and have no basis in Scripture!

(b)**The new Jerusalem** (Revelation 21:9-22:5) In contrast to the instability and uncertainly of ‘the sea’, a place of danger to be avoided; God’s new creation is envisaged as a city, a heavenly glorious secure and beautiful place for His people to dwell in. The numbers here as elsewhere in Revelation are symbolic. The number twelve or multiples of it representing the complete number of all the Old and the New Testament people of God, as already stated in Revelation chapter seven. John is doing his best to convey its beauty and glory and most important of all reminds us in Revelation 21:22-23 of the truly God-centred and God-honouring focus of the lives of the people who will live there: *I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.****23****The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.* We have snapshots of life in this wonderful place. Revelation 22:1-5 states: *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb****2****down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.****3****No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him.****4****They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.****5****There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.* Living in our sin-damaged world, the snapshots of the future seem almost too good to be possible, but as children of the King of Kings, like young children opening presents on Christmas Day, we will be overwhelmed with excitement and joy on that day when our faith becomes sight. The details given in Revelation 21-22 are impressions of the splendour of the glorious inheritance God has prepared for those who love Him. In reality, it will be more beautiful than we can ever imagine and more fulfilling than anything we have experienced so far on earth and in a context where sin and evil cannot be found. No wonder Paul told the Corinthians: *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him* (I Corinthians 2:9).

**4. Jesus is coming soon –are you ready?** (Revelation 22:6-21)

(a)**The basis for our preparation** (Revelation 22:6-7) ***6****The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place.’****7****‘Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.’* The ground of our confidence for the future is based on the trustworthiness of God’s Word. The angel is reminding John that as someone who has followed Jesus for many years he has known that God’s Word is to be trusted. The angelic visions he has received are a confirmation and reinforcement of what he already knows.

(b) **A reminder to keep our focus on living for Jesus** (Revelation 22:7-11) *I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll…* *let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.* These words are also a challenge to be ready for Jesus return each day of our lives. The most important step we can take is to put our faith and trust in Jesus so that we are prepared for His second coming. This point is expressed in Revelation 22 in a number of different verses to make the same point. Based on the trustworthiness of His Word, as followers of Jesus we are then urged to: … *keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!’* (Rev.22:9b); and to …*continue to be holy* (Rev.22:11b). These statements are a reminder of repeated messages that are found in different books of the New Testament. Our focus is to be on the Lord and on what He has called us to be and do as His people. In the remaining years closest to His coming there appears to be the suggestion that times may get very tough for followers of Jesus, but we must never give up or lose track of our calling.

**(c) *Come Lord Jesus*** (Rev.22:12-21) *I am coming soon* In the light of such blessings and glory. Jesus declares in Revelation 22:12-13: ***Behold, I am coming soon!*** *My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.* ***13*** *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.* What is our response? The message is a call to persevere through tough times and to be encouraged in our witness knowing that the time is near to Jesus’ return. It could be in your lifetime or mine. We are given the reminder here that there are rewards that are available to God’s holy people, which are referenced in other places in the New Testament. (II Corinthians 5:9-10: *So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* ***10*** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*). This judgement will be not about our place in heaven which is not in doubt, but to determine if we are to be honoured for service for the Lord, and if so what honours. I Corinthians 3:11-15 explains: *For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ***12*** *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* ***13*** *his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.* ***14*** *If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.* ***15*** *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* Our works will be tested metaphorically by fire not us –there is no reference to purgatory in the Bible. These rewards include: for leading someone to Christ, for enduring under trials, and a martyr’s crown. We serve the Lord out of love for Him and in response to His amazing love for us, but we note this reminder that God delights to honour those that honoured Him in their lives here on earth. Will you and I seek to honour Him at the centre of our lives and priorities?

 John pictures the response to Jesus’ words from the Holy Spirit and from His bride, the Christian Church: *The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life* (Rev.22:17)*.*

Again, this testimony is repeated in Rev.22:20b: *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.* Can you from your heart utter these words? These are the declarations of a child of God for whom Jesus has prepared our place in His eternal kingdom. I pray that each of us has committed our lives to follow Him and is ready for that glorious day, Amen.

**Questions for Reflection:**

**Q1.** What are you looking forward to most on that day when ‘your faith will become sight’?

**Q2.** What is the most important thing you have learned through this study of the Revelation of John?

**Song for Reflection:** ‘You’re the Lion of Judah’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5ejXLAimgQ>