

Lesson 10: Revelation 22:8-21

Opening Question: What “wrong” on earth are you most looking forward to being overturned?

Opening Prayer: God of light and life, we praise you for your tireless work on behalf of the whole world, that someday everything sad will be made untrue. Hasten that day, O Lord, and keep us faithful while we wait. Amen!

Read aloud Revelation 22:8-21

Read Wright aloud:

I stood in the cloister and listened to the bells. To begin with, I could hear each of the ten, clear in the morning air. But gradually, as the order changed and the echoes multiplied in the ancient stone colonnades, they seemed to merge into one: a glorious, wild, ancient sound, awakening not only echoes but memories of years long past and imaginings of years yet to come. Even so, out of the rich confusion of their noise, the lowest two or three notes kept intruding, wherever they were in the constantly changing pattern: dong – dong – dong, dong . . . dong . . . dong. They were part of the whole music and yet seemed to be saying: Pay attention. This is important. Listen hard. We’re telling you something. Keep awake.

Something of that sense comes over us as we reach the end of this most remarkable of books, whose surface we have skimmed in the interests of time and space and yet whose depths we have glimpsed as we have sped by. To begin with, we may have been able to hear most of the notes. But as the pace quickened and the echoes multiplied, the sequence of events – the letters, the seals, the trumpets and the bowls, and all that went with and around them – may have merged into one in our memory, a glorious, wild, ancient sound, pointing us back to the very dawn of time and the most ancient of scriptures, and yet pointing us on through symbolic signposts to things yet to come in God’s ultimate future. But, out of this rich confusion of vision and image, two or three notes now stand out, emerging variously from all that has gone before, part of the music and yet with something else to say. Pay attention. Keep these words. I am coming soon. I am coming soon.

Coming soon! That had been the hope of Israel for many a long year, before ever John saw Patmos, indeed before Jesus opened his eyes to the frosty light of a Bethlehem morning. Malachi, four hundred years earlier, had warned the bored and careless priests that ‘the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his Temple’. He will come! Ezekiel had described the glory of the Lord abandoning the Temple to its fate (Ezekiel 10.18 –19; 11.22–23), but Ezekiel had also promised that he would come back once the Temple had been properly restored (43.1–5). At no point in the next four hundred years, however, did anyone report the kind of vision Ezekiel had had in mind, or an experience that might correspond to the vision of God’s glory in the Temple as in Exodus 40 or Isaiah 6. The Lord had not

returned – but he would come. He would come. The hope of God’s coming back was at the heart of the hope for the restored Temple, which was itself at the heart of the hope for a restored Israel. The hope within the hope within the hope. Surely, he is coming soon! (202-204).

And the bells find tongue to fling out broad his name, to ring out their praise and their invitation. Come to the waters. There is still time. Come and take the water of life, freely. John's readers may find it hard to see in their neighbors on the street anything but cold, hostile stares and the threat of informing the authorities. They may be so aware of the present rule of the dragon, the monster and the false prophet that all they want is to escape, to be rescued, not to hold out to their neighbors God's repeated and generous invitation. But see they must, because the mercy of God is vast and his invitation wide as the world. Because he has made us as he has, he will not compel except with the appeal of love; only those who tell lies about his love, and about everything else, will resist (verse 15). But because he is who he is, the creator whose purposes are gloriously fulfilled in the slaughtered lamb, he will go on inviting and welcoming and pouring out the water of life for all the thirsty. Listen to the bells. These words. This prophecy. This book. Coming soon. Yes, I am coming soon.

The letter - it always was a letter, as well as a prophecy and a revelation - ends as it should, with a closing greeting. 'The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all' (verse 21). But, however conventional, this greeting now carries the freight of the entire book. It is dense with a thousand images of 'grace', pregnant with the power of the word 'Lord' when spoken under the nose of Caesar, sparkling in the still-open invitation to 'you all: and above all delicious with the name, the name that is now exalted high over all, the name of the slaughtered lamb, the name of the one we love and long to see. This book has been a revelation of Jesus, a testimony to Jesus, an act of homage to Jesus. This word. This book. This prophecy. Listen to the bells. Coming soon. This Jesus (206-207).

Optional Discussion Questions:

“Maranatha” is a word the church has prayed through the centuries. It means, “Come!”
Maranatha, Lord Jesus!

1. How often do you pray for Jesus to return?
2. How often do you hear people pray for the return of Christ?
3. What prevents us from praying for Christ’s return?
4. What has God taught you through the book of Revelation? (Leader: if you can, take notes on this and send them to campusministries@calvin.edu.)

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for the revelation that you gave to your servant John.
Thank you, Holy Spirit, for guiding our study week by week.

Thank you, Father God, for working even today to make everything right again.
Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus. This world belongs to you. Amen.