

## Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – June 2, 2019

### [Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).)

#### **Suggested Study / Prep**

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

#### **Commentary on Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21**

(From *Homiletics*; “Prophecy for Profit”, May 23, 2004)

This passage constitutes a portion of the epilogue to the book of Revelation (22:6-21). In it the heavenly Jesus announces his imminent return, offers promises of eternal life to those who remain faithful, and makes several statements concerning his own identity. The putative addressee of the remarks is the seer John of Patmos (see 1:1-11), whose account of his visions and heavenly journeys was apparently intended to exhort Christians in Asia Minor to increased faithfulness.

Although it seems that the speaker in verses 9-11 is the angel who acts as John’s guide and interpreter throughout the entire book, in verse 12 the speaker must certainly be Jesus. The assertion, “behold, I am coming soon,” is found three times previously in Revelation (2:16; 3:11; 22:7), and in each case it is on lips of Jesus. The second half of verse 12 supports this identification, as the authority to “repay according to everyone’s work” clearly would belong to Jesus and not an angel. Jesus is also presented as an eschatological judge of deeds in 2:23, a role that similarly is ascribed to Jesus as the Son of Man in the gospel tradition (e.g., Matthew 16:27). It is important to note that in Revelation, Jesus is the one who brings judgment functions both as a promise and as a warning. In the case of those who persevere in faith, the speedy return of Jesus is a source of hope and encouragement (e.g., 3:11). However, in the context of apostasy or immorality, the return of Jesus is intended to induce repentance (e.g., 2:16).

In 22:13 we find three statements of self-predication on the part of Jesus, all of which have been encountered earlier in Revelation. The interesting thing, however, is that not all of these predicates had applied to Jesus; some had rather been used of God. The first, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” is used in two other places in reference to God (1:8; 21:6). The second, “I am the first and the last,” is always used to refer to Jesus (1:17; 2:8).

The final predication, "I am the beginning and the end," is applied to God in 21:6. The author of the work is thus quite comfortable in attributing epithets to Jesus that are also used of God, which demonstrates a view of Jesus' identity that would be at home with the prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-18). The three predicates all seem to express the idea of Jesus' eternal existence.

The final of seven "beatitudes" in the book of Revelation comes in 22:14 (the other six can be found in 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; the form "blessed are..." is the same as that of the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5:3-11, Luke 6:20-22]). In this case the "blessed" ones are those who "wash their robes" and who "have the right to the tree of life" and are able "to enter the city by the gates" (22:14). The meaning of this isn't immediately clear, but a survey of similar language in the rest of the book can shed some light on the problem. In 2:7 those who have access to the tree of life are those who "conquer," a reference to persevering in good works. An association between clean garments and right living is made in 3:4, where those who have "not soiled their clothes" are the few in Sardis who are worthy to walk with Jesus. Thus it seems fair to understand "those who wash their robes" in 22:14 as a reference to those who have maintained faithful obedience to Jesus and his teachings. To these individuals immortal life is granted ("the right to the tree of life"), life that will be lived in "the city," i.e., the New Jerusalem described in 21:1-22:5.

In 22:16 Jesus announces that he has sent the angel "to you" (plural in Greek) to serve as witness to "this testimony" (i.e., the content of the book of Revelation) for the benefit of "the churches." Who are the individuals addressed collectively as "you"? We know that John has received the revelation from the angel, so we might expect the "you" to be singular. We should probably thus assume that John's fellow prophets, a group that is mentioned in 22:9, are intended to work alongside John in disseminating the content of his visions to the churches of Asia Minor.

Jesus continues in 22:16 by describing himself by means of more self-predications, in this instance emphasizing his messianic identity rather than his eternal nature, as was the case with the predicates of 22:13. The designation "root ... of David" (an allusion to the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:10) occurs earlier in 5:5; "descendant" seems to function merely as a complement to "root." The "bright morning star" alludes also to a messianic prophecy (Numbers 24:17), and has also appeared earlier in Revelation (2:28).

The first part of 22:17, where we are told that the "Spirit and the bride say, 'Come,'" has always proved a bit difficult for interpreters. It most likely means that the Holy Spirit and the Church respond to Jesus' assertion that he is coming (22:12) with a hopeful and expectant "Come!" This same sentiment should be articulated by "everyone who hears"; thus the reader of the book should also yearn for the imminent return of Jesus. The verse ends with an invitation for everyone who "is thirsty" and "who wishes" to "come" and "take the water of life as a gift" (cf John 4:13-14). It isn't clear to whom this invitation is addressed; some scholars think it is an invitation to the eucharist (and thus 22:6-17 would have a liturgical function), while others view it as directed to those not yet part of the Christian community, and still others understand it as an expression of encouragement to beleaguered Christians.

The ending of the book of Revelation comes in 22:20-21. The imminent return of Jesus is once again asserted, and then the hope for this return is stated in the formula "Come, Lord Jesus" (20:20), which is almost certainly a Greek rendering of the Aramaic phrase *maranatha* ("Our Lord come") found in 1 Corinthians 16:22. An epistolary postscript is added in 20:21 (cf Romans 16:22, 1 Corinthians 16:21, and the other letters of Paul), reminding us that the entire book is cast in the form of a letter (see 1:4).

## Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for this text (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](http://WorkingPreacher.org).

## Reflection Questions on Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

1. From Ronald J. Allen, *workingpreacher.org* (June 2, 2019): “*What does it mean for the congregation today to “wash our robes” to have “the right to the tree of life?”* What do we make of this “beatitude” today? How does it compare to the more often quoted beatitudes of Matthew (or Luke)? Do we hear echoes of our mothers and grandmothers saying “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”? Do we hear judgment? Promise? Invitation? Exclusivity?
2. You might want to take a look at the verses excluded from today’s lectionary reading. (vv. 15, 18-19). It is easy to see why they were omitted from the liturgical reading, even if it does leave us open to the charge of theological gerrymandering through the scripture! But if we were to take these omissions seriously, how might these verses color our interpretations and understandings of the rest of the passage? Is it justified to ignore/omit these less than pleasant but nonetheless “red-letter” words? If so, why? If not, what do we make of them? What do our choices in this regard say about our theology?
3. “Surely I am coming soon.” (v.20) Really? After nearly two millennia of waiting, the church is still waiting. Perhaps we have a faulty idea of the meaning of the word “soon?” How do you understand this eschatological promise?

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?**