**Ready or Not**
Revelation 22:6-15
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Do you pay attention to signs when you see them? It's easy to ignore them, especially when they've been there for a while. This happens repeatedly when trucks travel down Harrison Street or up Brady Street in Davenport and crash into those immovable bridges. So far, the bridges have won every one of these encounters [check out some pictures of these stuck trucks].

Why do these bridges keep getting hit? Because signs are often disregarded. As we've been learning in our Revelation Unveiled series, the Bible is full of signs about the second coming of Christ. The question remains: *Will we hear and heed those signs, or will we keep crashing into the rock-solid truth of Scripture?*

Before going further, I'm still rejoicing at what God did last weekend as we celebrated 25 years of Celebrate Recovery at Edgewood! There were many highlights, including Pastor Daniel's tremendous sermon, but what stands out to me is that nine people signed up to serve in Celebration Place, our ministry to children on Friday nights!

Lord willing, we'll finish the Book of Revelation next weekend. For today, let's give our attention to Revelation 22:6-15: ***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." "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." 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, 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." And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 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. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.***

Here's a summary of this section of Scripture: *Because God's Word is reliable, and Jesus is returning soon, we must be ready for His return.*

**1. God's Word is reliable.** Once again, John receives a message from an angel in verse 6: ***"And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true…"*** The phrase, ***"these words"*** is emphatic and refers to what the angel is about to say, to what has already been recorded in Revelation, and to the whole of sacred Scripture. These words are ***"trustworthy,"*** which means, *"rock solid and believable."* The word ***"true"*** means, *"real and genuine, versus spurious or false."* This reinforces Revelation 19:9: ***"These are the true words of God"*** and Revelation 21:5: ***"…for these words are trustworthy and true."*** Amazingly, the unique truth and trustworthiness of God's Word is underscored seven times in the last two chapters of Revelation.

Proverbs 30:5-6 gives a warning about not adding to God's Word, ***"Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar."*** Revelation 22:18-19 warns about adding or subtracting from the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible and the completion of the canon: ***"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, 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."*** We must not change, diminish, or supplement God's revealed Word.

Speaking of that, I want to take a few minutes to address the growing fascination with the Ethiopian Bible. While I respect the history of the Ethiopian church and celebrate how this community of Christ-followers can trace their roots back to the Book of Acts, we need to be careful about embracing all their beliefs.

By way of introduction, the Ethiopian Bible is made up of 81 books (some versions have 88). That's in contrast to the 66 books in our Bibles. I purchased one of these Bibles weeks ago and have spent time reading large chunks of it. Here are some of the names given to these books: *Jubilees, Enoch, Prayer of Manasseh, The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Apocalypse of Peter,* and *Judith.*

Here are six key biblical and historical truths to keep in mind:

1. **These additional books are not newly discovered revelations that have previously been hidden.** These books make up what is known as ancient "apocryphal" texts. The word "apocrypha" means, *"hidden or secret."* These manuscripts contain stories of doubtful authorship, disputed authenticity, or unknown origin that fall outside the accepted standard collection of sacred Scripture. Also called "pseudepigraphal" (false) writings, these books are often erroneously attributed to famous biblical figures (such as Enoch or Abraham).

2. **These books were never removed by Christians or banned by them.** Popular internet theories allege that books like *Enoch* were secretly removed from Western Bibles by councils for religious, political, or economic control. However, the extra books in the Ethiopian Bible were never included in the canon of Scripture because they were not recognized as inspired and authoritative. Viewing them as "missing pieces" undermines the sufficiency of Scripture.

3. **Just because a book is old, it does not mean it is inspired.** One popular claim making the rounds on the internet declares, *"The oldest and most accurate Bible."* The Ethiopian Bible is often advertised as *"original, complete, and uncensored."* Another promo makes this claim, *"Contains endless pages of celestial knowledge."* It's important to know that these writings were not solidified in their current manuscript form until the 14th century.

4. **The Ethiopian Bible contains unsound doctrines and theological speculations.** While some of these writings provide helpful history, there are also several bizarre and even dangerous doctrines. Here are just a few.

    - **Unsound angelology and demonology.** The book of *Enoch* details the fall of the "Watchers" (who are allegedly angels who intermarried with women), giving specific names, and elaborate hierarchies. *Enoch* also gives detailed origins of demons as the disembodied spirits of the Nephilim. This speculation can lead to sensationalized views about the demon world, which can shift one's focus from Christ's victory on the cross.

    - **Noah's birth story.** This week I read *Enoch 106* and was surprised and unsettled to learn that when he was born, Noah's body was white as snow and red as the blooming of a rose, with rays of the sun coming out of his

eyes which lit up the whole house. When the midwife held him, newborn Noah immediately started speaking, causing his father to flee in fear to Methuselah, begging him to consult with Enoch, who was living among the angels, to find out the truth.

- **Cosmic warehouses and portals of heaven.** During his tour of heaven, allegedly Enoch sees massive storage rooms for frost, rain, and even the sun and the moon. *Enoch 36* refers to three open portals to heaven. In *2 Enoch*, a snow angel freezes Enoch's face, and a strange creation account describes God building light and darkness out of explosive cosmic entities.

5. **Citing a source does not make the whole work inspired.** Some argue that because Jude quotes from the book of *Enoch*, the whole book must be inspired Scripture. Remember that Paul quotes pagan poets in Titus 1:12 and Acts 17:28. Referencing an ancient text as an illustration does not mean the entire source is inspired and inerrant. Incidentally, Jesus frequently cites the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, but He never quotes *1 Enoch* or *Jubilees* as authoritative Scripture.

6. **Be on guard against algorithm-driven discipleship.** This week I ran into two pastors and told them what I was preaching on. One of them mentioned how he is concerned that too many Christians are getting their theology from popular podcasters who often espouse conspiracy theories, spurious beliefs, and sensationalized spirituality. Remember that algorithms on social media and podcast platforms are designed to maximize engagement and screen time.

   I want to linger on this for a bit because this is a big issue among Christians. One resource explains it well: *"Algorithms are not designed to disciple you into the likeness of Christ; they are designed to keep your eyes on a screen…if you click on one sensationalized video or fringe theory, the algorithm immediately serves you ten more—gradually pulling you down a rabbit hole while filtering out the balancing voices of wise, grounded believers. Before long, an invisible line of code is curating your spiritual diet, rewarding loud certainty over biblical depth, and subtly replacing the shepherding of a local church with an echo chamber of strangers."*

I've heard it framed like this: *"Algorithms and clickbait podcasters survive by convincing you that the Bible isn't enough—that you need a hidden book, a secret*

*code, or a sensational conspiracy to really understand what God is doing."* Friends, because God's Word is trustworthy and true, we don't need to add to it, and we dare not take away from it.

In short, we hold to *Sola Scriptura*, one of the battle cries of the Reformation. The Scriptures alone are sufficient for salvation and sanctification, requiring no supplemental revelations, church tradition or modern philosophies. Jesus treated the Scriptures as a settled, reliable standard when He prayed these words to the Father in John 17:17: ***"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."***

No other writings are necessary for the good news of the gospel to be understood, nor are any other writings required to equip us as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*** The canon of Scripture is closed.

John MacArthur writes, *"The Bible is complete, comprehensive, and contains everything necessary for salvation, spiritual life, and Christian living."* As someone has said, *"If you want to hear God speak, read the Bible out loud!"*

The Bible alone is true and trustworthy as we read in Psalm 19:7-9: ***"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."***

1 Timothy 1:3-4 says, ***"… charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith."*** Colossians 2:8 provides this warning: ***"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."***

I appreciate this insight: *"We don't need a bigger Bible. We need to believe, obey, study, memorize, and live out the Bible God has given us. We don't need secret books, hidden revelations, or newly discovered truths to complete what God has already revealed. Every word of God proves true. Let's not add to it. Let's not*

*subtract from it. And let's never put human writings on the same level as the inspired Word of God."*

*Because God's Word is reliable, and Jesus is returning soon, we must be ready for His return.*

**2. Jesus is returning soon.** Let's pick up the second half of Revelation 22:6: ***"…and the Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."*** What makes the Bible true is that ***"the Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets"*** is the one breathing out His Word through men who recorded Scripture. The sovereign Lord was in control of the spirits of the prophets who were the human agents in the transmission of Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The phrase ***"must soon take place"*** has the idea of *"swiftly, suddenly, and speedily."* This phrase serves as a bookend to the first verse in Revelation: ***"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place."***

In verse 7, Jesus speaks again: ***"And behold, I am coming soon…"*** The word ***"behold"*** is used to call attention to what follows. Notice ***"coming"*** is in the present tense which means it's regarded as already in the process of coming to pass. This is a repeated theme in Revelation where we see some form of the word ***"come"*** seven times in this final chapter. Hebrews 10:37 says, ***"Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and not delay."***

This passage lists some implications of the closeness and quickness of Christ's return.

- **His return demands our joyful obedience.** We see this in the second half of verse 7: ***"Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*** This is the sixth beatitude found in Revelation. A special blessing is pronounced on those who ***"keep"*** the words of Revelation, which is exactly what we read in 1:3. The word ***"keep"*** means, *"to observe, to fulfill, to heed, to guard like a warden"* and is an admonition to obedience. We need to watch over the Word's work in our lives by reading, reviewing, reflecting, and repenting when needed.

  God gave us prophecy not merely to tell us what is coming, but to change how we live while we're waiting for Christ to come. It should make us more

holy and more hopeful as we await the Blessed Hope. As I worded it in the "Ready or Not" booklet: *Prophecy is not designed to satisfy our curiosity but to sanctify our character.*

David Jeremiah writes, *"The top priority for all believers as await the return of Christ is to walk submissively to the Word of God…to read the Word obediently, follow the Word exclusively, believe the Word totally, and study the Word continually."* This reinforces the necessity of protecting our minds and hearts from unbiblical and extrabiblical truth and to make sure we're hearing and heeding God's word alone.

- **His return calls for worship.** In verses 8-9, for the second time, John drops to his knees to worship an angel: ***"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, 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.'"*** Exodus 34:14 declares: ***"For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."***

- **His return calls for urgency.** Listen to 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 word ***"seal"*** means to *"conceal or keep secret."* Daniel was told in Daniel 12:4: ***"But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end."*** Now that the end is near, God's words and warnings are both understandable and urgent. The Bible is not a closed book, accessible only to those entrusted with its secrets or extra books.

  Verse 11 adds, ***"Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."*** When Jesus comes back it will be so sudden, that evildoers will not have time to change their ways as stated in Isaiah 32:6: ***"For the fool speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity."*** It will be too late to decide for Christ if it has not been done before. Patterns of sinful behavior may lead to that which is irreversible. The righteous, on the other hand, are ready to go at any time and will be rewarded for how they have stewarded their time, talents, and treasures.

- **His return brings reward and recompense.** This is clearly stated in verse 12: ***"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to***

***repay each one for what he has done."*** Once again, we see how a verse in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the Book of Revelation as this comes from Isaiah 40:10: ***"Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him."***

- **His return shows that He is one with the Father.** In verse 13, Jesus takes a title used previously for God Himself: ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*** Jesus is eternal, omnipresent, and omnipotent.

*Because God's Word is reliable, and Jesus is returning soon, we must be ready for His return.*

**3. We must be ready.** We see the final benediction, or blessing for believers, in 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."*** This final blessing is plural, which speaks of multiple blessings given to those who are washed by the blood of Jesus. Soiled robes represent sinfulness and washing speaks of the cleansing of sin that accompanies salvation. To those of us who know Christ, we have access to the tree of life and Revelation 21:25 says the city ***"gates will never be shut by day."***

While believers will be blessed, unbelievers will barricaded outside heaven according to verse 15: ***"Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."*** Dogs at that time were dirty and diseased scavengers, concerned only about their physical well-being. The term ***"dogs"*** was used to describe Gentiles and false teachers in the Bible. This doesn't mean that anyone who commits these sins is doomed to Hell, but only those who ***"practice"*** them as a way of life.

Here's the deal. There are some who will be in and others who will be out. Some will be in Heaven, and some will be in Hell. Some will be let in and others will crash into the gates.

**Action Steps**

1. **Be Baptized:** Follow the example of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. He was reading Isaiah 53 (not an extra-canonical book), and asked Philip to explain it to him. When he heard the gospel, he believed, and was baptized on the spot! If you believe in Jesus, it's time to take that step of obedience.

2. **Live Righteously:** If you are in Christ, put your faith into action by gathering, growing, giving, and going with the gospel. BTW, the Youth Hope Food Pantry is looking for more servants. I'm hoping everyone participates in Curbside Christmas as way to bless our community.

3. **Share the Gospel:** Because Jesus is coming back soon, urgently share the good news with those who aren't ready. Grab a copy of the *Ready or Not* booklet in the foyer to help start conversations.

4. **Prepare Your Heart for Christmas:** As we look forward to His Second Coming, let's go deep this Christmas season by celebrating His First Coming. Pick up one of our free advent devotionals:

    - *Family Devotional*
    - *The King is Near* by Ray Pritchard

5. **Cross the bridge of salvation.** You have a choice to make. You can choose to ignore the warnings signs, keep driving down your own path, and you will crash into the rock-solid truth of God's holy judgment. Or, you can turn around today, repent of your sins and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

You have a choice to make. The Bible calls Jesus Christ the Cornerstone, yet warns that to those who refuse to believe, he becomes 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense' (1 Peter 2:8). Jesus put it starkly in Luke 20:18: *'Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.'*

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we are separated from a holy God by an unbridgeable chasm of sin. We can try to build our own bridge across to God by trusting our own good works or chasing sensationalized spirituality and secret knowledge. But every man-made bridge collapses.

You can choose to ignore the warning signs, keep driving down your own path, and eventually crash into the unyielding reality of God's holy judgment and be crushed by Christ in final judgment.

Or, you can walk over the only Bridge to God. On the cross, Jesus Christ stepped into our judgment, absorbing the crash of God's holy wrath against our sin, and

built a permanent, rock-solid way across. You can turn around today, fall on the Rock in broken repentance over your sin, and cross over from death to life by receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

This is *your* sign. What will you do with it?

**Paul and Glenda Stetson Interview**

1. Can you summarize the ministry the Lord has entrusted to you?
2. In what ways are you seeing God at work?
3. How can we pray for you?