

Three Quickly's

Revelation 22

The first five verses of this chapter probably belong with those in chapter 21. They continue the background information on the heavenly city that the Lord knew would be a blessing and encouragement to all believers throughout the church age and in the tribulation. After that, the Lord will wrap up the Revelation with some words on His coming and a stern warning concerning this book.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. As beautiful as this river is, it's not just for looking at. It's not protected by heavenly environmentalists and there are no "No Trespassing" signs. I think this verse is literal, but it also speaks powerfully of the torrential outflow of the pure essence of life coming from the Father and the Son to all in heaven. And this is an important aspect of eternal life – it is not simply a one-time gift, but rather it is the result of a continual outpouring from its source. God made us eternal beings, but the quality of eternal "life" is another matter. Many will spend eternity in perdition -- the torment of fire, eternal isolation and darkness. But God's gracious eternal supply to His children is a quality

of existence that defies description for its beauty, joy, love and so on.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. The wording here is somewhat mysterious; at least the translation is. I don't think it should read "street" because the Greek word really just means a "broad place" and since we've just learned of the river of water of life, it is probably better understood to be the breadth of this river or the breadth in which it flows. The fact that it is a broad place would indicate that God's not being 'stingy' in pouring out this essence of life.

It's not clear whether there are one or twelve trees, but perhaps in heaven that's not a difficulty. The Godhead is three in one; the Holy Spirit appears in this book as seven in one; the Bride of Christ is called a great multitude that no man could number and is yet one; maybe the tree of life is twelve in one. Whatever the case is, we see that the yield is twelve separate types of 'life-fruit' each and every month. Now, we know of nine aspects to the fruit of the Spirit; perhaps there are twelve aspects to the life-fruit.

King David wrote prophetically of himself and of Christ:

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.*

For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, (the grave, hell)

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

You will show me the path of life;

In Your presence is fullness of joy;

At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

(Psa 16:9-11)

"Life" in this passage also means a fresh flowing river – perhaps a reference to this river of the water of life providing fullness of joy and beautiful, pleasing things forever.

Now, it seems that the fruit is available to all in heaven (and those who are even now heavenly minded) whereas the leaves of the trees are for the service of or to the nations. Since the nations usually speaks of the gentiles, and since we learned in the previous chapter that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no more unbelievers, this must apply to us even now and perhaps throughout the millennium. If we consider the symbolism of the fig tree, we recall that Adam and Eve first vainly tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. The Lord graciously replaced them with the covering of animal skins (probably lambs'). We also recall that it was Jesus, Who coming to a fig tree (symbolic of Israel) and finding leaves but no fruit on it, cursed it and it withered. The fig tree has always been a type and symbol of the nation of Israel, its fruit

representing those truly faithful to the Lord; as for its leaves, I suggest they are symbols of the law – a showy but ineffective covering for sinful man.

So as the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing (or more literally, the service) of the gentiles, it could be that this is a picture of the living Word of God being the basis for law and moral conduct among the gentile nations. Of course, this has indeed been the case as the gospel spread for some 1900 years now since John received the Revelation. But Daniel 7:25 tells us of the antichrist, *And he shall speak [great] words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws.* So look out!

Also, you can't help but think of the beauty of ending the Revelation and thus the Bible with the promise of access to this awesome tree. At man's beginning, we lost this access because of sin. In fact cherubim and a flaming sword guarded the way to it. But because of the Savior's taking on Himself all of our sins, we who believe have access to it again. It is the perfect ending and at the same time an outstanding new beginning.

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. This

is a wonderful promise, for not only will heaven be filled with all manner of life and joy and beauty but also a perfect sense of purpose. Do you suppose the activity of the cosmos, both seen and unseen, is limited to our tiny speck of a planet?? There will be countless blessings to bestow and meaningful things to be accomplished, and as we do them, we will become more and more like our Lord. Paul wrote, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.* (1 Cor 13:12) And, *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image (likeness) from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (2 Cor 3:18)

There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Beyond the millennial reign of Christ and on into eternity, God will use His children in a royal capacity – not for power because He doesn't need it; He's all powerful. Not for glory or fame; He doesn't need them either; He doesn't need any of the things we in this life have come to expect of a king. His entire motive and character are as beautifully different from sinful man as...well, as these verses show:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts,

Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are My ways higher than your ways,

And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55:8,9)

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." The prophets have always been charged to speak the words that are faithful and true to the world. That's why John is told that it is the "Lord God of the holy prophets" Who has shown him these things.

The vision begins with the letters to the seven churches representing the church age; thus, the words "shortly take place" are obviously true.

The Greek word for "quickly" has no exact match in English and many have erred thinking it implies "soon". It is better understood to mean "suddenly" and "imminently". Indeed, Paul also wrote that His coming for the church would be "in the blink of an eye".

The messenger here says that he who "attends to carefully" (keeps) what has been said in the Revelation will be blessed.

Unfortunately, throughout the last 1900 years comparatively few have. In fact, it has been considered by many to be uninspired or too mysterious to understand, and the wildest theories possible have emerged from confused minds who did not let the Bible interpret itself. But the largest portion of the book, chapters 6 – 20, apply mostly to the Hebrew believers, and thus they will yet have opportunity for this blessing as the days of the tribulation and millennium approach.

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." Oh John, there you go again. However, I'm sure I'd have done the same thing.

Again, probably because of the extreme likeness of the angelic messenger to Jesus, John mistakenly begins to worship him. In clarifying his identity to the apostle, he explains that he is of his brethren (possibly a former Hebrew) the prophets (perhaps an OT prophet or even a NT believer like Stephen who spoke the truth) "and of those who attend carefully to the words of this book". This latter phrase indicates to me that indeed, he is

a former Hebrew, for they are the ones who, unlike the church, will pay very careful attention to the Revelation during the tribulation.

And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." As you can see, this is not really a sealed or mysterious book if you look to other scripture to understand it. It has always been open. Chapters two and three needed to be heard and received by the believers immediately; thus, the statement "the time is at hand". But this "time" also speaks of a period or measure of time – probably, the church age and the tribulation. At the conclusion of this period, we've seen in our studies, all who can be saved will have been. The wicked, at that point, cannot and will not change. And so, it is quite apparent that the finality of the last part -- "he who is unjust, let him be unjust still" and so on -- speaks of the time of God's bowls of wrath and that which follows, for the word "still" in the Greek means, "of a thing which went on formerly, whereas now a different state of things exists or has begun to exist".

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the

Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

When the Lord repeats something, it is for emphasis. Clearly, He wants us to truly understand that His appearing will be a sudden event. I think this will be the case with both the rapture and for His subsequent coming to earth to finally deal with the devil and his horde. That's because this word “reward” has a positive sense and a negative one in the form of punishment.

Also, the word “give” means “to pay off, discharge what is due such as a debt or wages”. Thus, it also has a positive and negative sense when you consider the spiritual implications.

An exhaustive study of the Greek would likely reveal some unique qualities between the three Self descriptions which are given, but I'm inclined to see them all as pointing to the unity of the trinity itself. That's because all that Christ has communicated with us, all that He rewards, both positive and negative, comes from all three persons of the Godhead. They are in perfect agreement.

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and

practices a lie. Here is Christ's final descriptive comment concerning heaven and it is applicable to the time up until the point where this ‘background’ was presented to us -- the new heaven and the new earth. After the Great White Throne judgment, we know that all the vile creatures listed as being outside the city are cast into perdition, forever gone.

Thus our background is complete. His blessing stated here is to those who DO His commandments, not just hear or even study but put them into practice. He makes it clear that they who do so can enter but only through the gates – the pearls. It's only by grace. The walls are beautiful to be sure. They represent the righteous acts of the saints. But no one will enter heaven by the walls, only the gates. Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.* (John 10:1)

And no one, no matter how ‘good’ or wise or mighty they may appear, will ever enter apart from the salvation that is found solely by sincere faith in the shed blood of Christ and His resurrection to the right hand of God Almighty.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” Notice that He says “the churches”. Clearly, He's

addressing all seven of the gentile congregations throughout the church age. However, the word for church, as many of you know, is ekklesia which can mean “the assembly of the Israelites” as well as “an assembly of Christians gathered for worship”, so I'm convinced this book is intended for both groups. His title as the “Root and the Offspring of David” is powerful reminder to the Hebrews from scripture that He is the fulfillment of the “Root” in Isa 11:10:

And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,

Who shall stand as a banner to the people;

For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.

And the fulfillment of the “Offspring of David” in 2 Sam 7:12-14:

When your days are fulfilled and you (David) rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.

As for the Bright and Morning Star, it was the enigmatic prophet Balaam, overruled and overpowered by the Spirit of God, who foretold the truth about the Messiah when the children of Israel were about to enter the earthly Promised Land:

*I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star (the bright and morning Star) shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter (the King of kings) shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult (the forces of antichrist).
(Num24:17)*

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” There's a beautiful invitation and response here. “The Spirit and the Bride” is the church on earth. Together, they say, “Come!” in two ‘directions’. They speak to the world to come to the kingdom of God by putting faith in Jesus Christ, and they speak to the Lord Himself that He would return for His Bride.

The response they get is from two directions as well. Those on earth who respond to the gospel join in and as a part of the Bride say, “Come!” In addition, the Lord, calling from the clouds of heaven, will one day soon say, “Come up here!”

And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. That word “let” means that the choice is yours. It's not mandated nor is it forbidden. Will you choose life? Do you thirst for it? Moses said to the children of Israel, *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and*

cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; (Deut 30:19)

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. There is perhaps no greater warning to those who will study and teach the Word of God and specifically, this book of Revelation. The words of this prophecy stand. No one is to add more prophecy to it or omit any words from it. It stands as is. Those who would comment on it or teach from it must be clear with the readers/hearers that the prophecy alone is God's Word – commentary may make it more understandable in the contemporary language and times, but it in no way should ever add or subtract from it. Am I clear?!

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. For the third and final time, the Lord tells us that His coming will be with suddenness. He even amplifies it by prefacing with "Surely" which the lexicon says is a "strong affirmation". What more can He say to cause us to 'get it' – that we must be ready. There will be no alarm or early warning system in place. You won't have five minutes to 'make things right'. You won't be able to repent and get saved before 'the blink of an eye' is done. Humble your stubborn heart now even if it means going against the grain; even if it means humiliation, persecution or death. Life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.