

Keep Doing Wrong? Revelation 22:10-21

Today is an exciting day! Today we are finishing out our study through the book of Revelation, *and* we have our preschool and elementary kids with us today in the service! The verse that they have been studying is from **Psalm 139:14**, it says this: “How you made me is amazing and wonderful. I praise you for that. What you have done is wonderful. I know that very well.” (NIRV) Adults, you might have heard that verse stated like this “I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.” (NKJV)

The idea is that God has created us very unique and special in this universe we live in. The complex, detailed systems of the human body are absolutely mind blowing and amazing, for instance, did you know that human are the only species who can blush? And each person has a unique tongue and fingerprint that will always grow back to the original pattern even if damaged. Brains contain over 86 billion neurons, our circulatory systems would stretch from 60,000-100,000 miles if laid end to end. A human skeleton renews itself completely every 10 years. The way God designed us is amazing! And not only have we been created in unique fashion, but as we’ve been looking at over the past few weeks- God has created us for the specific purpose of *us living with Him*. God has mighty angelic spiritual warriors, but He says He wants to hang out for all eternity with you, you, you, you, you, and you... That’s right, the Bible tells us that even the tabernacle tent that was a house for God, and then the temple built that was a house for God- both of these were pointing to the reality that one day, *we* would be the house for God. Chapter 21 of Revelation even describes the New Heavenly Jerusalem city as being the bride of Christ, seemingly inferring that the bride of Christ previously defined as the *church* is to be viewed as *one and the same* as this New Heavenly Jerusalem *city* bride of Christ in which Jesus our God will live forever.

That’s so crazy. The creator of the universe, the One who is all powerful, the One who can be all places at once, who knows all things, the King of the Universe, the Super-hero rescuer of all time- wants you and I to live with Him at *His* house. That’s why He created you and I. And the very end of the Bible, the last chapter, Revelation 22, says some interesting things in reference to us knowing that we have been made by God as amazing and wonderful, awesomely

made so that God can live with us. I'm going to go ahead and read these last verses of the Bible, starting in verse 10, and I'll read to the end and then we'll walk back through it. Follow along with me in your own Bible, or with a Bible in front of you, or with the verses on the screens, here's verse 10... **(v 10-21)**

Ok, verse 10- the angel tells John not to seal up the words. In the Old Testament, Daniel the prophet was told to seal up what was spoken and written down, because the things said were for very distant-in-the- future generations, and the words were not applicable for the then current generation. So Daniel was to close up the book, and it be saved for people to read much later in the future. But here John is told- *don't* close the book, keep it open for everyone to read, because the things spoken of were applicable for that current generation, and these things would be happening in the more *near* future. Yes this was written a long time ago, but the urgency was very near for those readers of that time, just as the urgency is very near for us as readers today. For those alive during this time in history, they would very much need these words of encouragement- that though they were experiencing so much trouble and danger in their lives as a result of being Jesus followers, they needed to know with certainty, that Jesus- along with His followers- would have the ultimate victory. And in regards to the whole timeline of history, from Genesis to today, this was written during a time in history that *is* relatively close to the end of history that God will eventually be bringing about.

Verse 11 is absolutely so unique. As far as I know, this is the only verse in the Bible that sounds like it's telling people to keep doing wrong things. Spoiler alert- that's probably not what this verse 11 is trying to tell us. Like, when your parents tell you to stop calling your brother or sister mean names, it probably would *not* be the right thing to respond, "Well, mom and dad, the Bible says for the one who does wrong to keep doing wrong." That would not be the right meaning and application of this verse. Husbands, wives, this would NOT be the right verse to quote when your spouse is calling you out on something. "Well, you know honey, I've been reading the Bible and it says..." No, don't do that with this verse. We're going to come back here today- as confusing as it might be, I think this verse in particular is a huge key to understanding our take-away from this passage of scripture, maybe even a huge key in understanding the application of the entire book of Revelation- so we're going to save the best for last and unpack it at the end, so hang in there, we'll come back to it.

Verses 12 and 13, the angel is giving John this message, but it appears Jesus speaks through the angel, or at the very least, the angel is quoting the words of Jesus. Jesus is the one who will be coming to reward, He is the judge coming to evaluate everyone's life, it has always been about Him and always will be about Him. It says He is the Alpha, which is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and He is the Omega, which is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. In seminary I learned the Greek alphabet to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. You guys want to hear it real quick? It's a pretty jammin' tune- sound booth can you hook us up with jam? Feel free to try to sing along... (Song plays)

Pretty sweet tune right? It began with Alpha, and ended with Omega. In English, we would say Jesus is the A and He is the Z. Jesus is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. The Old Testament is all about Jesus, the New Testament is all about Jesus.

Verse 14, blessed are those who wash their robes. Now, this isn't saying that God will bless you and reward you if you put your dirty clothes in the washing machine. Your parents will really appreciate that- they might have some consequences and rewards for *doing* or *not doing* that, but in the book of Revelation and elsewhere in the Bible, clothes are spoken of symbolically as our actions. We "wear" our actions is basically what the Bible says. It compares good actions to wearing clean, nice clothes; and bad actions to wearing dirty, unclean clothes. So this verse is saying wash the dirty clothes (get rid of the bad actions) and wear the clean clothes (do the good actions), so that we can eat from the tree of life and enter to live in the New Jerusalem buildings of gold, streets of gold, walls of jasper city mentioned previously. Now, this isn't advocating for a works based salvation, the good action that the Bible tells us to do is to surrender to and follow Jesus, receiving His forgiveness; and the Bible then describes doing good works as *evidence* of us already being saved, not the *means* through which we are saved.

The Tree of Life is mentioned again here, we read earlier in verse 2 of this same chapter that this tree brings healing. This Tree of Life was the one that God *didn't* want Adam and Eve to eat from after they disobeyed Him, after they had already eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They *could* have eaten from the Tree of Life before disobeying God, but after they disobeyed God,

it would have been really bad for them to live eternally in a state of rebellion and sin against God, so mankind was kicked out of the paradise Garden of Eden, so that God could introduce His plan of redemption through Jesus, so that mankind would then be able to one day eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in a state that was good. Trust me, it's way more fun to live with someone who is always good, than to live with someone who is always bad. That's what God wants, that's what we want- to live with good people.

Verse 15- outside the perfect city are the dogs, sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, liars. All these are bad things, these are not the type people you would want to share a house with, these are things people do and become when they reject God's ways. But you might be asking yourself why are *dogs* listed in this group of badness, right? I mean, what's wrong with dogs- who lets the dogs out?" (Sound bite)

Sounds like God lets the dogs out- they don't belong in the New Jerusalem Heavenly city. The Bible isn't talking about *animal* dogs here, but rather it is talking about people, in how they behave. The Bible, in several places, refers to people *figuratively* as dogs, and the meaning is that a Biblical "dog" is a spiritual predator, someone who feeds off of others, someone who looks to scavenge off food from someone else. We have two dogs at our house, and they are very well behaved, but if I were to accidentally leave a tasty hamburger on the counter top, and then leave the room for 10 minutes- that hamburger just might disappear. Even if the dogs had just been fed, bellies completely full, they would still most likely put their front paws up on the counter, and take that hamburger from me. Listen, I love my dogs very much, but anyone who steals a hamburger from someone else, is not a good person. Or dog. Don't be taking other people's food- that's messed up. That's kind of the Biblical idea of "dog" here in verse 15, a person who steals from others to feed themselves. God is saying *that* kind of person, will not be in the Heavenly city. Sorcerers won't be in the Heavenly city- those who seek power and results in this world from beings other than God. Those who live a lifestyle of sexually immorality won't be in the Heavenly city- kids, you can ask your parents about that one later... Those who wrongfully kill others won't be in the Heavenly city, those who worship anything or anyone other than Jesus will not be in the city. Those who love lying, who live their life in a state of continual untruthfulness and deception, will not be allowed inside the Heaven city. There are all kinds of other sins and wrong doing the Bible *could*

have mentioned here, but this is just a short list of examples of the people and things that won't exist in Heaven.

And let me be clear, none of these sins *alone* will keep you from going to Heaven. There is only one sin that will keep you from going to Heaven, and that is the sin of rejecting Jesus. The Bible also calls this idea "blaspheming the Holy Spirit." Blasphemy is calling that which is good "bad," and that which is bad "good." It would be blasphemy for me to say that cheese cake tastes bad and Brussel sprouts taste good. Likewise, the one sin that will keep you from Heaven, is living a life that shows you calling God bad, and sin good. If we live life in that type of mindset, we will not be part of this Heavenly city God is bringing. We have to recognize that God is good, His plan is good, and disobeying Him is bad, doing the things He says not to do is bad.

Verse 16, again Jesus is speaking through the angel, saying that He confirms all these words in this book of Revelation, and again emphasizes that He has always been and always will be- the alpha/ omega, first/last, beginning/end, the *root* of the tree and the *fruit* of the tree. He's King David's great great great great great grandfather and King David's great great great great great great grandson. It's been Jesus from Genesis to now to Revelation and will be into all eternity.

This verse also says Jesus is the bright morning star- this is a really cool reference worth understanding. I know I taught on this before, and I was trying to find the message where I talked about this, but I couldn't find it. The bright morning star has historically always been known to be the planet Venus- Venus is the brightest natural object in the sky (besides the sun and moon), and it appears in the eastern sky right before sunrise. The illustration here is that we endure through the "night" of this current world, because a brand new day is coming- and Jesus' appearance in the eastern sky will be the sign that the brand new day has arrived.

Verse 17 emphasizes the open invitation to all who want what Jesus has to offer. We'll come back to this verse in just a little bit as well, **verses 18-19...**

Here is a serious warning to not add anything to what is written here, nor take anything away from it. In full transparency, I personally have felt that many

studies on the book of Revelation add a lot to what is written, there's a lot of extra theology being taught- events and circumstances, Old Testament prophecies- assumed and inserted into the text, that I think we should be a little careful about doing that, especially in light of this very stern warning. As I mentioned, verse 17 emphasizes the open invitation to come to Jesus, and then here in **verse 20** the same word is used again for Jesus coming. The invitation is "to come," because Jesus is "to come." We are to draw near to Jesus, because Jesus is drawing near to us. And may we be able to agree with the author John here, and in our hearts say, "Yes, please come soon Jesus."

And as we await Him, as verse 21 emphasizes, may we remain with His grace- knowing His love, forgiveness, blessing, mercy for those whose hearts are turned to Him.

In closing, I want to sum up this message through considering the meaning of **verse 11**. As I mentioned earlier, this verse could easily be misunderstood. There are a few different possibilities as to what it means, but let's start off with what we know it *doesn't* mean, from what we know of the rest of the Bible. As I said earlier, it's probably safe to say that this verse is *not* encouraging anyone to keep doing wrong things- that would go against major Biblical themes. So what is it saying? Well, Bible commentators have several different ideas on this, some take this verse to be using language that is intended to shock the reader with the idea of the urgency of really weighing this message of Revelation, and thus make life changes as a result. This interpretation would assume a little bit of reverse psychology is being implemented. Like, if mom and dad wanted you to clean your room, they might jokingly, mockingly- but lovingly- say something like "You're not going to clean your room. Pshhh.... You're probably too weak to even do such a thing. There's no way it's possible that you're even capable of cleaning up around yourself." And hopefully, the idea is that you'd be embarrassed, or want to prove them wrong, and you'd get up and go clean your room. Maybe that's what's going on here, perhaps there's a little bit of shaming of those who are doing wrong, in an effort to hopefully nudge them towards doing what's right.

Others view this verse as perhaps just describing typical human nature by saying- despite these words, despite these warnings- the general principle is that people will just keep doing what they are already doing- those who do wrong will probably, more than likely, just keep doing what is wrong; and

those who are trying to do what is right will just keep on doing what is right- and either way, these events are going to happen. The physical world as we know it will eventually go to ruin and all that will remain will be the eternal new world in which Jesus reigns as King in a Kingdom of goodness for His followers.

Still others see this verse pointing to the idea that as we get closer to this time of King Jesus rule, that it will become clearer and clearer who is following Jesus, and who is rejecting Jesus. Like, right and wrong will become more clear, there will be less middle ground, less grey area- it will become more and more clear who is on the side of Jesus doing what's right, and who isn't. Currently in our world, it *is* sometimes hard to tell who the real Christians are from those who aren't. But as we approach the events mentioned in the book of Revelation, especially when persecution of Christians increases, there will more than likely be many who we *thought* were Christians, who actually really weren't, who will at that time make it clear that they are not followers of Jesus. Motivations of individuals, even motivations of governments and nations, will be exposed.

I think all of these possible interpretations have some validity, but I'm going to focus us in on one more possibility that I think we need to consider in addition to these. Perhaps this verse *is* indicating all the things I've already mentioned, but perhaps it is also pointing towards the idea that whatever is done in this life, becomes fixed in the life to come. As in, the one who continues to do wrong in this life- that's who he/she will still be in the life to come; and the one who chooses to do right in this life- that's who he/she will still be in the life to come. The concept is that every decision has the potential to become a habit, and habits form character, and character leads you to your eternal destiny. In that sense, the time *is* very short, as in the decisions you make even *today* very much directly affect your future. You and I are making decisions right now, that very much affect the future trajectory of our lives. We are making decisions in the here and now that last for eternity. So yes, the time is near as verse 10 says, *today* make the right choices that prepare you to live in this new, amazing, coming Kingdom world in which a perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing God will live with mankind. The time is so short, that there is barely enough time to allow for people to prepare themselves for the coming of Jesus, so the idea is that those who want to be ready for Him in the future- must acknowledge that now- today is the day of salvation.

Now, it would be easy to take these words and attempt some form of spiritual legalism, or works based religion, but that's not the idea. The idea is more so the acknowledgment that every decision is leading us closer to God and preparing us more for God to live with us, or it is leading us further from God and thus polluting the environment of where God wants to live. I'm still fairly young, but I've lived long enough to see the effects of decisions in people's lives- little decisions that seemed at the time perhaps irrelevant- I've seen those little decisions lead to huge consequences in people's lives. Those little decisions form pathways, they cut trails, that eventually affect where you arrive. I've also seen people making little decisions that were leading to huge consequences, and they humbled themselves, surrendered to God, repented, and it totally changed their life trajectory *for the good*. That's the crazy thing- at any moment we find ourselves making decisions that are leading us further from God, at any moment- we can wake up, come to our senses, and get back on the path that leads us closer to God. God is there with open arms. The invitation is open. Verse 14 says *blessed* are those who wash their robes- God is inviting us to get cleaned up- to rid ourselves of distracting addictions, to rid ourselves of negative thought processes, to stop being prideful, to stop lying, to stop putting others down- to get *healthy* mentally, spiritually, emotionally, physically. Allow God to wash us, let's get clean- the fruit from the tree of life awaits, the pure gold city is calling us. Verse 17 says "come." That's God's heart- come over to His side, let Him be our focus and motivation, receive His love and forgiveness, receive the life that is coming, be nourished. If you have desire to allow Jesus to be King in your life- then come. As you are, come to Him, and allow Him to clean you up and prepare you to be part of the housing in which He lives.