

The End of the End

Rev 22:6-21 | Jonathan K. Dodson | May 25, 2014

This is our final message on the return of Christ, but it should not be our final thought on the matter. What we believe about the future has a profound effect on how we behave in the present. If we think it is going to rain, we bring an umbrella or jacket to work. People of hope anticipate the future. What is the hope of the future? Let's look at how the whole story ends in Revelation 22: the Conclusion, an Interruption, and What to Conclude about the conclusion. What's the end of the End?

Conclusion: How Stories End

How stories end tell us a lot about why they begin, what they *mean*. Let me give you a sophisticated example. Humpty-Dumpty ends with all the king's horses and all the king's men unable to put humpty back together again. What's the point? Don't sit on a wall or you might fall. Cormack McCarthy's *The Road* chronicles the survival of a father and son in a post-apocalyptic world. After narrowly escaping death over and over, the boy is adopted by strangers. The closing paragraph describes a trout in a stream and concludes that the world cannot be put back right again. The point? Embrace the mystery of life and relationships because there is no hope from outside. How does the biblical story end? Well, it begins as a lonely, luxuriant garden-wilderness (Eden amidst an undeveloped earth), but it ends as a beautiful garden-city, filled with people and teeming with life. Revelation 22 shows us a city that flows with the river of life, running right through it, straddled by the tree of life with its omni-seasonal fruit. The city gleaming with gold, bespeckled with precious stones. There's no night, only the daytime brilliance of God and the Lamb whom the people worship forever. What does *this* end tell us? A well-landscaped urban development, surrounding a celestial temple, it's architecture is not only functional but glorious, including unnecessary walls and decorative gems tell us the future is creative, beautiful, safe. It makes case for creativity, implicitly underscoring the value of work, art, and beauty. Or perhaps you might point out the presence of community, located in the images of the city, the Bride, and the brothers. Since the end of history is a creative community, we can conclude that the church is meant create and commune. The angel says, "[These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place](#)" (6). Unlike the existential, speculative ending of *The Road* or the cautionary tale of Humpty Dumpty, the end of the Biblical Story narrates reality with words that are "trustworthy and true." This isn't one man's reflection on life or childhood rhyming; it is the language of the inspired prophets (Dan 10; Isa 65:16). What they say is true. That's the claim here. The Bible is not a pick and choose document; it's a revealed story that hangs together as the true account of the world. It is claiming to be correct, providing the plumb line of life. It is not speculative but revelatory. What is particularly true and trustworthy here is the end, *the promise of a new, urban creation*. But the end is not a distant vision with no relevance for the present. The Lord has sent his angel to show us "what must soon take place." Not distant but imminent.

Interruption: Idolatry of Cultural Imminence

This final chapter is infused with imminence: “[what soon must take place](#)”, for the time is near (10), “[Surely, I am coming soon!](#)” (20), and “[Behold I am coming soon, Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.](#)” (7, 12). “I am coming soon” **communicates imminence, urgency** but for what? *To keep the words of the prophecy of this book*. What does that mean? It means the whole of Revelation is important, to be kept, and yet Christians often marginalize it. Revelation opens with a promise of blessing if we read, hear, and keep these words and so it concludes with that promise. The word “keep” can also mean guard. It’s used of Adam working and keeping/guarding the garden. Intimately involved, we should get our hands dirty in these words, plunge them into its pages, and keep them. But you can’t keep what you don’t know. Once you know it how do you keep it? In my early twenties what was imminent for me was sex. And I’ll never forget, after confessing my sexual immoralities to my Dad, him saying: “Jonathan, when are you going to keep the integrity of God’s Word?” What did he mean? He meant when are you going to obey God’s Word, let his Story narrate your life, shape your convictions, decisions. What is imminent for you? What *has* to be done? Where do you feel *urgency*? Meeting work deadlines, generating breakthrough entrepreneurial ideas, or just doing what you love? Ben Roberts pointed me to a [recent article in the New York Times](#) where author Miya Tokumitsu points out that the unofficial work mantra has become “do what you love.” This **DWYL** ethos is so ubiquitous in our culture that it is elitist because it degrades work that is not done from love. What about the millions of people who don’t do what they love—service industry, trade work, subsistence farming, staying at home all day with the kids? Isn’t there inherent dignity in these stabilizing structures of society? If what’s really imminent is doing what you love, then you’ll be snobbish, enslaved to your work and perpetually dissatisfied. You will live to live the dream. This is **cultural imminence**, embracing cultural messages as more immediate, pertinent and important than the gospel message and bringing them right into your heart as words that are trustworthy and true (when they are false). Cultural imminence doesn’t have to be about work. It can be about play—being in the right scene, intimately acquainted with the latest bars, restaurants, fashion and film, connected to the right people. If you don’t know a place someone recommended, you feel left out, a little behind, a little less human, so scramble to get back in the know, upgrade your wardrobe, spend more money on food, and less time with people that you really should, all the while the return of Jesus gets further and further away. Less imminent, important, urgent. We are willfully oppressed by cultural imminence, keeping the word of the culture, striving to do what we love, while our true love slips away as we break the words of this book. Cultural imminence is absolutizing even the good things of life, treating them as imminent and transcendent, a kind of false worship like John falling down at the angel’s feet. As a church family, we should point out these pitfalls for one another, responding like the angel, “You must not do that...Worship God” (8). Not do what you love but return to your Love. Return to your Creator. Replace your loves that can be taken away with the one true love that cannot be taken away. **The antidote to false worship is true worship**. Richard Bauckham: “[In the end it is only a purified vision of the transcendence of God that can effectively resist the human tendency to idolatry which consists in absolutizing aspects of this world. The worship of God is the power of resistance...](#)” **We must trade worship**. This is how we resist, with a truly imminent and transcendent God as the object of our devotion. If we do not, the consequences are

terrifying. Those who continue on “the road” of existential pursuits end up distant from God, eventually finding themselves outside the celestial city, along with everyone else who loves falsehood. **But to those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:13), will be given the right to the tree of life and entrance into the city by the gates (22:14).** Perhaps the loving, Heavenly Father is saying to you this morning, “When are you going to keep my Word?” When will you believe what’s trustworthy and true? Will you live in light of the future? Imminence produces obedience.

Christ: The End of the End

Conclusion, Interruption, the End of the End. Notice the first thing John does in response to the imminent return of Christ—he falls down. He does not speed up. He lingers in God’s presence. Imminence also results in presence. Many of you need to slow down, to recover God’s presence. You’re moving so fast that you’ve exchanged cultural imminence for Christ’s imminence. The nearness of God for a psychology of speed. Slow down and delight in your chief good. Form Christ-centered habits of prayer, reading, meditation. Jesus says, **“I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (16).** He is the root of entire tree of Christianity. His kingdom has grown slowly but deliberately. It is strong and true. **Christ the Root contains the healing properties to cure our fast, transient, and weak Christianity.** When Christ becomes imminent, we slow down enough to receive a word of prophecy, a spontaneous word that strikes home. I’m sure you’ve had that moment when someone said something that really struck, as if from God, and you know you need to heed it, but you move on and forget it. Perhaps a word from a friend or in a sermon, something not be forgotten but remembered. The person for whom Christ is imminent will return to that word throughout the week—meditate on it, study it, pray, reflect on it in the presence of God as the word of God for you. My word came this week during a staff meeting when Matt Oakes asked me if I was filling a vacuum of encouragement and affirmation with vocational praise? Am I looking for it in what people say about me in my books or on twitter? After stewing on that for some time, I’ve concluded that though its not all of the time its some of the time. I exchange the imminent love of Christ for the love of others. What do I do? Stop writing? No, just write repentantly. Trade worship. Trade glory. After all he is the Star of Glory. We need to exchange cultural imminence for Christ’s imminence. To slow down and come back to the Root, the very presence of God. Remember that how a story ends tells you something. The end of The End is Christ. He is the greater ending, the greater goal, not creativity and community, beauty or praise. Christ is the greater End, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. He alone is the bright morning star. The glory of Christ should eclipse our cultural glory, our vocational glory, our motherly glory, our glory glory. It is God and the Lamb who shine forever: **“They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (22:4).** Trade glory and you get to walk in the light, even reign with Christ. Let’s recover the imminence of Christ, our messianic Victor who cleanses our robes, who Roots our presence, and eclipses our glory. Let’s return our praise back where it belongs, to the bright morning Star. He is coming soon, and with him the brilliant light of a new age, where those who keep his word and cultivate his presence will enter a new creation, fully restored as his children of light. Christ, the End of the End, The Alpha and Omega. He is coming soon.