

*Grace and peace are yours, from your first day till your last,
from he who is the Alpha and the Omega. Amen.*

The Bible begins with a promise (Genesis 3:15) and ends with a promise (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20). And all of the pages in between are chock-full of promises. And the final promise in Revelation builds on all the other ones to give you *hope* – the conviction that things are going to get better, because when Jesus returns everything wrong will be undone and everything will be eternally, exactly as it is supposed to be (Revelation 21:1—22:5).

There is nothing uncertain about this hope. It is not a matter of *if*, it is just a matter of *when*. And this last promise of Revelation is God's last word on all his promises, the crown jewel, the cherry on top of them all.

But is it though, really? Shouldn't this last promise be the least? If Christian hope is all about everything getting better in some far-off future, won't that make you worthless in the present? If everything that you look forward to is far down the road, why bother making the world a better place now? The heavenly minded are of no earthly good, right?

You heard Jesus in today's Gospel. He doesn't just want you to wait for him to come back, he wants you to *watch* for him to come back (Luke 12:36, 37). You can't do nothing and run out the clock, you need to keep your peepers peeled for him. So how in the world are you supposed to do anything else in your life if you've got to be watching for his return?

How? By understanding the promise that the Bible ends with. It's **last but not least**. **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" (22:6).**

The Book of Revelation is a collection of visions about the future that the apostle John received. This is the very end of Revelation, and John's angelic guide tells him that everything he has seen is trustworthy and true because it's all from God. So you can live in the hope of a perfect future, certain that one day every tear will be dried and every evil undone because God does not lie (Numbers 23:19).

And that hope does not make you useless in the here and now, it makes you useful. Listen to this. **"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll" (22:7).** Watching for Jesus's return does not mean that you stop everything that you're doing, stand outside, stare into the sky, and stay like that until either you die or Jesus returns.

No, you are God's servant (22:6), so *watching* means that you live dressed and ready for service (Luke 12:35). You do all of the things that God has commanded you to do in all of the opportunities he gives you. You are his servant as a husband or a wife or a parent or a child or a student or a worker.

But while you serve, you keep **the words of the prophecy written in this scroll (22:7)**. In other words, you hold on to the promises of Jesus. You live life in the light of his return.

Think about it. When it is completely dark out you need to have a light in hand or you won't be able to get anything done. In the same way, as you wait for Jesus to return, you need to have his promises in hand or you won't be able to get anything done.

Living without Jesus' Word is like living in total darkness without a light (John 12:46). You cannot see what's right in front of you, you see things incorrectly, you see things that are not there.

It's not the heavenly minded who need help. The earthly minded are searching for something – anything! – that will light them up. They plug into success or pleasure or possessions or altruism to light the darkness and give them hope. But that hope is not certain and death takes it away (Proverbs 14:12).

That's why watching for Jesus to return makes you a lot of earthly good, because when you hold to Jesus' promises, you see things as they really are (John 8:12). When you keep **the words of the prophecy written in this scroll (22:7)**, you know that your purpose in life is not to make a name for yourself in this world, but to glorify the name of the God who created this world (Psalm 105:1).

If not for this light, you would view people assets to exploit or obstacles that stand in your way, anything but what they really are: those for whom Christ died (1 John 2:2). Without this light, you would see your possessions as something to pile up as high as you can, rather than gifts that God gives you to use for good (2 Corinthians 9:11).

It's a lot to think about; overwhelming even. John was so overwhelmed by it all that he tried to worship the angel that showed it to him (22:8). But the angel told him to worship God (22:9). Then he said, **"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near" (22:10)**. Don't take Jesus' promise, seal it up and forget about it. It is **last, but not least**, and you need it right now.

Because this is what it means to live when the time is near: to look around and to know that everything you see will soon be gone. Everything but you. By faith you are safe in the hands of God (John 10:28-29). By the waters of baptism you are bound to Christ and the life he lived for you and the death he died for you (Romans 6:3-4).

And that is *exactly* where you need to be. **"Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy" (22:11)**. When Jesus returns your opportunity for repentance and forgiveness is over. Wicked unbelievers will continue to be wicked and vile forever. Righteous believers will continue to be upright and holy forever.

These are the eternal consequences for whether or not you **keep the words of the prophecy written in this scroll (22:7)**. So holding on to Jesus' promise does more than give you purpose now, it keeps you ready for the end. Being heavenly minded is of tremendous good.

But is that ever your problem – that you are too heavenly minded? If someone followed you around all week, if he listened to you talk, if he examined your browser history and your budget and your bank statements, would he really come to the conclusion that you are too heavenly minded?

Or that you are too earthly minded? You don't get caught up in watching for Jesus to return, you get caught up in everything but watching for Jesus to return. Why is that?

Well, Jesus said, **"Look, I am coming soon!" (22:12)**. Soon. But it's been two thousand years since Jesus made this promise, two thousand years since he said soon. Doesn't that take some of the urgency off of all this? Doesn't that make you think, "This last promise really is the least. Jesus obviously is in no rush to get here. I can set down this light for a while. My eyes will adjust to the darkness."

Don't do it. The Jesus who promised to come back soon is the same Jesus who already came once and fulfilled God's very first promise (1 John 3:8). In point of fact, Jesus has kept so many promises that he himself is trustworthy and true (3:14, 19:11).

So you can be confident that this **last but not least** promise – as of yet unfilled – is as good as done. Jesus will return, reward in hand. **"My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done" (22:12)**.

This is not a reward that you earn. Jesus called it "my reward" because he earned it and he freely gives it to everyone who believes in him. This reward is a seat at the eternal wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9). And like you heard in today's Gospel, when Jesus comes back, he is going to serve you, set you down at his table and wait on you hand and foot (Luke 12:35-40).

Isn't that amazing? It makes your waiting and watching completely different, when you know that the heavenly banquet is at the end of it all. That the One who paid for this reward with his blood, sweat, and tears is the same One who promised it. That there is absolutely no doubt that he will keep this promise, and soon.

You can take his Word for it. **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (22:13)**. The Lord Jesus Christ is not confined within the walls of years and months and weeks and days and hours and minutes and seconds the way that we are. Jesus is eternal. He has a perspective on time that is completely different from ours.

So when the Alpha and the Omega says that he is coming back soon, it doesn't seem like it to us, but whose perspective on time do you suppose matters more?

Think of the child who cries for help and mom says, "Just a minute!" For the kid that minute is an eternity, but for the mom that minute is a second. It's the same way with Jesus. He says that he is coming soon, but he appears slow from your perspective now.

But one day – one *eternal* day – you will have a different perspective on time. And you'll be able to look back at all the waiting and watching that seemed to take forever, and think, "That went by fast."

Because Jesus will fulfill his **last but not least** promise: "Yes, I am coming soon" (22:20). Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.