

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.”¹ 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?

Date of My Bible Study: _____

Group Time

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

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, 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.”²

—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 _____.

¹ 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. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy 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).

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their 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 ³	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.”⁵

—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?”⁶

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 thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (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?

