

Jesus' Last Words to Us: "I Am Coming Soon!"
Sermon based on Revelation 22:12-21
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther
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**Introduction: On Memorial Sunday,
Maybe You Remember Your Loved Ones' Last Words**

Jesus once made this towering assertion: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—who on this final Sunday of the Church Year, Memorial Sunday, are remembering your loved ones, who departed this world to be with Christ during this past year:

People's last words, before their death, are often very memorable. During one of the debates, during the past presidential campaign, Senator John Kerry remembered his mother's last words: "Integrity! Integrity! Integrity!" A few week's ago, we considered together the sermon text for the funeral of Martin Luther. Do you know what his last words were? In a mixture of German and Latin, he said, "Wir sind Bettler. Hoc est verum." "We are beggars. This is true." And he was reflecting upon his own lack of righteousness—the righteousness he was begging from Christ.

Theme: Jesus' Last Words to Us: "I Am Coming Soon!"

People's final words are often very memorable, and very meaningful. This morning we have the privilege of considering Jesus' final words to us—not his final words before his death, but his final words in his Word to us: the Bible. In a single short sentence, JESUS' LAST WORDS TO US are these: "I AM COMING SOON!" And because he's coming soon: Jesus is looking for us to avoid evil, God is looking for us to come to Christ, and Jesus is looking for us to believe the Bible.

**Exposition & Appropriation & Application:
The Contents of Jesus' Last Words to Us**

Now, when a person utters his last words, you don't usually parse them and pull them apart. Usually, you just let them stand as they are, and you consider them. That's what we're going to do this morning with Jesus' Last Words to Us. We're going to read them in order, and savor them, and pause several times along the way to reflect....

You'll find Jesus' final words to you on the first inside page of your bulletin. This is Revelation, chapter twenty-two, verses twelve through twenty-one. And it starts this way: "***Behold, I am coming soon!***" Those are the first words of Jesus' final words, and he'll repeat them later. So, you just know that this is what he wants to get across most of all to us. "***Behold, I am coming soon!***" Now, at first we might want to quarrel with these words. Jesus spoke them almost two thousand years ago! How could he say, "***I am coming soon!***" when he isn't here yet?! Well, first of all, to Jesus a thousand years are like a day, as Scripture says. Secondly, within the scope of all eternity, Jesus will be back in no time. And third, on the day he does come back, you and I will say, "Wow! That was quick!"

Then Jesus says: "***My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.***" Now, you and I know we're not going to enjoy life with Christ because of what we've done. *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this*

is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God – not by works – so that no one can boast. Nevertheless, Jesus does promise here that those who have done evil will get punished for their evil. And those whose evil is forgiven through faith in him – and of course, they respond by doing good – they will receive a gracious reward for their efforts. You people who love others, even though they hate you—you’ll be rewarded! You people who rejoice, even when life kicks you in the pants—you’ll be rewarded! You people who are at peace, even in the middle of war—you’ll be rewarded! That’s what Jesus promises here. What a reason to do good!

Then Jesus says: ***I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*** *I am the Alpha and the Omega*, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; we would say “I am the ‘A’ and I am the ‘Z’.” Jesus is saying, “I am God’s full revelation of himself.” *I am the First and the Last.* “Before the beginning of this world, a trillion times a trillion years ago and infinitely more, eternally ago: I was. And after the end of this world, a trillion times a trillion years from now and infinitely more, eternally in the future, I will be. And if you want genuinely to live, you need to latch on to me.” That’s what Jesus is saying. *I am the Beginning and the End.* “Do you want to know the source of your life? I’m it! Do you want to know the goal of your life? I’m it!” That’s what Jesus is saying!

And then Jesus continues: ***Blessed are those who wash their robes*** – and these aren’t little bath robes, these are princely and princess-ly robes – *Blessed are those who wash their robes* ***that they may have the right to the tree of life*** – the eternal life that our ancient great-grandparents Adam and Eve forfeited – ***and may go through the gates into the city*** – that’s the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. That’s the good news!

But now the bad news: ***Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.***

Ah, now that’s cause for us to pause.... *Outside*: absent the loving presence of God and in the presence of his holy hatred for sin, *Outside*: in darkness so thick it can be tasted and torment that causes a person always to grit his teeth, *Outside*: in the lake of burning sulfur, in burning hot agony for all of eternity—are those who do evil.

Brothers and sisters: we’ve got to avoid doing evil! And that’s scary, because we all know that we do evil. *The sexually immoral*—that’s you and I by nature! because God sees what happens in our souls and not just with our bodies. *The murderers*—that’s you and I by nature! because God sees what happens in our spirits. *The idolaters*—that’s you and I by nature! because God sees what happens inside our hearts.

But brothers and sisters: I’ve got to issue a special warning to some of you—and I don’t even know which ones you are. But some of you live in a state of sexual immorality—either literally bodily, or by what you have piped into your homes daily. Some of you live in a state of murder, you’ve got hatred in your heart quite constantly. Some of you live in a state of idolatry—you live for your pleasure and not for the Lord; you live for your possessions and not for God; you live to be proud of yourself and not for the Lord. And that’s so dangerous! because you’re saying “no!” to the Lord—and also “no!” for your salvation.

Brothers and sisters: *Wash your robes!* Journey with me to the font of Holy Baptism, where Jesus Christ once for all scrubbed your soul clean—every crevice free from transgression. *Wash your robes!* Journey with me to Christ’s cross, where the water and blood flowing from Christ’s side washed all your sins away. *Wash your robes!* Journey with me to Jesus’ tomb, where Jesus left behind the entangling robes of death – where Jesus left behind the entangling tentacles of your trespasses – and he rose, and you

rose, and you will rise to life eternally, and so will your loved ones who departed with confidence in Christ!

Well, what other final words does our Savior utter? He concludes: **"I, Jesus, have sent my angel** – the angel who repeatedly helped the Apostle John narrate this Book of Revelation – **"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."** *I am the root and fruit of David.* "According to my nature as God: I, Jesus, am David's Creator. According to my nature as man: I, Jesus, am David's descendant." How amazing! *I am the bright and Morning Star.* Weary watchmen welcome the arrival of the Morning Star, the planet Venus, which is also the brightest of all "stars". When the Morning Star appears, they know that dawn is never more than an hour and a half away, and sunrise is soon to follow. When Christ our Morning Star appears – most brightly of all! – an eternal sunrise, bathed in light, bright and cheery, dawns upon us eternally.

No wonder we read: **The Spirit and the bride** – the Church, God's people – **say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty** – who isn't? – **let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.** After the hot weather of our earthly lives, let us drink deeply of the cool and refreshing waters of the river of the water of life, Jesus Christ! Let's dive, headlong, in to his mercy and grace!

And how is it that we do that—even now? It's by way of God's Word, the Bible! **I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.** If you know the plagues described in the Book of Revelation – ugly and painful sores, blood all over, scorching heat but deep darkness, frogs everywhere, and a storm with hundred pound hailstones – you don't want those plagues coming on you! So, don't add to God's Word!

And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. And you don't want to lose your access to the Tree of Life, Jesus Christ. You don't want to lose your membership in the Holy City, God's Christian people. So, don't subtract from God's Word!

And that gives cause for us to pause.... Do we add our private opinions to God's Word? Do we subtract from God's Word what doesn't match our limited experience?

Well, first of all, I'm sure I'm talking to at least some people who do literally add to and subtract from God's Word. Quit it!!! Quit it!—because I love you. Quit it!—because God's loves you. I want you with me in the Holy City sharing the Tree of Life. So does God! I don't want you plagued by him. Neither does God!

So, if you've been thinking your sin isn't so serious, trust God's Word instead: *The soul that sins is the one which will die!* If you've been thinking there is a way to eternal life besides Jesus Christ – that sincere Jews and Moslems and pagans will get there, too – trust God's Word instead: *Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life.* If you've been thinking parts of the Bible just aren't so, trust Christ's own Word instead: *The Scripture cannot be broken.*

And if you struggle with what the Scriptures say in regard to our relationships to one another as men and women, if you battle with what the Bible says in regard to our relationships with other Christians, if you struggle with what the Scriptures say regarding using all your time – every moment! – all your talents – every ability! – all your treasure – yes! every penny! – for Jesus, trust Christ's Word instead!!! And don't hesitate to visit with any of us pastors; maybe we can help you understand the Scriptures better.

Having said all that, all that is probably not the main threat toward your adding to or subtracting from God's Word, is it? I mean: Most of us are willing to say, "The Bible is God's Word." But then we add to it, saying, "I already studied that when I was

young—now I need to move on.” And we subtract from God’s Word: not by denying any of it, but by leaving it on some shelf or in some box at home. That’s the way we’re prone to add to or subtract from God’s Word, isn’t it?

So, my brother, my sister: Get into God’s Word! Buy and play some Bible tapes while you’re exercising or on your way to work. Read a chapter of the Bible with your morning coffee, at break at work, or right before bed. Or be sure to read the Meditations every day. And do that because you know that by studying Scripture, you are clinging to Christ! Join a Bible Class; they’re always listed in the bulletin, and we’ll welcome you with open arms. And for sure: Get to church—yes, week after week. One one-hundred-sixty-eighth of our time – one hour out of the one hundred sixty-eight hours God graciously gives us every week – is not too very much to hear his Word together and to declare his praise.

Conclusion: My Mom’s Last Words This Past Year Are Also Ours

Finally, we read the very last words from Jesus to us: *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."* And we respond by saying: *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.* It’s through him that God can say to us: *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.*

Those, then, are Jesus’ last words to us. They urge us to avoid evil. They urge us to come to Christ. They urge us to believe the Bible.

Did you happen to hear the last words of your loved one? Do you remember what they were? My Mom died early this past February. And my Dad could correct me if I’m wrong, but I believe her last words were, “I think I’ll be okay.”

Mom was referring to her chest pains, which exploded into a massive heart attack, when Jesus dispatched his angels to wing her soul to the embrace of her Savior. But those words were sort of prophetic, too. “I think I’ll be okay.” I know my Mom is okay. And your loved ones who left this world with confidence in Christ—they’re okay. They’re in his hands. You’re in his hands. And someday soon, Jesus will bring his hands together—to unite us all to himself eternally. Amen.

Jesus once made this towering assertion: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* Amen.