An Open Invitation Revelation 22:12-21

Well, here we are at the last Sunday of the year. It went by fast. How was it for you? Were there any surprises? Were there some days or events that you wish you had a golfer's Mulligan, a do over? Or are you glad they are behind you now and hoping for better things to come in the New Year?

Some welcomed new life into their families either through marriage or birth. Others said good by to loved ones and friends. That happens every year.

In recent weeks our interest was piqued by the prediction of the Mayans who claimed that the world would come to an end on December 21 sometime around 6:30p.m. It didn't and here we are. Many of you will remember the panic that ensued with Y2K when there were groups who advocated the end of civilization as we know it in the year 2000.

According to Wikipedia, recorded predictions go as far back as 634BC. As the myth goes, 12 eagles had revealed to Romulus a mystical number representing the lifetime of the Roman Empire. Some believed that each eagle represented 10 years giving the Empire 120 years.

Wikipedia records over 200 doomsday predictions both from secular and religious scholars, pastors, and teachers and religious groups. They range from a Pope to psychic Jeane Dixon. Of course we can't forget Nostradamus. They include the likes of Jim Jones of the People's Temple, mass murderer Charles Manson, Herbert Armstrong, and Sung Myung Moon founder of the Unification church. The list also notes some of our own Christian writers like the Apostle Paul, Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsay, Jerry Falwall and Pat Robertson, Jonathan Edwards, Puritan Minister Cotton Mather, Reformer Martin Luther, and Founder of the Methodist church John Wesley. The Bible Student movement of the late 1800's and early 1900's had several predictions as did the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists. Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam stated that the Gulf War would usher in Armageddon.

Now let me clarify for you that some of the Christian authors/Pastors identified with end of world predictions put a disclaimer that it COULD happen, but are not emphatic. Like us, they believe that no one is sure but the Lord, but given current events it seemed possible.

Of course there are still some predictions that are in the future. One occurs this coming May and another in 2020. Some scientists believe the earth has another 500,000,000 million years before carbon dioxide levels make the earth uninhabitable. Other scientists believe that in 5 billion years the sun will become a large red sun that will engulf the earth and swallow it up. Still another group of scientists believe that in 22 billion years there will be what they call the rip theory which suggests that the universe will no longer be able to expand and the force will be great enough to tear it in half.

Of course we know that all of them have been and will be incorrect. There is only one right source of information about when the end will come. We have it neatly recorded for us in the Bible. While it's predicted date is unsure, that it will happen isn't. God who is truth has revealed for us the events of the last days. It would do us well not to predict dates but rather to prepare for when it does come. He gave a promise and He has yet to fail in fulfilling one. So we have confidence that His return is guaranteed.

Turn with me to the last book and chapter of the Bible – **Revelation 22:12-21**. In His lifetime and recorded in the gospels for us Jesus gave us many wonderful teachings. Some are encouraging as they instruct us how to live with one another. He encapsulated the commandments into two very

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distinct commands – love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. They are the fundamental and foundational commands by which if we obey them will do a world of good.

Jesus also had some stern warnings for those who would pretend to be religious. He rebuked the religious leaders for their superficial piety and lack of heart when it came to obedience. He also warned about the last days and what they would be like instructing us that we should be wary and watchful. They were a strict directive to prepare and be ready for His return.

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, records some final words of Jesus that He gave him while in exile on the Island of Patmos. John spoke both with an angel and the Lord Himself revealing to us the events of the end times. They are words that attempt to describe the beauty and splendor of heaven that some will experience and the terror and dread of destruction in the lake of fire that will be the punishment for others. Chapter 22 is Jesus's last words to us and they have to do with His return.

Jesus's return is sure. Jesus's return is sudden. Jesus's return is with scrutiny. Jesus's return is summoned.

I. JESUS'S RETURN IS SURE – v. 12a

Notice in verse 12 what is repeated from verse 7 and then reiterated in verse 20 – "I am coming..."

This past summer we were next door at our neighbor's sitting around a camp fire. After the marshmallows were toasted, David and their two granddaughters decided to play hide and seek. Off they would run to hide somewhere in the backyard while one of them counted. When they had reached the agreed upon number they would shout "ready or not here I come." You know the game. Although many will want to run and hide from the One who came some 2,000 years ago to seek the lost, His return is no game. Some though are looking for His return. When He comes again it will be for a different reason. His coming again, a term we often refer to as the second coming is a compelling theme throughout the Bible. **Malachi 3:1-2 Matthew 16:27-28 Matthew 24:26-27**

Jude 14-15

That Jesus is coming again is sure. He will not fail to return. Daniel 10 records that Daniel had a vision of things yet to come. His spirit was troubled and he prayed for understanding. An angel was sent in response but the prayer to interpret the vision was delayed. He told Daniel that he was detained by the prince of darkness. When God the Father says to His Son, Jesus, that it is time to return there will be no delaying Him. He says, "I am coming."

But this recording in John isn't the first time He made such a statement. On the evening of the crucifixion Jesus was in a room eating the Passover meal with his disciples. He candidly talked to them about a number of different things. Among the topics of discussion was His soon departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Even more important than the coming of the Comforter was His words about His return.

John 14:1-3

This isn't just a prediction like what General MacArthur made when he left the Philippines and said he would return. Jesus was making a promise and it's stated in such a way that they could take it to mean that it was already happening. It was a done deal. If the disciples had learned anything about Jesus during their 3 years with Him it should have been that He was a man of His word.

He said He was going. But He said He was going to come back. He states it the same way in

Revelation 22:12 - "I am coming."

I heard the story of a pastor who was preaching on this very passage when he was so caught up in the text, he forgot where he was and fell off the platform and into the lap of one of the lady parishioners. Quickly getting his composure he apologized to the woman who responded "that's all right preacher, you said you were coming."

William Miller was a 19th century revivalist who predicted the second coming of Christ after 14 years of studying the Bible. He had nearly 100,000 followers convinced that Christ would return on April 3, 1843. Some of his followers went to mountaintops hoping to get a head start on the others in getting to heaven. Others were in graveyards planning to ascend to heaven with departed loved ones. Society ladies in Philadelphia gathered outside the city to avoid entering God's kingdom with common people. When April 4 came some were disillusioned, but most took heart because Miller had given a range of dates, the next was to take place on March 21, 1844. The devoted continued to make ready, but again were met with disappointment and again prepared for October 22.

Jesus said that no man knows the day or the hour. But you can rest assured that the Father knows and when He gives the Word, Jesus will come again just as He said He would.

The promise of His return is sure. No force on earth or in heaven will restrain Him. So, like the game we play, ready or not He is coming. Are you prepared for His return?

II. JESUS'S RETURN IS SUDDEN – v. 12a Notice the words of Jesus in the text again – "Behold, I am coming soon!"

The word soon means suddenly or quickly. On one hand it is a word that means to be unexpected or unprepared for. On the other hand the Lord's return

is an event we have been warned would come, we just don't know the day or the hour. We speak of the Lord's return by using the word imminent, that it could happen at any time. Listen to what Jesus Himself has to say about His return. Matthew 24:36-38

Paul spoke of it as a twinkling of an eye. The coming of the Lord is going to be faster than making Instant Oatmeal, faster than a speeding bullet, faster than the speed of light. It will be sudden and though He has said He will come and that He will come soon, many will not be prepared for it, they won't even be looking for it. They will be going about the normal routine of their lives to get ready for meeting anyone but Jesus. They will get up in the morning and get ready for work showering and brushing their teeth. They will have a cup of coffee and a muffin. They will read the newspaper or check out the weather forecast on the TV, they will check their email or their iPod for events or meetings. They will get kids off to school making sure they have lunch money and homework in hand. They will get ready for a trip to another town for business or pleasure.

They will go shopping and plan for the day's meals, maybe even for the week.

They will check their stocks and adjust them according to the market to ensure their retirement portfolio is current.

They will make all kinds of plans for all kinds of things but they won't plan for the single most important event of their life – the soon coming of the Lord.

Here's a song we sing sometimes. What If It Were Today? (#759)

Jesus is coming to earth again – What if it were today? Coming in power and love to reign – What if it were today? Coming to claim His chosen Bride, All the redeemed and purified, Over this whole earth scattered wide – What if it were today?

Glory, glory! Joy to my heart 'twill bring;Glory, glory! When we shall crown Him King.Glory, glory! Haste to prepare the way;Glory, glory! Jesus will come someday.

I wonder if we truly believe that when we sing it. I wonder if when people sing that He is coming someday they have in the back of their heads that it won't be that day.

I wonder if many hope it's not today.

When Jesus spoke of the events at the end times He gave a parable of 10 virgins who were waiting for the coming of the groom. Five had prepared by making sure they had plenty of oil so they could keep watch for when he arrived. Five foolishly did nothing to get ready. They were ill prepared and when the cry rang out that the groom was coming they begged those who were prepared to lend them some oil for their lamps, but it was too late.

Jesus is coming soon. It may be today. It may be tomorrow. It may be this year or it may not be for another 10 or even 100 years. That He is coming is sure. That He is coming suddenly is also sure. Even though we don't know when it will occur we are told to be ready.

There will be those who don't know because they have either chosen to be ignorant about it or they have chosen to ignore it or they have chosen to disbelieve it.

II Peter 3:3-10

Don't be one of those scoffers who claim that it's been such a long time since He made that promise that He either forgot, changed His mind, or wasn't intending to come back at all – that He just wanted us to be hopeful, to have something to look forward that sounded better than the pain and heartache we experience here on earth. Don't be a scoffer.

Jesus's coming is sure. Jesus's coming is sudden. Are you ready?

Jesus's coming is with scrutiny.

III.JESUS'S COMING IS WITH SCRUTINY – v. 12b-15

To scrutinize something is to look at it very carefully, to examine it closely, or to inspect it minutely. According to the dictionary it implies looking over carefully and searchingly in order to observe the minutest details. It also implies close, critical observation, especially for detecting errors or flaws. Finally it suggests close observation or investigation to determine the condition, quality, or validity of something.

Our passage tells us that Jesus is coming soon and that He will be bringing His rewards with Him. He will judge every deed, every act, every word, and every motive. Notice that there are two rewards. There will be salvation of some. There will be a sentence for others.

He begins by stating the authority by which He is able to mete out these rewards. He speaks in three different ways about His deity and through which lays claim to His sovereignty.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega." It's in reference to the Greek alphabet in which Alpha is the first letter and Omega is the Last. We would say He is the A and the Z. He stresses that point by stating that He is **"the First and the Last."** Finally He refers to Himself as **"the Beginning and the End."** He existed before all creation and He will exist

He existed before all creation and He will exist when it's all over. These mark His claim of

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authority and consequently the right to give out these rewards according to what a person has done.

He speaks first of all about the reward for some. v. 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."

This is something that we have to look forward to. We are told to rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is our reward in heaven. (Matthew 5:12)

The righteous are the ones who have had their robes washed and obey His commands. Now keep in mind that robes are not washed by obedience to His commands. A desire to be obedient to His commands comes as a result of having our robes washed. John stated earlier that he saw a great multitude in heaven whose robes had been washed in the blood of Christ. That's the only way to wash your robes.

Those with washed robes will share in the tree of life and in the Holy City – the New Jerusalem. It was the heavenly city that according to Hebrews **11:13-16**, motivated the patriarchs to live by faith. "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefor God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

Only by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross who shed His blood are we able to have our robes washed. One author wrote that Christ's "red blood whitened our dark robes." It is only the blood of Christ and the power of His sacrifice on the cross

that cleanses us from sin and fits us for heaven. Only through Christ's robe of righteousness are we made clean.

The rewards we will receive at this time are the rewards for things done in this life. The ever watchful scrutiny of the One who gives the reward sees beyond the act and looks at the heart to determine if it is worthy of reward. We may look at someone's sacrifices and service and consider them to be a very noble, virtuous and even righteous person, but the reward to be given is left up to the One who knows the true motivation of the heart. **II Corinthians 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."**

I Corinthians 3:12-15 "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 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. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Heaven is its own reward, but there are also other rewards given for faithful service. The one who serves well in this life will be entrusted with greater responsibility in heaven. Those whose robes are washed will receive a reward.

But, those whose robes are not washed will receive a sentence.

v. 15 "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

These are the ones who habitually sin. They have rejected the only way through the gate of heaven.

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The have rejected Christ who told the disciples in their evening before His crucifixion that He is the only Way, the only Truth and the only Life. John simply put it that if you don't have the Son you don't have life, referring of course to eternal life. These will not have access to either the tree of life or to the gate of heaven. Jesus said He was the only way into the sheepfold. Paul tells us plainly in **Ephesians 5:5** that nothing unclean will receive an inheritance in heaven. It will only be for those who have washed their robes.

The testimony of Jesus has been given to the churches to be ready. He began by declaring His deity. He ends by declaring His humanity. He not only created David, He was also from the family of David. It affirms the promise that we is coming. v. 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 and Morning Star."

He is coming and His reward is with Him, some to receive the salvation promised and others to receive the sentence they deserve.

While we await His return we have been given instructions on how to prepare for His coming. I Peter 1:1-16 "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

II Peter 3:9, 11-14 "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him."

I John 3:2-3 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be life Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

His likeness is also a reward we will receive. We must prepare ourselves now for His return by striving to live godly lives.

Warren Wiersbe writes "Heaven is more than a destination, it is a motivation. Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now." Heaven's rewards should keep us from complacency and carelessness.

Faithful and true would He find us here If He should come today? Watching in gladness and not in fear, If He should come today? Signs of His coming multiply, Morning light breaks in eastern sky; Watch, for the time is drawing nigh – What if it were today?

Glory, glory! Joy to my heart 'twill bring; Glory, glory! When we shall crown Him King, Glory, glory! Haste to prepare the way; Glory, glory! Jesus will come someday.

Jesus's return is sure. Jesus's return is sudden. Jesus's return is with scrutiny. Jesus's return is summoned.

IV. JESUS'S RETURN IS SUMMONED – v. 18-21

Both the Spirit and the Bride call for the return of Jesus. They are ready for Him to fulfill His promise of eternal life. But John doesn't end the dialogue there. He notes that even yet there is still time. Anyone who is thirsty, anyone who recognizes their need for new life in Christ alone can come. Jesus exclaimed that He was the Living Water and all who drink of Him will be satisfied. It is not too late (John 7:37). II Peter 3:9 points out that God is not willing that anyone should perish. His desire is that everyone would receive eternal life. This threefold invitation is to those who hear, to those who thirst and to all to receive this remarkable gift.

But when Jesus does return the invitation to receive the free gift of the water of life will be over. They will have no share in the tree of life.

John closes the book with the words of Christ that He is coming soon and then invites Jesus to come. Until Jesus's return John stresses that God's grace will be with us. It is, after all, His grace that saves us and sustains us and is sufficient for us at all times.

In this New Year let's endeavor to be more watchful as we await the return of Christ, to live with godly character.

For those of us who have washed their robes let us call to the Lord to come.

For those who have yet to wash their robes the Lord Himself invites you to come and receive His gift of eternal life so that you too can enjoy the rewards of heaven.

It is by His truly amazing grace.

Are you prepared to meet the Lord when He returns? Do you have your robes washed in the righteousness of Christ? Are you looking for His return? What it if were today? If you are here today not knowing Christ as Savior, if you are thirsty, will you come?

If you are here today knowing Christ as Savior are you ready to meet Him, are you making every effort to be blameless and holy?

Ready or not He is coming.