

Main Idea: The final chapter of the Bible encourages hurting Christians to think about two motivating, hope-giving subjects. As we do so, we experience grace to the end.

- I. When we are hurting, we need to think about what is coming (1-20).
  - A. We see a picture of what is coming (1-6).
  - B. We hear a message from the One who is coming (7-20).
    1. He says, “I am coming soon.”
    2. He offers a blessing and a warning that is out of this world.
- II. When we are hurting, we need to think about what we have (21).
  - A. We have specific grace.
  - B. We have sovereign grace.
  - C. We have personal grace.
  - D. We have grace that is meant to be shared.
  - E. We have grace that produces assurance and fortitude.

Making the benediction personal: Two questions...

1. How have I responded to the grace of the Lord Jesus?
2. How am I responding to the grace of the Lord Jesus?

*Intro to Scripture Reading:* There’s something quite significant about the final chapter of a book. Take away the final chapter and you’re left hanging. But with the final chapter comes closure. Everything comes together.

God took over 1,500 years and about forty human authors to give us His Word. But because it is *His* Word, there is a unifying theme in the storyline of the Scriptures. The Bible is the story of what God is doing to form a people for His glory. The story begins with the description of a paradise that was lost (Genesis 1-2) and it ends with the prophecy of a paradise restored (Rev 21-22).

In Revelation 21, God allowed John to see a vision of the new heaven and earth. In Revelation 21 John attempted to put into words what he saw. The vision continues in the next chapter, the final chapter, not only of the book of Revelation, but of the entire Bible.

Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 22 are like symmetric book ends. As I read now the final chapter of the Bible, listen carefully for things that existed in the first garden of Eden, the one Adam forfeited, that will also exist in the coming paradise.

*Scripture Reading: Revelation 22*

Life is hard. An unstable economy. Government breakdown. Conflict in the Middle East. Truth under attack. Persecution of the followers of Christ. Blatant immorality in the world.

What am I describing? You say, “You’re describing what’s happening in our world today.” And you’re right. I have just described the world in which we are living. But I’ve also just described what the Bible says is going to happen in the days just preceding the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

When the apostle John wrote the final book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he was an old man who had been arrested by the Romans and sentenced to a harsh exile on the island of Patmos. It had been six decades since Jesus had called him and privileged him to spend three years with Him. He had seen Jesus’ miracles, heard Jesus’ teaching, watched Jesus breathe His last breath on the cross, then saw the empty tomb,

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

and then spent wonderful times with the resurrected Jesus before He ascended back to heaven. He had taken seriously Jesus' final charge, "Go, make disciples of all nations, teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." That's why he was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, miraculously survived and then was sent to this God-forsaken rock. John was a Christ-follower, and the world has no place for Christ-followers.

It is difficult to be a Christian in a world that believes there are many ways to God. Christians believe the claim of the Savior who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." We not only believe that claim, we proclaim it, we call on others to believe in the one and only Savior and receive the gift of eternal life.

By God's grace, some do believe. But many, for Jesus said the road to destruction is broad, refuse to believe in the name of Jesus and take out their fury against His people.

What keeps us going? What sustains Jesus-followers when life gets hard? This does. The final chapter. The final verse.

The final chapter of the Bible encourages us to think about two motivating, hope-giving subjects. As we do so, we experience *grace to the end*.

Subject #1—*what is coming*, verses 1-20. Subject #2—*what we have while waiting for what is coming*, verse 21, grace to the end.

#### I. When we are hurting, we need to think about what is coming (1-20).

In the final chapter of the Bible we see something and then hear something regarding the future that ought to give us tremendous encouragement in the present.

**A. We see a picture of what is coming (1-6).** We just read the account, so I won't re-read it. But let's think our way through this stunning account.

First, an angel showed John something incredible in verses 1-5. John tells us *what* he saw in verses 1-2: a river, a throne, and a tree, the tree of life. Then he records *who* he saw there in verses 3-5. God and the Lamb will be there, he says. God's servants will be there too, and they will serve God and the Lamb and actually reign forever and ever.

You can't help but be impressed by the similarities between the first two chapters of the Bible and the final chapter. In both places we find mentioned:

\*A river (1-2) -- see Gen 2:10

\*The tree of life (2, 14) -- see Gen 2:9

\*Fruit (2) -- see Gen 1:29 & 2:9

\*God's servants serving Him (3) -- see Gen 2:15

\*God's servants reigning (5) -- see Gen 1:28

\*God's people seeing God face to face (4) -- no specific text in Genesis, but 3:8 mentions the intimacy Adam and Eve once enjoyed with God and then forfeited

These are the bookends of the Bible: paradise lost and paradise restored. The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 3 through Revelation 21, is the record of how God did it, how He worked out His plan to restore what was lost, all to His glory.

Then, in verse 6, the angel verified the certainty of his prediction. "These words are trustworthy and true. These things must soon take place."

After receiving a picture of what is coming...

**B. We hear a message from the One who is coming (7-20).** He says two things.

1. *He says, "I am coming soon."* He repeats the prediction three times. In verse 7, "Behold I am coming soon!" In verse 12, "Behold I am coming soon!" And in verse 20, "Yes, I am coming soon." Then, in the mix of this threefold prophecy...

2. *He offers a blessing and a warning that is out of this world.* And that's no exaggeration. Out of this world. Both the blessing and the warning pertain to the life that is to come.

First, in verse 7 Jesus speaks and pronounces a **blessing**. "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Then He extends another blessing in verse 14, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life." So cleanliness is next to godliness! Only those who are clean enjoy the tree of life, and of course, they are clean only because of the work of the Lord Jesus who made them clean by the power of His cross.

The angel speaks in verses 8-11. He says two things. First, don't worship me, but worship God (8-9)! And then, don't seal up the message, but live in light of it (10-11).

Then Jesus speaks again in verses 12-16. He repeats His promise that He's coming soon, and identifies who He is and who this message is for in verse 16.

Then John speaks again in verses 17-19. Actually, John records what someone else had to say, and in so doing he tells us what to do while we wait. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

The Spirit—that's the Holy Spirit—and the bride—that's Christ's bride, the church. What are they saying? *Come!* To whom are they speaking? You can take their words in one of two ways. Are they speaking to the Lord Jesus? Are they saying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"? Perhaps, and that's what John will verbalize in verse 20. But it's also possible that they're offering this invitation to those mentioned in the latter part of this verse, to those who are thirsty for the water of life. *Come! If you are thirsty, come to Jesus!*

That's what we ought to be doing while we are waiting, beloved. Calling on Jesus to come, and calling on people to come to Jesus! Why?

Because there's a **warning** that's out of this world. We hear the warning in verses 18-19. "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

So the blessing and the warning are out of this world. I would testify that it was hearing this message that God used to bring me to repentance and faith when I was little boy. I am praying even now that God will use this message to do the same for you, my non-Christian friend.

Jesus speaks one final time in verse 20. He repeats His promise, "Yes, I am coming soon." *Soon...* He keeps saying. And it is. What is two thousand years compared to an unending eternity? Not a drop in a bucket to the One who Himself is eternal.

To which John offers the fitting response, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Do you see the point of this amazing scene in Revelation 22? When we are hurting, and Jesus-followers will hurt in this world with devils filled, we need to think about *what is coming*. It's the knowledge of what's coming that sustains us when life is hard. We know what is coming. We just read it right here. We know there is a new heaven and

earth to gain. We know there's a lake of fire to avoid. We know that we are heading for paradise restored, by the grace of God, where we will eat from the tree of life and drink deeply the water of life. And we also know that unless they come to know Christ, millions, even billions, will never know those pleasures but will feel guilt and shame and torment that will never end.

We need to think about what we know, brothers and sisters. Think about what is coming. Read about it. Memorize verses about it. Talk about it with each other. Sing about it. Dream about it. Long for it. Spread the news about it. Nothing brings hope to the believer's hurting soul like knowing the truth about what is coming.

You say, "Yes, it is wonderful to know what's coming. But what about now? I need help now." And we have it, my friend. This brings us to our second hope-giving subject.

## II. When we are hurting, we need to think about what we have (21).

Verse 21 (NIV '85), "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

Just stop for a moment and let the final words of the Bible sink in. In the ESV, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen." John has an eye to the future—"Come, Lord Jesus," he says. And John knows we have what it takes for the present—"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people." Yes, the Lord has given us two very significant things, and we need them both. *We have His promise.* He is coming soon. *We have His grace.* His unmerited favor and help.

Is it significant that the final words of the Bible emphasize that *God's people* need and have available grace? Indeed, it is. We needed grace to be saved. We also need grace to live as saved people. And what we need we have in Christ.

Last time I showed you that nearly every one of the New Testament epistles begins the same way, by affirming grace. "Grace to you." "Grace to you." "Grace to you." Then after affirming grace, Paul, Peter, John, and the other shepherds applied grace to the challenges the churches were facing. We marveled at that simple model for dealing with the challenges we face. Begin with grace affirmed. Then move to grace applied.

But today we need to modify our model. When we look at the end of nearly every New Testament book, outside of the gospels and Acts, we discover they end the same way, with another affirmation of grace.<sup>1</sup>

Romans 16:20 "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

1 Cor 16:23 "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you."

2 Cor 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Galatians 6:18 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers."

Ephesians 6:24 "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

Philippians 4:23 "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Colossians 4:18 "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."

1 Thes 5:28 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

2 Thes 3:18 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

1 Tim 6:21 "Grace be with you."

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<sup>1</sup> The only epistles that don't use the "Grace be with you" ending are James, 1 Peter which uses "Peace to all of you," 2 Peter uses "But grow in grace," 1 & 2 John, 3 John uses "Peace to you," and Jude.

2 Tim 4:22 “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

Titus 3:15 “Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.”

Philemon 25 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Heb 13:25 “Grace be with you all.”

It’s so obvious, we’re prone to miss it. Here’s how to deal with problems. We affirm and extend grace to others. Then we apply grace to the problems at hand. But we don’t end thinking about the problems. We end by affirming grace again, by saying it, not just thinking it, “We have what it takes to bring honor to our Savior in this situation. We have His grace.”

John shows us this model in the final book of the Bible. He begins by saying in 1:4, “John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come.” And now he concludes this book, indeed these sixty-six books, with a final affirmation, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.”

When you look at a diamond, what do you see? At first glance, you see a *diamond*. I mean, it’s a beautiful even stunning rock. Sometimes you’ll even say, “Wow, look at that rock!” But if you keep looking you begin to see so much more. If you take that beautiful rock and turn it in the light, you see something different, something unique, something that’s hard to put into words. Indeed, you move from seeing it to *experiencing* it.

I want us to experience the Bible’s final verse. I want us to turn it in the light and gaze at each word carefully and prayerfully. The words are stunning and they communicate to us five beautiful realities about this grace that we have.<sup>2</sup>

**A. We have specific grace.** Look at the first word. “The.” *The* grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. It’s a definite article. Not simply “a” grace, but “the” grace.

There are common graces in the world. My dad went to get his haircut last week and when he was finished and proceeded to pay the \$12 the barber said, “Someone paid your bill. You don’t owe anything.”

That’s a grace, and thankfully we experience these unmerited, unsolicited blessings from time to time. But this is far more.

What do we have? *The* grace of the Lord Jesus. This is specific grace. It’s specific in that it comes very a specific person, the Lord Jesus. It’s specific because it takes care of specific needs.

It’s the same grace that took care of our need for salvation. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you, through His poverty, might be made rich (2 Cor 8:9).”

It’s the same grace that took care of our need for faith. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph 2:8-9).”

It’s the same grace that provided us with spiritual gifts for service (Rom 12:3-8), for strength to endure suffering (2 Cor 12:10). It’s the grace in which we stand (Rom 5:1-2). It’s the grace that when sin abounds, it super-abounds (Rom 5:20).

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<sup>2</sup> In the Greek text there are seven words.

This grace is specific. We have tasted it before, and we will again, and again, and again. This is something we have. The unmerited, unsolicited, undeserving favor and help of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But turn the rock and you see something else.

**B. We have sovereign grace.** “The grace of *the Lord* Jesus be with God’s people.” Look at that word “Lord.” Kurios. The Greek term can simply mean “sir,” or it can refer to a master of slaves, but the Romans applied it to Caesar and it signified divinity.

When he was 86 years old, the second century bishop of the church at Smyrna, Polycarp, was arrested. Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, who penned the words we are considering. The Roman authorities ordered Polycarp to confess, “Caesar is kurios. Caesar is Lord.” Had he said those words, he would have saved his life. But of course, he did not. He could not, and so the Romans murdered him.

Curious thing about the Roman caesars. You said, “Caesar is Lord” one day, and then a year later he died, and another became your Lord, then another, then another. It was a contradiction in terms. Caesar is not Lord because he is not in control.

But the One who conquered death is in control. Of everything. “That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Kurios*,” writes Paul in Philippians 2.

My mother loved me and she would do whatever she could to help me, even demonstrating unmerited help, grace, at times. You can probably relate. But my mother’s grace was not sovereign grace. When I was sick she could hold me, but she couldn’t fix the problem. She did not have the power nor the authority.

But He does, no matter what the problem is. Look, look at that word. The grace of the *Lord* Jesus. The fact that this grace belongs to the Lord Jesus means that this is sovereign grace. When He chooses to help me, the choice comes from Him alone, and none can stop Him.

“He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of the glory of his grace,” says Ephesians 1:5-6.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace, that he lavished on us...” says Ephesians 1:7-8.

We talked about thorns a few weeks ago. We all have them. It could be sickness. It could be a thorny situation, or thorny person in your life. Because He is Lord, He can take thorns away, and sometimes He does. But sometimes He doesn’t, not because He can’t, but because He has a higher sovereign purpose. As He told Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:8, after Paul pleaded three times for the Lord to take away his thorn, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Dear friends, what are you facing right now? Does life seem out of control? It is not out of the control of the Kurios, and He offers to us, moment by moment, need by need, His unmerited help. We have access to sovereign grace.

But there’s more. Turn the rock again.

**C. We have personal grace.** “The grace of the Lord *Jesus*.” Jesus. A person. A person like none other. “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins,” said the angel to Joseph in Matthew 1:21.

Yeshua. A compound word from “Ye”, the abbreviation for the covenant name of God, “Yahweh,” and the verb that means “saves.” Hence, His name means, the Lord saves.

As sinners in the hands of a holy God, we could not save ourselves. We were condemned to perish, and justly so. But God demonstrated His love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). He died for us. He saved us.

And it’s this One who saved us who now extends His grace to us, grace sufficient for every need, grace to the end. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us, how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things (Rom 8:32)?”

This is personal, highly personal. This is the grace of *Jesus* Himself.

Do you know what happens when you, my dear brothers and sisters, call upon the Almighty God in the name of His Son, Jesus? Listen to this. These are John’s words in 1 John 2:1-2, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

We have an advocate, one who speaks to the Father in our defense. “When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.”

Is the person of Jesus real in your life? If you have never bowed your pride and received Him as your Savior, He certainly is not real, but could be, if you called on Him even now. But I’m talking now to Christians. Is the person of Jesus real to you? Do you spend time with Him in His Word? Do you walk with Him through the day, seeking His wisdom, His strength, His purposes? Do you seek to please Him in every pursuit, live for His fame in every investment of time and money? Are you experiencing His unmerited help, and responding with daily praise-be-to-His name?

But there’s more. Keep turning. Not only is the grace we have specific, sovereign, and personal, but this too.

**D. We have grace that is meant to be shared.** “The grace of the Lord Jesus *be with God’s people*.” He is not our Genie in a bottle. What He offers us He offers to all.

In fact, we need to talk about Bible translation for a moment to appreciate this. You may have noticed that our English translations sound different.

NIV “The grace of the Lord Jesus *be with God’s people*.”

ESV & NASB “The grace of the Lord Jesus *be with all*.” (ESV footnote, “Some manuscripts *all the saints*”; NASB footnote, “One early manuscript reads *the saints*)

KJV “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be with you all*.”

In the Greek text, there is no verb “be”. It simply reads, “The grace of the Lord Jesus with all.”

Why the differences? It’s because John wrote this in Greek. It started with one Greek manuscript, which eventually he or someone else copied and sent to seven churches. Those manuscripts in turn were copied and sent to other churches, eventually all over the Roman empire and beyond. Archaeologists have discovered hundreds and hundreds of these Greek manuscripts, or portions of a manuscript.

You can imagine this. So you are sitting in a church service in Ephesus and hear someone read this passage. You go home, and decide you want to share what you heard with your cousin in Alexandria. So you take out your quill and papyrus and write it down from memory.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus.* Or did he say, the grace of the Lord Jesus *Christ? Be with all.* But you want to encourage your cousin in Alexandria to become a Christian so you emphasize that this grace of Jesus is *with all God's people*, so he too will become part of God's family.

But it doesn't stop there. Now your cousin writes a letter and shares this verse with his friend in Antioch. He copies what you wrote, but substitutes the word "saints" in place of "God's people," because he just learned in his church Sunday that this is what God's people are, *saints*.

And so it goes. These verses are copied and shared over and over again. And the variations become families of manuscripts, so that texts found in one part of the Roman Empire read one way, and those in another read another way.

The goal of a Bible translator is this. We want to go back as far as we can to the original, in this case, what the Spirit of God directed John to put down on the first piece of paper. Quite often, the original is the shortest reading because as time passes and people copy the text, they add extra words to clarify.

So the KJV translation took place in in the 1600s. It's longer. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be with you all.*" In the past four hundred years many more manuscripts were uncovered that did not have the extra words. Hence, the NASB and ESV, which are more literal and word for word than the NIV, "The grace of the Lord Jesus *be with all.*"

So there's why there are differences. But what is not different is the basic message. We have grace that is meant to be shared. Not cherished but kept to ourselves. Shared. This news is too good to keep to ourselves.

This is an affirmation. This is also our desire and prayer. The grace of the Lord Jesus *with all.* That's what we want. That's why we tell our neighbors and send our missionaries to the nations. We want them to know, we want *ALL* to know, that they can experience the unmerited favor and help of the Lord Jesus.

One more. Turn the rock again and we see this.

**E. We have grace that produces assurance and fortitude.** The final word?<sup>3</sup> "Amen." Which means, "This is true. So be it." Do you hear the confidence in that word? The circumstances have not changed. The enemy is still attacking the followers of Jesus. But with the knowledge of what is coming, and the knowledge of what we have in mind, John can say, "So be it. This is true. The grace of the Lord Jesus with all. Nothing more needs to be said. This is enough. Now go and live for Jesus, and tell the world about Him, for He is coming again."

Making the benediction personal: Two questions...

1. *How have I responded to the grace of the Lord Jesus?*
2. *How am I responding to the grace of the Lord Jesus?*

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<sup>3</sup> I should note that not all the ancient manuscripts have the word "Amen," though it is in verse 20 as well.