

# The Redeemer Returns

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** Jesus will return as the conquering King who will judge all those who have rebelled against God and will make all things new so that His people can be with Him forever.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** Revelation 19–22

John Lennon’s 1971 song “Imagine” encouraged a generation to imagine there is no heaven or hell and instead to embrace living for today. Contrast Lennon’s sentiments with what Christians everywhere have always confessed in the Apostles’ Creed: “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

As we come to the end of our journey through the last book of the Bible, we must consider the New Testament’s teaching on the return of Christ and the making of all things new. A recent confession of faith puts it this way: “In God’s own time and way, the bodily risen and ascended Christ will visibly return to consummate God’s purpose for the whole cosmos through his victory over death and the devil.”<sup>1</sup> Part of that victory will be expressed in Christ’s judgment of the world. Justice and judgment go hand in hand. In order to make all things new, God will consign all falsehood, unbelief, sin, and evil to everlasting destruction.



When you encounter the Bible’s portrayal of final judgment and renewal, what questions arise? What elements give you hope? What elements alarm you?

# Group Time

## Point 1: The conquering King will return to judge rebellion (Rev. 19:11-16).

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and he judges and makes war with justice. <sup>12</sup> His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. <sup>13</sup> He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. <sup>14</sup> The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. <sup>15</sup> A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The horse rider in this vision is called “Faithful and True,” a reference that clues us in to the identity of this messianic figure—this is Jesus (3:14). In His first coming, Jesus was sent to be judged on the cross for our sin in our place. But in His second coming, Jesus will return to execute judgment and reclaim His rightful rule over this rebellious world.



Why should Christians in places where persecution is severe find so much hope in this promise of coming judgment?

Once we understand God’s judgment as putting an end to all that is wrong with the world (war, famine, disease, and so on), then we can understand why Jesus rides a horse and the apostle Paul viewed judgment as part of his gospel (Rom. 2:15-16). Take away the notion of judgment and you rob Christianity of any hope of satisfying our longing for justice, a longing built into us by our just and wise God. Without judgment, the gospel fails to deal with the problem of evil and the detrimental ways we humans treat each other and, by extension, God. Once we take away judgment, we lose the gravity of our sin. Once we lose sight of our sinfulness, we short-circuit our experience of the powerful gratitude that comes from receiving grace.

### Voices from the Church

“The Bible says that God’s wrath flows from his love and delight in his creation. He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying its peace and integrity.”<sup>2</sup>

—Timothy Keller

## Point 2: The conquering King will return to make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).

**Second Coming of Christ:** The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in \_\_\_\_\_ form to rule and reign over all creation. Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur, only assuring that it will be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Because of the mystery surrounding these events, several views have emerged about this return and His millennial reign. Despite their differences, all views agree that the \_\_\_\_\_ return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

<sup>3</sup> Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

<sup>5</sup> Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new." He also said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true."

The picture we see in Revelation 21 is the marriage of heaven and earth. Once sin is banished from the earth and all evil is judged, then the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven to earth. Our ultimate destination, as Christ's followers, is not a disembodied existence somewhere out there in the skies but a resurrected existence on a physical, transformed earth. Heaven may be where our spirits go when we die, but it isn't our final destination. Our bodies will be resurrected at the end of time, and we will enjoy the new earth, filled with the presence of God forever.



Take another look at Revelation 21:1-5 and note what will be present and what will be absent. How does your heart respond to this vision?


### Point 3: The conquering King will return to be with His people forever (Rev. 22:1-5).

<sup>1</sup> Then he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the city's main street. The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, <sup>3</sup> and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.

We've arrived at the final chapter of the Bible, and God is bringing things full circle, but in a new and better way. Genesis began with Adam and Eve and the tree of life in the garden of Eden, but they were exiled because of their sin. Now the last book of the Bible gives us a glimpse of the new Jerusalem, a garden city in which the tree of life brings healing and fruitfulness forever to God's resurrected and restored people.

GENESIS <sup>3</sup>	REVELATION
_____ established (1:5)	No _____ there (22:5)
_____ created (1:16)	No need of the _____ (21:23)
The _____ announced (3:14-19)	No more _____ (22:3)
_____ enters history (3:19,24)	_____ exits history (21:4)

**New Heaven and New Earth:** When Christ returns and the children of God are revealed, the physical world itself will undergo a similar \_\_\_\_\_, a new heaven and a new earth. Scripture describes the new earth as a \_\_\_\_\_ and as a physical place that will include eating and drinking. Best of all, \_\_\_\_\_ will be all and in all, and we shall see Him face to face.

 What impact should the promised vision of Revelation 22 have on our actions today?



# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Revelation 19:1-21

The final judgment described in Revelation 19 demonstrates the holy love of God. Many today resist the idea of God as judge, but when they do so, they are left with a one-dimensional God—a sappy, sanitized deity whom they can easily manage. He nods and winks at our behavior, much like a kind elderly man who is not seriously invested in our lives. But the evil of our world is much too serious for us to view God as a pandering papa.

The Bible's picture of God is much more satisfying. He is angry because He is love. He looks at the world and sees the trafficking of innocent children, the destructive use of drugs, genocidal atrocities, terrorist attacks that keep people in perpetual fear, and He—out of love for the creation that reflects Him as Creator—responds rightfully and gloriously with anger.

The god who is truly scary is not the wrathful God of the Bible but the god who closes his eyes to the evil of this world, shrugs his shoulders, and ignores it in the name of “love.” What kind of love is this? A god who is never angered at sin and who lets evil go by unpunished is not worthy of worship. The problem isn't that the judgment-less god is too loving; it's that he is not loving enough.



### Voices from Church History

“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.”<sup>5</sup>

—Nicene Creed (AD 381)




What does the promise of final judgment tell us about the character of God?

## Day 2: Read Revelation 20:1-15

Various perspectives on challenging portions of Scripture give us an opportunity to reason together as believers and to show grace to each other when we come to different conclusions. For centuries, Christians have debated the best way to understand the description of the thousand-year reign of Christ in Revelation 20, as well as the resurrection mentioned here. With so many views (and variations of those views), the labels of “amillennial,” “postmillennial,” or “premillennial” have led some Christians to throw up their hands and say they’re “panmillennial”—it’ll all *pan out* in the end!


The truth is, however, that the Lord intended for us to take hope, not consternation, from these and other passages. We should study them in light of other Scriptures, come to a conclusion on what we believe is the best approach for interpretation, and then show grace to brothers and sisters who, with sincerity of heart and love for the Lord, come to other conclusions.

-  What are some examples of doctrines where Christians can agree to disagree? What are some doctrines that are so fundamental to the Christian faith that to disagree is to embrace major error?

## Day 3: Read Revelation 21:1-27

If you’ve ever experienced profound grief, you know how impossible it is to control the tears. At times, for some, tears cease because of the numbness that can overtake you as your soul descends into the shadows of sadness. The promise of Revelation 21 is that God will wipe away every tear. One of the best lines from *The Lord of the Rings* is when a character who has seen so much evil and destruction and yet believes the world may be renewed asks, “Is everything sad going to come untrue?”<sup>6</sup>

The reason such a question resonates with us is because deep down, we look to the Lord to renew all things, to bring new life out of the grave, to swallow all the sufferings and sorrow of this present world, and to create something so beautiful that the weight of this present moment won’t compare to the joy promised tomorrow.

-  What do you long for most when you think of the future glory promised to God’s people?

## Day 4: Read Revelation 22:1-5

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, He told her about living water that would satisfy her forever (John 4:13-14). Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him” (John 7:37-38). Jesus was referring specifically to the Spirit there, but this image of water flowing—bringing life to the world—shows up in Revelation 22 as well.

The image is of a river flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, watering the city and bringing fruit along the way. Here we see the promise of a future in which hunger and thirst are no more. We who long for the Savior will be fully and forever satisfied in Him.



What earthly wells of water are you drawn toward in order to satisfy your deepest longings? How does the vision of the well-watered garden city point you to Christ for satisfaction?

## Day 5: Read Revelation 22:6-21

Jesus is coming soon! That’s what He said in Revelation 22. But do we believe that His coming could be at any moment? Isn’t it easy to be caught up in the daily affairs of our lives, forgetful of His promised return? Many people turn to Revelation out of curiosity regarding the future timetable for the end of the world. But God did not give us this book in order to satisfy intellectual curiosities but as a presentation of Jesus intended to change our lives now in the present.

We look to the One who was, who is, and who is to come, and—trusting in His word that He will come again soon—we live with hopeful anticipation. We obey Him today as we look to His return tomorrow. In the meantime, we lift our voices as an expression of our hearts’ deepest desire, and with the saints of all the ages, we say: “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”



What are some ways you can continually remind yourself of the promised return of Christ?





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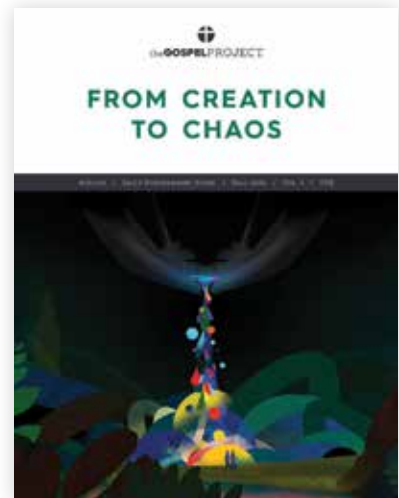
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## All Things New

The life of a believer is not easy, and for some, it can be deadly. As a prisoner for preaching Christ, the apostle Paul experienced rejection, false accusations, and threats. But he also experienced the peace of God and the fellowship of believers to encourage him.

Through all the adversity, struggles, and persecution that Paul experienced, including a long, stressful journey and a shipwreck, Jesus Christ—the Son of God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Savior of the world—was present, powerful, and in control, just as He is with all believers. Therefore, we can live in grace, strive for unity, defend the faith, and obey our Lord, overflowing with His love for us.

In these last days since the time of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the church has experienced difficulties through persecution and from false teachers. Yet the Lord has encouraged His church to hold on to hope because of what we know from Scripture—Jesus is coming again. He will be with His people forever and He will make all things new.

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