

Dawning of the Kingdom of Grace

By Phillip G. Kayser · Revelation 22:13-17 · 2018-11-4

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Text

12 “Take note, I am coming swiftly, and my reward is with me to give to each one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and end, the First and the Last.” 14 (Blessed are those who do His commands, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, even to enter through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the ‘dogs’ and the sorcerers and the fornicators and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices a lie.) 16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you, in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning Star. 17 Both the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let whoever hears say, ‘Come!’ And let whoever thirsts come; whoever wants to, let him take the water of life free of charge.

Introduction

Last Sunday we saw from verse 12 that Christ's soon-coming-in-judgment of AD 70 is quite different from Christ's distant-coming-in-judgment at the end of history. Scripture speaks of a judgment day at both the beginning of the kingdom and the end of the kingdom. And this whole paragraph deals with a Judgment Day that occurs at the Dawning of the Kingdom. I won't deal with verse 12 again, but Daniel 7:26-27 summarizes this judgment and dawning of the kingdom theme. It says,

26 “But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy it forever. 27 Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.’

That chapter mentions the same tribulations that Revelation talks about leading up to the birthing of the kingdom. Just as labor pains result in a beautiful baby, the Old Testament predicted labor pains that would give birth

to the kingdom. And every verse in this paragraph gives confidence in this soon-to-be-dawning of the kingdom. We are picking up today at verse 13.

The divinity of Jesus is expressed once again by these three titles (v. 13; see 1:7,17; 2:8; 21:6-7; Is. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12-16)

In verse 13 Jesus gives His divine credentials for why He can bring light out of darkness. He says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and end, the First and the Last." This is as clear a statement of the Divinity of Jesus as you could get. And if you ever deal with cult-members who deny the deity of Jesus, you may want to make marginal notes here. Not only does the angel point John's worship away from himself and to Jesus, but Jesus acknowledges the legitimacy of worshiping Him by taking titles to Himself that only belong to Yehowah God.

These titles have already been used more than once to emphasize Christ's deity,^[1] but this is the first time that all three are grouped together. They basically have the same meaning. But with the three titles you have a triple confirmation that He will do what He has said He will shortly do. His divinity makes it easy for Him to fulfill these prophecies.

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last letter. So the first title would be like saying "I am the A-Z." The next phrase explains by saying, I am the "beginning and end." And the last phrase says, I am the "First and the Last." It's just three ways of saying the same thing. And the use of all three absolutely nails down the doctrine of Christ's divinity. They show that He is the Creator of all things and that all things owe their existence to Him and find their purpose in Him.^[2]

Let me prove those assertions. Turn back one page to Revelation 21 and look at verses 5-7.

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Take note, I make everything new!" And He says to me, "Write, because these words are true and faithful!" 6 Then He said to me, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the one who thirsts I will give of the spring of the water of Life freely. 7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him and he will be a son to me.

There is no getting around these verses. If the JW's admit that this is Jesus speaking, then He clearly calls Himself God in verse 7. If this is the Father speaking, then the Father is identifying Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. It's a title of divinity. So either way, Jesus wears the same titles as Yehowah.

Turn next to Revelation 1:8. This too is Jesus speaking. But even if a JW tried to evade that by claiming it was the Father, you again see that God identifies

Himself with the same titles that Jesus did. In any case, in context it is clear that it is Jesus speaking. He says,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "He who is and who was and who is coming, The Almighty."

Jesus is called "the Lord God" and "The Almighty" and "the Alpha and the Omega." In chapter 1:17 and in 2:8 the other titles are clearly applied to Jesus again. This is the kind of information you need when people deny Christ's deity. Not only is Jesus worshiped in the New Testament without rebuke, but you can see Christ's divine nature by the fact that He possesses all the attributes of God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc.

Back to our text, Beale tries to capture the significance of these three titles by saying, "Christ's presence at and sovereignty over the beginning of creation and over the end of creation are boldly stated in order to indicate that he is also present at and sovereign over all events in between."^[3] Leon Morris says, "All three expressions mean much the same and they set Christ apart from all created beings. None other than God could share in these titles of God."^[4]

Amen! Please turn to Isaiah 44 to prove that point. This is one of three Old Testament passages that uses the title, "The First and the Last," for Yehowah alone. Yehowah alone has the right to wear that title. I'll just read the second two of the references in your outline. And these are my favorite verses to show the Trinity in the Old Testament. Isaiah 44:6 speaks of two Persons who are Yehowah and both of these Persons are First and Last. It says,

Thus says Yehowah, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, Yehowah of hosts: [And what do both of them say?] 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.

So against Mormons, we would say that the Son is not a second god. There is only one God, even though there are two persons in that Godhead mentioned in this verse - the King of Israel and the Redeemer of Israel. And both have the title, "The First and the Last." And beside this one God there is no god. So when JW's try to get around it by saying that Jesus is **a** god, they also contradict this verse.

But Isaiah 48:12-16 shows **three** Persons who are Yehowah God. It is God the Son who is speaking, and you can recognize things that other Scriptures ascribe to God the Son, such as creating all things. John 1:3 says, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." So commentators point out that this is God the Son speaking, and He is identified as Yehowah. I'll start reading at verse 12.

12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last. 13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, They stand up together. 14 "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? Yehowah loves him; He

shall do His pleasure on Babylon, And His arm shall be against the Chaldeans. 15 I, even I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper. 16 "Come near to Me [That is still God the Son speaking - "Come near to Me], hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now Adonai Yehowah and His Spirit Have sent Me." 17 Thus says Yehowah, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am Yehowah your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.

So the Father (what the New King James translates as Lord GOD, but which is in the Hebrew Adonai Yehowah) sends the Speaker (who is also Yehowah, but is more specifically called "Yehowah, your Redeemer") and Yehowah's Spirit also sends the Son. So the Son is speaking as Yehowah and He says that Adonai Yehowah and His Spirit have sent Me. Three Persons who all share the One name.

Anyway, you can have fun with these and many other Scriptures to show that the Trinity can be found throughout the Old Testament. Even the very first verse of the Bible contains it. In Genesis 1:1 there is a plural name (God - Elohim) with a singular article, showing plurality of Persons within the singular God-head. And this Godhead goes on to say, "let **Us** make man in **Our** image," etc. Don't let people tell you that the doctrine of the Trinity is only a New Testament concept. It can be found throughout the Bible. And I can show you Jewish commentaries on Genesis that were written before the time of Jesus, and these commentaries are Trinitarian. It is only much later Judaism (in reaction against Christianity) that rejected the Trinity.

But back to our text - if Jesus in Revelation 22:13 uses this title for Himself, He not only shows that He is divine, but He also shows that He fulfills the original purpose of that phrase **with regard to the kingdom**. In each of those three chapters in Isaiah God uses those titles to give courage to God's people that Yehowah's Servant is capable of giving birth to the kingdom. They are references to the dawning of the kingdom. And I dealt with that quite a bit last week, so that's all I'll say here. These titles show once again that the Judgment Day that is in view is not the one at the end of the kingdom, but the Judgment Day at the beginning of the kingdom; the Judgment Day that happens after a period of apostasy, darkness, persecution, and trouble.

The First Judgment brought both separation and blessing (vv. 14-15)

But in the next two verses we see both blessing and cursing. Overcomers are promised blessing while those who persist in sin are promised exclusion from heaven. So there is an antithesis that God maintains between the elect and the non-elect. Both Judgment Days make that antithesis permanent.

Blessing pronounced once again on overcomers (v. 14)

Verse 14 says, "Blessed are those who do His commands, so that they may have

the right to the tree of life, even to enter through the gates into the city."

There are three basic interpretations of this verse.

1. The first interpretation is that only those who persevere in holiness will get to heaven and all the elect will persevere in holiness.
2. Five point Arminians agree that only those who persevere in holiness will get to heaven, but they think some will not persevere and will therefore lose their salvation.
3. A third interpretation is that those who persevere in holiness have a right to the Lord's Table, and through that table they weekly enter the gates of the New Jerusalem, and show themselves to be citizens of that city, as Hebrews 12 affirms.

Now, I am not going to try to settle that debate this morning. Obviously I disagree with the five point Arminian interpretation. But instead of settling something people will still disagree on, let me focus on what is obvious and inescapable in each phrase.

He says, "Blessed are those who do His commands." Doing His commandments is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing perseverance in doing His commandments. And what does it produce? Far from producing misery, such holiness produces blessedness or happiness. In fact, the Gospel of John says that the only way to have your cup of joy so full that it overflows is to persevere in keeping Christ's commandments. After talking about the importance of keeping His commandments, Jesus says in John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Holiness = fullness of joy. There may be other applications of that phrase, but if I get into those debates, we will miss the essence of this phrase - that there is great joy and happiness when we pursue holiness. "Blessed are those who do His commands."

Second, this holiness produces deep fellowship with our holy God. That should make sense since the greater your likeness to God the greater the intimacy. The first phrase is followed by "**so that** they may have the right to the tree of life." Again, I will avoid trying to settle the question of whether this refers to the Lord's Table on earth, communion meals in heaven, or the eternal life of fellowship the elect will have throughout eternity. Getting into that debate will keep us from seeing the heart of the message - that holiness ushers us into fellowship. The "so that" statement indicates that there is a cause and effect relationship. It's not that holiness earns salvation (because these people were already saved), but instead it is indicating that walking in God's commandments ushers us into a closer and closer walk with God Himself.

And there are other Scriptures that have already said that. Revelation 2:7 says, "To the one who overcomes I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of my God." Adam was barred from that tree and barred from fellowship. But fellowship is restored not just by justification but also by a change in character. This is why symbolically, rebels who refuse to

submit to God's commandments are eventually barred from the table. Their life makes a mockery of the concept of fellowship or communion. As Hebrews says, they have no right to eat of the table because their lives don't exhibit holiness.

In any case, in verse 17 of the same chapter He said, "To the one who overcomes I will grant to eat from the hidden manna." That's another incredible image of deep fellowship. In the Old Testament, the High Priest entered the Holy of holies only once a year, but he didn't dare even peek into the mercy seat, let alone eat of the manna hidden in that ark of the covenant. But today, those who war against their sins and overcome have such closeness to God that it is as if they partake of hidden manna. They are right inside the Holy of Holies. Just like eating of the Tree of Life, this is an incredible image of restored fellowship.

Chapter 3 uses another metaphor of the Lord's Table symbolizing an already existing fellowship: "If anyone should hear my voice and open the door I really will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Again, whether this is an image of the Lord's Supper on earth or of our eternal eating from that sacramental tree, it is a symbol of close fellowship with God through union with Jesus. Forget about the debate and focus on that which all agree on. Do you want close fellowship with God? Then pursue the first phrase; pursue holiness.

The final phrase says, "even to enter through the gates into the city." If it refers to communion, it is saying something similar to Hebrews 12 - that in every communion we are caught up to the heavenly city and feed on Christ. That's what Calvin said. If it is a reference to eternity, we are still ushered into God's heavenly Jerusalem, but then, more literally. But it shows our citizenship in the heavenly city. Paul said we have that citizenship even while we live on earth. But holiness and fellowship are co-relative with rights of citizens. This verse is saying at least that.

So this verse is an encouragement to keep growing in holiness, to keep growing in fellowship with God, and to keep allowing the heavenly city to tug upon our hearts and to answer that upward call in Christ Jesus with enthusiasm. In Galatians Paul gives similar descriptions of those who walk in the Spirit and says that Jerusalem is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26).

Evil-doers excluded from heaven (v. 15)

Galatians also talks of those who do not walk in the Spirit, but who walk in the flesh. And they are not citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. So when you compare Galatians 4-5 with verses 14-15 there are some cool correspondences.

Let me read verse 15. He says, "Outside [outside what? Outside the heavenly Jerusalem which is the mother of us all. "Outside"] are the 'dogs' and the sorcerers and the fornicators and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices a lie." In contrast to the three-fold

description of true believers, this gives a seven-fold description of those who are not part of the city; they are not part of the bride. They might be in the visible church, but not the invisible church. The number seven seems to be symbolic in that these seven descriptors are general categories that cover all other sinners.

Dogs

There is disagreement among commentators on who "dogs" refers to. It's politically incorrect no matter what interpretation you have, but God doesn't seem to be too concerned about political correctness. Let me outline the various interpretations. Mounce points out that in Deuteronomy 23:17-18, God clearly uses the expression "dogs" to refer to male homosexual prostitutes.^[5] That seems to be a pretty common interpretation. Others show that the way the term is used in the Old Testament shows that "dogs" refers to anyone in the gay lifestyle.^[6] They have no moral conscience; they are acting like dogs. But it may be that this term is even broader than that. Yeatts may be correct when he points out, "The Bible uses the dog to symbolize a male temple prostitute (Deut. 23:18), the unclean (Matt. 7:6), outsiders (Matt. 15:26; Mark 7:27), evildoers (Ps. 22:16), and Judaizers (Phil. 3:2)."^[7] Since dogs were unclean, dangerous, and roamed the streets scavenging and eating refuse, it is possible that they symbolize every form of rebellious uncleanness. But a majority of my commentaries apply this term to the GLBTQ+ community, and I tend to agree.

And if that is the case, this is another significant verse for settling the debate that has been swirling around the recent Revoice Conference. Far from celebrating that identity as something that will make it into the New Jerusalem (as some at the Revoice Conference claimed), this insults the whole community and places them outside of the bride of Christ. There is no such thing as a gay Christian or a transgender Christian. If gays or transgenders get truly converted, they have a new identity in Christ and should put off the old identity. They are no longer dogs. For sure they shouldn't celebrate the dog-like identity. Or as 2 Peter 2:22 words it, they should not be going back like a dog to its vomit or like a washed pig to the mire. Those who are truly saved are changed from dogs to sheep, from swine to family members. This verse clearly says that the old identity and culture will not make it into the New Jerusalem. No dog has citizenship in heaven. So anyone who claims to still be a dog (in other words, to still be homosexual) should not be treated as a Christian. Christians may fall into sin as they grow in holiness, but they are pressing more and more into their new identity in Jesus. And the same is true of each of these other categories of sin.

Sorcerers

The next group is sorcerers. The Greek word is φάρμακος, from which we get the word, pharmacy. And the dictionary definition relates the term to both drugs and the occult - especially where they work together. Drugs and the occult are placed together, so this is a general term that could encompass

both. But all who dabble in the occult are covered by this term. And it is a caution to all of us that we need to avoid the occult in New Age alternative medicine. We should have nothing to do with the occult. And a lot of Christians have gotten into demonic bondage by visiting occultic alternative health practitioners. That's where the demonic attachments have happened.

Fornicators

Fornicators is a broad Greek term that refers to all sexual sins of any kind. Keep in mind that these are general terms that cover all the non-elect. Where some take "dogs" to refer to the LGBTQ lifestyle or identity, fornicators refers to the sexual license itself - any kind of sexual sin.

Murderers

Murderers is a general term that covers all sins that tend to death or that promote death. So this would not only cover those implicated in abortion, but those who abuse their bodies and those who promote ungodly wars. If you read the Larger Catechism's exposition of the sixth commandment, you will see that it covers a wide range of sins.

Idolators

Idolators refers to any person who engages persistently in false worship. Why do we follow the Regulative Principle of Worship? Because any worship that man invents and that God has not authorized is a kind of idolatry. Christians should more and more be getting beyond that. This means that a majority of modern churches engage in some form of idolatry.

Those who love a lie

And the last phrase says, "and everyone who loves and practices a lie." That is actually two categories of people. Those who love a lie are any who are willingly deceived. There are many people who want to be deceived because they like sin. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They don't want to know the truth because it might convict them too much. They prefer to have their ears tickled in preaching than to have their sins exposed. They love to hear slander against the opposing political candidate. They don't care if the propaganda is true or not. If it is against their opponent, they love it. They eat up the lies of the media. They eat up the slander of gossip. There are many ways in which people can love a lie.

Those who are liars themselves

Those who practice a lie are the ordinary liars and professional liars who routinely seek to deceive others. It seems that the majority in the mainstream media fall into this category. They produce propaganda that mixes lies with truth.

They are not part of the bride. They may be in the church visible, but not in the church invisible. True believers hate it when they find themselves lying; they hate their sin and want to turn from it. And to have two categories of people

covered by lying and deceit shows how hateful this sin is to God. It is yet another manifestation of unbelief.

Now here's the thing. Every one of us could be grouped under one or more of those seven categories if God did not regenerate us, cleanse us, justify us, and sanctify us. In fact, at the dawning of the kingdom, the vast majority of the world was defined by one or more of these categories. Yet the kingdom has been growing non-stop and today there are 2.2 billion Christians comprising 31.6% of the world population. Granted, many of those are nominal Christians. But the invasion of the kingdom of Satan by Christ's kingdom has been growing non-stop. This is why the invitation of the Gospel is to everyone in verse 17. Yes the city is exclusive to those who are regenerate, but the invitation is not exclusive. The invitation goes to whosoever will. And so it should give us humility when dealing with sinners.

Christ the God-Man speaks of the dawning of the kingdom (v. 16)

But before we get to that grand invitation of the Gospel, he interjects an explanation about Jesus that emphasizes once more that the kingdom of light is just now dawning. We should not be surprised by darkness early in the morning. When Kathy and I have gone out recently for our walks, it is so dark it is hard see and by the time our walk is finished, it is beginning to be fairly light. So verse 16 gives hope to those who have been bound by sin and darkness. Jesus can shine as the bright morning Star.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you, in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning Star.

Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua (v. 16a; see Heb. 4:8-13)

I failed to mention to you before that the name Jesus is simply the Greek spelling of the Hebrew name Joshua. To Jewish readers who have just finished reading this book about Christ's conquests, they would have identified Jesus with Joshua. In the Greek, their names are identical. In Hebrews 4:8-13 the ancient Joshua was a type of Jesus. Where the OT Joshua used a sword, Jesus uses the sword of the Word of God. Where the OT Joshua was not fully able to give Israel rest, this second Joshua is successful. So it is a name of hope. And it is definitely a name that is associated with the dawning of the kingdom and the conquest of Canaan.

His churches are His army (v. 16b)

And the angel acted as Jesus' emissary, testifying solemnly to the churches His marching orders. If Jesus is Joshua, the churches are His army. And the angel is His recruiter.

He is root and offspring of David (v. 16c)

And His second title shows that He was the long-promised coming Jewish

Messiah.

As root He is divine

As the root of David, the title shows that David was created by Jesus. So being the root of David points to the fact that Jesus is before David and Jesus is divine.

As offspring He is Man

As the offspring of David, David produced Jesus genetically. This speaks to His humanity.

So for Jesus to be the root of David, He had to exist before David. For Jesus to be the offspring of David, He had to be born after David and be David's descendant. It's a perfect title representing Jesus as the God-Man. The Old Testament predicted that the God-Man-Messiah would come to establish His kingdom. And that is what this book has been documenting. It showed that by being the Lamb slain, He legally purchased the kingdom. By giving the Spirit He empowered the kingdom. But 40 years after this new Israel was formed and brought out of Egypt (so to speak), they crossed the Jordan (so to speak) and the kingdom began in AD 70. Again, it is a title dealing with the dawn of the kingdom, not the end of the kingdom.

He is the bright and morning star (v. 16d)

The next name is, "the bright morning Star." This too was a Messianic title very tightly connected to the beginning of the kingdom, not the end of the kingdom. So all of these things reinforce why verse 12 is not talking about the Second Judgment at the end of history, but the First Judgment in AD 70.

As bright star, he was the Messianic Davidic King (Numb. 24:17)

As a bright star, he was the fulfillment of Numbers 24:17, which says, "A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." Jews applied that to the **beginning** of the Messianic kingdom. Interestingly, since the first century Jews for the most part rejected Jesus as Messiah, they were constantly looking for other Messiahs to fulfill the prophecies, to deliver them, and to begin the kingdom. They were constantly looking. The last Messiah they followed was Bar Kochba, a name which means "Son of a Star." He said that he was the fulfillment of Numbers 24:17, and he led a revolt against Rome that ended up disastrously, with the Romans almost massacring the entire nation in AD 135-136. We saw earlier in the book that it was during the Bar Kochba rebellion that there was literally blood up to the horses' bridles. But this title declares that there is only one bright star fulfillment, and that is Jesus. If you reject Jesus, you are out of the city; out of the bride; out of the kingdom. Those who reject Jesus tend to look to the state to be the Messiah, just as the Jews did under Bar Kochba.

As morning star, He signals the end of night and the dawn of an era of Messianic victory

And the term "**Morning Star**" pointed to the beginning of Messiah's kingdom as well.^[8] It refers to the fact that just before dawn, night is darkest. Jesus had predicted that within one generation, the church itself would experience the greatest tribulation ever to occur in history. In other words, these times were pitch black darkness. But the morning star signals the coming of dawn after a long time of darkness. So Mounce (even though he gets the timing wrong as a Premillennial) rightly says about the theology, "The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn."^[9] Exactly. But AD 70 was the dawning of the kingdom. The growth of Christ's kingdom will never stop from dawn to mid-day brightness. And I dealt with this subject in depth last week.

But I do want to make one more application from that phrase. Some commentators point out that this morning star imagery would have also been considered treasonous by Caesar. Caesar claimed to be the morning star who would bring the kingdom of light and who would deliver the people out of darkness.^[10] Caesar claimed that he alone could bring salvation and peace.^[11] He put that star on his coins. So this statement would have been considered by Romans to be a treasonous overthrow of Caesar's Messianic claims. And actually, I have a commentary that demonstrates how the entire book from chapter 1 to the end would have been considered treasonous by Rome. It is so anti-statist. Throughout this book Jesus has taken on the Messianic claims of both Rome and first century Judaism. He has always been an enemy of statism, and those who treat the state as Messiah are the enemies of Christ.

And its not just in this book that Jesus calls out Caesar. All the way through the Gospels and Acts Jesus and the apostles contradicted Caesar's claims with Christ's own universal claims. When Peter preached, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," Stauffer^[12] points out that this bold statement might have taken some people's breath away. Peter was making a direct head-on contradiction of Caesar's coins which were in everybody's pockets, and which claimed that there is no other name under heaven by which people can be saved than Caesar's name. Stauffer's book documents these claims rather well through the coins of Rome.

So Jesus was rejecting these imperialistic claims to total sovereignty and total care and instead declared Himself to be the total Sovereign with total care. Any time there are claims to total sovereignty or universal care, it is a claim that seeks to overthrow Christ's reign. The modern socialistic state that declares federal sovereignty over all and federal welfare care for all is not a trivial issue; it is a blasphemous attack upon Jesus. Jesus alone is Sovereign, and He alone is Savior, so that any legitimate human rule can only be limited, delegated, enumerated, and enumerated powers given by Jesus. All else is a Messianic pretense and illegitimate. We haven't fully defended the Gospel until we deny the anti-Gospels out there.

The invitation to this growing kingdom of life (v. 17)

But He ends this section with a glorious invitation that whosoever wants to may come to Christ and come into the kingdom and come to the waters of refreshment. Unlike the modern welfare state, He won't go bankrupt if you take Him up on His offer. Though He is a severe Judge, He is also a generous savior. And this too is such an appropriate way to speak to the beginning of a kingdom which was predicted to be an evangelistic kingdom that would have non-stop growth until the end of history. If people end up in hell it is through no fault of the offer. Verse 17 says,

Both the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' And let whoever hears say, 'Come!' And let whoever thirsts come; whoever wants to, let him take the water of life free of charge.

This is one of my favorite verses of Scripture. Charles Spurgeon said that this verse captures the central theme of the Bible. He said,

It is placed at the very end of the Bible, and placed there because it is the sum and substance, the aim and object of the whole Bible. It is like the point of the arrow, and all the rest of the Bible is like the shaft and the feathers on either side of it.^[13]

The divine and human must be involved for the Great Commission to be successful (v. 17a)

But let's dig into verse 17 a little bit because it reveals a very robust theology. If there is one thing that this book proves, it is that all men are totally depraved. And the Reformers pointed out that if Total Depravity is true, then the rest of the five points of Calvinism naturally follow and all five solas naturally follow.

Noblemen and peasants, rich and poor, adults and children all rejected God's offers of salvation earlier in this book. Their hatred for God made them utterly unwilling to repent no matter what the consequences. And that depravity is hinted at in this verse in that both the divine and the human are needed if the Great Commission is to be successful. Verse 17 says, "**Both** the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" with the emphasis being on the Spirit's call. If the bride says "Come," but the Spirit doesn't accompany our call with His own call, people will not believe.

The Spirit's work is to open deaf ears (v. 17c) while the bride's work is to communicate the Spirit's invitation (v. 17b) and to help new converts to repeat that invitation (v. 17d)

You can see the Holy Spirit's work hinted at in the phrase, "let whoever hears say..." Not all men hear, and in the Gospel we find that until the Holy Spirit regenerates a heart, it does not have the capacity to respond to God. Unregenerate men are likened by the apostle Paul to deaf cobras that will not

respond to noise. They are also likened to dead corpses that cannot hear your voice. So the Spirit's work is to open deaf ears so that they can hear the Gospel summons preached by the church. That's what's going on here. There are two kinds of people that hear the Gospel message - those that are deaf because they are not yet regenerate, and those who can hear. And there are two kinds of call - the Spirit's call and the church's call; and inward call and an outward call.

Of course, this verse indicates that both the Spirit **and** the Church must say "Come!" If the church says, "I don't need to preach the Gospel because God will sovereignly save whom He wills," we are hyper-Calvinists who have neglected human responsibility and have disobeyed this command. And if we think that it is all up to the bride to manipulate people into coming through psychological pressure, then we are sub-Calvinists who are going to fill our church with false believers. True Calvinists emphasize both God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Scripture speaks of the church's call as the outer call of the Gospel and the Spirit's call is the inner call, which is always effectual. In the first century, many were being called by the church's **preachers**, but few were being chosen by God. That's Matthew 7. It's in the present tense - many are called but few are chosen. But in the next chapter Jesus said that would be "many" would come in the future from east and from west. So remnant theology gradually gives way to fullness theology. The few gradually gives way to the many.

But all who are called by the Spirit (that's the inner call) are justified and will be glorified according to Romans 8:30. That golden chain of salvation in Romans 8 guarantees that 100% of those called by the Spirit will end up in heaven. But both calls are needed. The Spirit calls through the preaching of the Word. So when the church gives the outer call ("Come! Come to Jesus!"), the Spirit quickens that call to the hearts of the elect with His own call. So that is a beautiful summation of what sovereign grace is all about.

But notice that it's not just the **corporate** bride who says, "Come!" The new individual convert who has just heard and just responded must also immediately share the Gospel with others. So verse 17 goes on to say, "And let whoever hears say, 'Come!'" There is no such thing as a believer who is not part of God's army. When it comes to evangelism, we can't just say, "Let the church do it." Every believer is a part of the church. All are drafted into the army that summons the world to be reconciled to Jesus. All must issue the call to come to Jesus. Have you been involved in witnessing? Do you eagerly share the Gospel with those who are outside? This verse says that we must. If you have spiritual ears (that means a regenerated heart), then God's command is, "And let whoever hears say, 'Come!'" And if you need teaching on how to engage in evangelism, talk to the elders. We would love to help you and resource you with tracts or anything else that you need. But I think it is significant that the moment the demoniac who was possessed by the legion was delivered, Jesus told him to go home and share the good news with his

family, neighbors, and friends.

The Spirit's work is to create thirst (v. 17e) and to make the heart willing (v. 17f), but humans still have a responsibility to come and take by faith alone (v. 17g)

But it is the Spirit's work alone that can regenerate, create thirst, make the heart willing. Not all thirst according to Scripture. It is only those regenerated by the Holy Spirit who find themselves thirsty and who instantly respond to the Gospel. Romans 3 says that not one single human can come or can be willing to submit to King Jesus until the Holy Spirit regenerates that person. But as soon as the Holy Spirit removes the heart of stone and replaces it with a regenerate heart, that person is willing and is given faith. Thus Acts 16:14 says of Lydia, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." The regeneration of her heart had to precede her listening with faith. God makes people willing. Paul said that He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Praise God that it is not left up to us as evangelists. We share the outward call to come, but only the Spirit can give the infallible and irresistible inward call. And we can have confidence that He will.

Yet having said all of that, unbelievers still have a **responsibility** to come and take of the waters of life by faith. It is a sin not to come to Jesus. Coming to Jesus is a synonym for faith. So though they are morally unable, they are not physically unable to come. Their inability comes from the fact that their will acts consistently with their nature. As long as they have an evil nature they will willfully disbelieve against all evidence. In other words, they don't want to respond to God's free offer. As soon as the Spirit gives them a new heart or a new nature, they will wake up and recognize their rebellion and repent and believe. Regeneration enables them to believe; faith is a gift of God.

The Great Commission is a command, not merely an invitation (v. 17b,d,g). It requires unconditional surrender, not negotiation.

But notice that this is not merely an invitation. It **is** an invitation, and it is a glorious invitation, but it is more. This invitation is phrased as a command. You see the words come... come... let come... and take. God is not **hoping** the elect will come. He summons them to come, and they come. The Gospel is a call to unconditional surrender, not negotiation on your own terms. God is not wringing His hands and hoping that people will come. He conquers people and changes people. Saul was a persecutor of Christians and hell bent in his war against Christ, and instantly God knocked him off his horse and changed his heart. Paul said that just as God said, "Let there be light" and there was light, in regeneration God shines the light of His grace in human hearts and they come. When God gives this inward call, it is done.

The Gospel call is wide ("whoever...whoever...whoever")

Yet though it is a command, it is phrased so widely and generously that it is a glorious invitation that encourages faith. Three times he repeats the word "whoever." Whoever hears, whoever thirsts, whoever wants to. I love Spurgeon's comments on this verse. He uses the older version's translation of

"whosoever." It is a very vivid translation. He said,

"Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Oh, [someone objects] but he is a very poor man!" What does that matter? "Whosoever will." "But he is a very ignorant man, he does not even know his letters." What has that to do with the text? "Whosoever will." "Ah, but he has been a very bad man!" Well, what about that? It is "whosoever will." Does he will to trust Christ? Is he willing to take the water of life? Then, "let him come and take the water of life freely."^[14]

This is the balance that we must present. Both sides of the equation are important. In John 6 Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." But He also gave the other side saying, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me **and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.**"

So Spurgeon went on to show that both sovereign grace and human responsibility are true. He used the image of a man walking down a road and seeing a fork in the road, and a sign over one path that said, "Whosoever will may come." Most people just ignore the sign and walk right on by, but some men are strangely drawn and encouraged by that sign and they walked through the gates. They do so freely. If they are Arminians, they might think that they had a free will and that their choice contributed to their salvation. But that's bad theology. On the other side of the gates, these men look back and see another sign over the gate that says, "Elect from the foundation of the world." It explains why you were strangely drawn to come.

The Gospel call is satisfying

But what a glorious salvation it is. When sinners come to Christ, they not only find salvation from sin and hell, but find great satisfaction and reward.

An invitation to be part of the bride of Christ

In one sense the invitation is to be part of the bride of Christ. And once part of the bride, that person gets to be part of the advancement of Christ's kingdom. What could be more satisfying than to be related to Christ and be part of converting this world? I cannot think of anything more glorious and satisfying.

An invitation to quench one's thirst

But daily there is also thirst-quenching satisfaction. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put eternity in people's hearts. They can't escape it, and yet they can't fill the void of that eternity-hole within themselves. As Augustine said, "The soul is restless until it finds its rest in God." When we come to Jesus for salvation, it is more satisfying than a thirsty man drinking water.

The Gospel call is free (v. 17g)

But He ends by saying that this Gospel call cannot be earned. This valuable gift

that Jesus purchased at the infinite cost of His life is being offered without charge and without works earning it - "let him take the water of life free of charge." It costs Jesus so much, that when we offer our pitiful works to earn salvation or depend on somebody else's works for our salvation, it would be as insulting as offering a dime to pay for the Boeing 747 that someone gave you as a gift. Can you imagine the insult if you told the giver of the Boeing 747, "I can't take it for nothing. Here, would you take a dime for it?" Offering that dime to pay for it would be insulting to the generosity of the giver. The only proper response to Jesus when He offers eternal life and eternal joy is to receive it with joy, and gratefulness.

Conclusion

This is a book that has dealt a great deal with enemies condemned as well as enemies converted. There is nothing that makes the difference between those two groups of people other than sovereign grace. Nothing in them earned life. All were at enmity with Christ. But the Spirit's call is so invincible that enemies are slain by Christ's sword and then amazingly resurrected spiritually to be His friends and to be part of His family. In a moment we will be singing a hymn composed by Charles Spurgeon^[15] that describes God's grace overcoming depravity so well. But let us rejoice that His kingdom dawned in our hearts and continues to grow. Let us rejoice that His kingdom dawned in this world and is progressively banishing the darkness until the world will one day be completely conquered by the Great Commission. May the Lord hasten that day. Amen.

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1. The Alpha and the Omega can be seen in 1:8 and 21:6; The First and the Last can be seen in 1:17 and 2:8; The Beginning and the End can be seen in 21:6. ↩
 2. Gray says, "The Alpha and the Omega.—Christ is the Alpha and the Omega in — **I. The work of creation:** 1. He called the world into being; 2. He established the order of creation; 3. He ever sustains and supports the universe; 4. All is at His absolute disposal; 5. He is perfectly independent of all; 6. He will finally perfect the whole creation. **II. The scheme of redemption;** 1. How fitting that He should become the incarnate Redeemer; 2. He undertakes the work of expiation; 3. All power is therefore in His hands; 4. He is still carrying on the mediatorial work." James Comper Gray, *Biblical Encyclopedia and Museum*, vol. 15 (Hartford, CT: The S. S. Scranton Co., 1900), 348. ↩
 3. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 1138. ↩
 4. Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 247. ↩
 5. "In Deut 23:17–18 the term designates a male cult prostitute." Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 408. ↩
 6. For example, Aune says, "It may be that κύων, "dog" (and perhaps οἱ πόρνοι, "the fornicators," as well; see below), is used more specifically here for male homosexuals, pederasts, or sodomites since the term on the parallel vice list in 21:8

(see Comment there) is ἐβδελυγμένοι, "those who are polluted." Female and male cult prostitution is forbidden in Deut 23:17-18"

<https://accordance.bible/link/read/WBC-NT#76204> ←

7. John R. Yeatts, *Revelation, Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 419. ←
8. "The image derives from Num 24:17, a text that foretells the promise of a messianic leader who will crush those who oppose God's people. The Jewish revolt against Rome in 132-35 C.E., led by Simon bar Kosiba, was interpreted through this messianic lens. Simon was accorded the legendary title Bar Kokhba, "Son of a Star," and presumed to be the hero who would lead God's people victoriously against the empire. This interpretation was not unique: "The text from Numbers was interpreted messianically within Judaism (cf. T. Levi 18.3; T. Jud. 24.1; and the Qumran documents CD 7.18-21; IQM 11.6-7; 4QTest [4Q175] 9-13)" (Reddish 428). John is certainly following this line of messianic interpretation; for him, the Lamb, along with God, executes the judgment that destroys Babylon/Rome and inaugurates salvation for all who believe. Bauckham once again opens that understanding of salvation universally; he reads the star language through the lens of Isa 60:3, which understands God's light (star?) to be a beacon for the nations to find their way to the new Jerusalem (Climax of Prophecy, 324-25)." Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, ed. C. Clifton Black, M. Eugene Boring, and John T. Carroll, 1st Ed., *The New Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 411-412. ←
9. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 409. ←
10. "The star was pictured on imperial coins, and the symbol was bequeathed to Augustus and Tiberius, who shared imperial rule (Horace, Odes 1.12.47; Valerius Maximus, Mem. 1.pref; cf. the morning star in Statius, *Silvae* 4.1.1-4; Whitaker, "Falling"). In Revelation Christ is the legitimate ruler, who grants his followers a share in his reign, signified by the star." Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. John J. Collins, vol. 38A, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), 843-844. ←
11. "The symbolic meaning is clear: a new day is dawning for the world. The divine savior-king, born in the historical order ordained by the state, has come to power on land and sea, and inaugurates the cosmic era of salvation. Salvation is to be found in no other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved. This is the climax of the Advent proclamation of the Roman empire." [Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 52. ←
12. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955). ←
13. Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, volume 46, p. 350. ←
14. Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, volume 46, p. 356. ←
15. Words: Charles H. Spurgeon, Music: Henry Cutler, 1872 Public Domain.

Forth to the battle rides our King; He climbs the conquering car; He fits His arrows to the string, and hurls His bolts afar. Convictions pierce the stoutest hearts, they smart, they bleed, they die, Slain by Immanuel's well-aimed darts, in helpless heaps they lie.

Behold, He bares His two-edged sword, and deals almighty blows;
His all-revealing, killing Word 'twixt joints and marrow goes. Who
can resist Him in the fight? He cuts through coats of mail. Before the
terror of His might the hearts of rebels fail.

Anon, arrayed in robes of grace, he rides the trampled plain, With
pity beaming in His face, and mercy in His train. Mighty to save He
now appears, mighty to raise the dead, Mighty to staunch the
bleeding wound, and lift the fallen head.

Victor alike in love and arms, myriads around Him bend; Each
captive owns His matchless charms, each foe becomes His friend.
They crown Him on the battle-field, they press to kiss His feet;
Their hands, their hearts, their all they yield: His conquest is
complete.

None love Him more than those He slew; His love their hate has
slain; Henceforth their souls are all on fire to spread His gentle
reign.



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2 Timothy 3:16-17

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