

Our Future

Who We Are; Where We Are; Where We've Been; and Where We're Going
Revelation 22:1-6

Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day the Lord will come. You do not know the day or the hour. But of this be sure: the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

In Upstate, NY, there once was a group of believers committed to the Apostle's Teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer like you. They were led by a pastor deeply committed to the faithful teaching of the Word of God and making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ like I hope to be. For years and years, they studied and prayed together. But in 1843, something radically changed. And that something that radically changed was this: they became convinced that Jesus was going to come to earth in all His glory to gather the nations before Him on March 22, 1843. So, three days prior, they quit their jobs, abandoned their homes, gave away all their possessions, and even – in some cases – left their families - to gather at the farm of their pastor, William Miller, on County Road 11 in Hampton, NY. When March 22, 1843, finally came, the whole congregation stared straight into the sky for 24 hours. They saw nothing but clouds. As a result, March 22, 1843, became a day of disappointment. But not "great" disappointment. Not yet anyway. Their pastor convinced them he had miscalculated by a year. So, on March 22, 1844, they gathered once again, driven by the conviction that this time they had it right. They didn't. "I waited all Tuesday and dear Jesus did not come," wrote one of their church members. "I am sick with great disappointment." The last line stuck. That event became known in American History and Church History as The Great Disappointment.

Followers of the Lord Jesus Christ: The Scriptures give us a plenty of information about what is going to happen in the future. Jesus told his disciples on the Mt. of Olives that the Son of Man will come riding on the clouds with a loud trumpet call (Mt 24:30-31). He also told them that when that day comes, those who didn't take the Suffering Servant seriously in this life will get left behind by the Conquering King (Mt 24:40-41). The prophet Zechariah tells us that at some time in the future the nation of Israel will look upon Him whom they have pierced and believe (Zech. 12:10). And the Apostle John tells us through His vision, that when Jesus does come, he will make all things new (Rev 21:1-5). But, friends, I want to tell you this morning that if we gather on the farm looking up in the clouds because we think we've come to the realization from our prayers and studies that God has clued us in on the specifics and particulars of the future, then we are setting ourselves up for great disappointment. For it is written: "but about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mt 24:36). Since that is true about the future of the whole world that God has in the palm of his hands, it is also true for us here at the Genesis Church of Vero Beach; the precious bride of Christ that Jesus also has in His hands.

I do not know the specifics of our future, nor do I know the particulars. I only know two things related to it: (1) I know the ball is no longer in our court regarding the sacred space we asked you for permission to pursue. We did what you approved. (2) I know that regardless of the way that ball bounces, our future here and our future with Jesus in glory is extremely radiant and bright because God says it is. Today, I'm going to tell you why. To see them, please turn with me to the last chapter in the whole Bible: Revelation 22, verses 1 through 6.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.⁶ The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

1. We Have Special Messengers (1, 6)

- **I Believe There Are Angels Among Us:** (1) In 1993, while in route from Toccoa, Ga to Spartanburg, SC traveling as fast as I can in order to pray over my grandmother before she passed, I turned on the radio and heard a song with words I'll never forget. (2) I believe there are angels among us. Send down to us from somewhere up above. They come to you and me in our darkest hours. To teach us how to live. To teach us how to give. To guide us with the light of love. (2) The apostle John would agree. He believed so much the concept of angels as divine messengers that he couches the greatest passage in the Book of Revelation around the testimony of angels. We should to. Whether we ever see one or not, I'll assure you they are there. The Bible tells us so.
- **Then:** (1) Angels Announcing: (1) Biblical content didn't get dissected into verses until the Latin Vulgate in 1555 AD. So, in order to let readers know what verses belong together, writers used something called an inclusio. An inclusio occurs when the main idea and/or characters are mentioned first and last. That's what occurs here. The Angel in v1 "shows" and does the same thing again in v6. It's a message John wouldn't have learned otherwise. (2) Angels Among: (1) In the Bible, there are two "good" ones mentioned by name (Lucifer isn't one of them). Gabriel is an angel who appears in human form to Daniel in the OT and to Zechariah and Elizabeth in the NT. Michael is the other one. He shows up in Revelation to fight Lucifer himself in Rev 12:7. (2) In Revelation, though, there are angels that reveal (1:1); angels of seven assemblies (1:20); angels at the corners of the earth (7:1); angels around the throne (7:11), Angels with the key to the abyss (20:1); and Angels on the

gates of the city (21:12). And that's just a few references. There are many more. (3) We don't know the name of the angel who revealed the message to John. But we do know they were with him revealing the message in his darkest hour on the Isle of Patmos

- **Now:** (1) Angels have already given us a special message: (1) "I bring you good news of great joy. For on this day in the City of David a Savior has been born who is Christ the Lord. (2) Angels have been dispatched to watch over Jesus' bride, the church: (1) That's a fact: ²⁰ *The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches* (Rev 1:20).
- **App:** Every church in history who confesses Christ, and the Gospel is a lampstand. And every lampstand has a star, including ours. That makes our future bright. Amen.

2. We Have a Special Message (2)

- **The Oldest Tree in the World:** (1) The best dendrologists in the world tell us that the oldest tree in existence sits 10,000 feet above sea level and happens to be located right here in America, in the Inyo National Forest in California. (2) It's a bristlecone pine more than 4,800 years old with a fitting name: Methuselah. (2) Unfortunately, the oldest tree in the Bible became the instrument that brought the message curse. (3) But the last tree in the Bible brings a completely different message: a message of salvation far as the curse is found.
- **In the Past:** There was an old tree: the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil located in the Garden of Eden. The Lord told Adam and Eve not to eat from it "lest you die" (Gen 3:3). You know the rest of the story.
- **In the Future:** There is a new tree: the tree bears twelve crops of fruit (a reference to the 12 tribes of Israel) and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (a reference to the Gentiles). What is God up to in the world? Recreating the Garden of Eden in light of death and resurrection of Jesus. That's where the world is headed.
- **In the Present:** Our message is simple: (1) The first tree reveals our need for a Savior; (2) The second tree reveals the benefits: because of Jesus, when we all get to heaven, the leaves of that tree will result in what God intended: Life, not death. Fellowship, not banishment. And healing, not hurt.
- **App:** ¹⁴ *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (Rev 22:14)*

3. We Have a Special Mediator (3-4)

- **The Great Mediator:** (1) For some reason only known to the Lord, my kids don't like to come to me to talk about serious things. When they want to know what I think about those serious things, they ask my wife instead. (2) Dawn Elizabeth West serves in the West Household as the Great Mediator between Ole DW and His kids. (2) Jesus is our mediator who makes it possible to do the one thing I look forward to in heaven more than anything else: approach the throne of God with confidence while standing face to face with Jesus Christ.
- **In the Future:** In the OT, the priests were mediators. They offered sacrifices to God on the people's behalf. But they were limited: they couldn't see God, or they would die. In the NT, Jesus is our great high priest and our mediator. He offered himself as a sacrifice. Because of this, we will not only be able to see his "face," we will be able to do something we couldn't do on earth: approach the throne.
- **Right Now:** (1) We have a mediator whose blood speaks a better word than Abel's (Hebrews 12:24); (2) We have a mediator who enables us to approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
- **App:** *"Christ is not valued at all, unless he is valued above all" (Augustine).* May we value Him above all here, now, and forevermore. For He is our Mediator.

4. We Have a Special Mission (5-6)

- **John Wesley Quote:** (1) "I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship and the whole world as my mission field." (2) God gave him a special mission that started the 2nd Great Awakening in America. (3) May our mission start the 3rd.
- **In the Future:** (1) A Mysterious Mission: The strangest statement about our future with Jesus in glory occurs in v5: "And they shall reign forever and ever." Like the Hallelujah chorus, we expect this to say, "and He shall reign forever and ever." To be clear, He does. But this text adds "they," meaning Jesus' "servants." That's a shocking statement because "reign" means to "exercise authority at a royal level." (2) A Mysterious Meaning: The verse means that in heaven, we will have some kind of authority at a royal level. I don't know exactly what is. I'm not sure if we are even meant to. It's a mystery. But details will follow when we get there.
- **Right Now:** (1) A Clear Mission: V6 returns to the present and features two words that are deeply connected together: "prophets" and "servants." The Lord who "inspires the prophets." Prophets were spokesman for God. They said "thus saith the Lord." Servants obeyed the Lord because they knew what the Lord really "saith." (2) A Clear Meaning: Put them together and our mission right now is clear: "thus saith the Lord" because we know from the Scriptures what the Lord has said."
- **App:** ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet 2:9). Amen.