

Purifying Effect of Prophecy

by Carl Armerding

The announcement of the coming of the Lord has a purifying effect on our lives, putting us in the frame of worship and preparing us for the reward that awaits us.

Duration: 37:00

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Revelation 22:7-8, Revelation 22:10, Revelation 22:16

Topics: "Prophecy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the blessings of having a family and grandchildren and the joy of introducing them to the Lord Jesus. He emphasizes the practicality of confessing one's sins to God and the impact it can have on one's life. The announcement of the coming of the Lord inspires fresh energy and a desire to invite those who are thirsty for spiritual fulfillment. The speaker also discusses the concept of rewards in Christianity and how it is legitimate to think about the rewards that God will give according to one's work.

Transcript

I ask you to turn, please, to the last chapter in the Bible, Revelation chapter 22. While you're turning to it, I would like also to express my deep appreciation for the privilege of being allowed to minister in this prophetic conference. These things are not what you would call my specialty.

The Lord seems to have led me along other lines in the study of his word. But I always have my heart warmed when I listen to these, my colleagues, telling of the things that they have discovered in the word of God with regard to the things that are yet to come. They're very real.

As we said, this is what makes Christianity unique. And as I said to you the other day, one of the reasons why I'm not an atheist is because atheism has no future in it. But we do have a future, thank God, and it's just as sure as the word of God himself.

Revelation 22, and beginning at verse 6. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly, blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

And I, John, saw these things and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not? For

I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book.

Worship God. He saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. And here I would like to supply a word which I think will help us to understand the next verse.

The time is at hand when he that is unjust, let him be unjust still. That is, there is an event which is going to fix the destiny of men. If it finds them in their sin and their filth, this is the way they will remain forever.

And let him which is righteous, let him be righteous still. And he that is holy, let him be holy still. That is just as fixed as the other.

Verse 12. And behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Blessed are they that do his commandments, or as we have it, I believe, in the margins of some of the Bibles, and I have it in mind, blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without her dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, Come.

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

He which testifies these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen. The subject for this morning is the purifying effect of prophecy. During this last week, we have been listening to a number of addresses which have called our attention to that which is perfectly obvious to anyone who observes, and that is the awful increase in wickedness and sin.

And this of course is predicted in the word of God, and gives the lie to those who some years ago tried to make us believe that the world was getting better and better and better. In fact, some of us can remember back in our earlier days when there was a Frenchman by the name of Couet who had a philosophy, day by day in every way I'm getting better and better. And they were trying to tell us the world was getting better.

But of course since then we've had our eyes opened, and these world wars, and the flood of iniquity, and today we have only to look around us on any newsstand or listen to any radio reports and what have you, and you come to conclusion that this is almost if not altogether a repetition of the days of Noah and the days of Lot. I remember when a student at school, our professor of history told us that there was no such thing as the repetition of history, that history does not repeat itself, but the Lord Jesus says it will. He says as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be.

So there will be a repetition of this in history. And when we go back to the book of Genesis, we find out what those days were like. They were days of violence and corruption.

Two words that very aptly describe the condition of things today, not only in one particular field, but in practically every field, whether it be in the economic, the social, or political, religious, wherever it is, we find that these things are described by these two words. But this morning I would like to look at the other side of the coin. I'd like to talk a little bit about the decrease of godliness.

You know to me this is just as serious, if not more so, than the increase of ungodliness. And it's been a matter of deep concern on my part, as down the years I have read the biographies and have witnessed the lives of older Christians, to see how little of that old-fashioned piety there is among the professed people of God today. You know it used to be that we had men and women in all of our churches and assemblies to whom we could point and say, look at that.

How lovely. I remember a Sunday school superintendent back in New Jersey, such a godly man, that one day a little girl who had never been to Sunday school before, but who had heard about the Lord Jesus at home, she came home from her first session at Sunday school and her mother said to her, well, what did you learn today in Sunday school? Well, she gave a fairly good account of the lesson, but she said, you know, mama, she said, they've got Jesus in that Sunday school. And her mother said, you mean you got a picture of him hanging up on the wall? No, she said, he's right there, he talked with us this morning.

Oh, she said, my child, I think you're mistaken. No, she said, mama, you see it was two ladies, one fighting with the other, and she said, mama, it's so. Well, the mother very quietly dropped the conversation, but that afternoon as they were going out for a little walk, the Sunday school superintendent came out of the Sunday school room and she said, mama, there he is.

And she never realized before that this saintly man had made such an impress on this little child that she actually thought she was looking at the Lord Jesus in person. And you know, my dear friends, I believe that this would be the effect of this old fashioned piety if you and I were taking time out to look more into the face of our blessed Lord as revealed to us in the word of God, with open face beholding as in a glass or as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord to be changed into the same image from glory to glory. You know, I got a pleasant surprise the other day, just last week.

I sat down in a barber chair. Man put the apron around my neck. He said, you don't happen to be a minister, do you? You know, I never, I hadn't said anything to him except good morning, that's all.

He said, you happen to be a minister? I said, yes, he's. Well, you want a preacher's haircut then, don't you? I suppose he meant close cropped. But anyhow, this was interesting that one should be taken for a minister of the word.

That warmed my heart, it really did. Sometimes it's just by your silence. I remember traveling on a Santa Fe train through Arizona, came out into the washroom of the Pullman car, this was years ago, and a man sitting in there smoking and cursing the country because it was of its barrenness and its desert country.

I said nothing but just good morning. Went ahead with my shaving and so on. In a moment he says to me, say, you don't happen to be a preacher, do you? I said, yeah, were you looking for one? No, he said, not exactly, but he said, I said, well, why did you think I was a preacher? Well, he said, I've been using some pretty strong language.

I said, I certainly think you have. He said, I want to apologize to you, sir. Well, I said, you need to do more than apologize to me, you need to confess your sin to God.

But here are some of the impressions that are left, and one is sorry to have to use himself as an illustration, but I'm just merely pointing out to you how practical this thing can be. And now coming to this passage of scripture which we've read, I want you to notice, please, the first effect that the announcement of the coming of the Lord has upon John. Let's come back here for a moment to verse 7. Behold, I come quickly, blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

Here's a benediction that I'm sure every one of us would covet, to keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I, John, saw these things and heard them, and when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship. Think of the effect that it produces upon John.

It's true that he worshipped the wrong person on this occasion, because he worshipped it before the feet of the angel which showed him these things. And I'm just wondering whether this angel describes himself as he does in verse 9, whether he's an angel in the same sense that we have them in chapters 2 and 3 of this book. In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, you have the angel of the church at Ephesus and so on, and we're inclined to believe that that was the pastor of those churches in those days.

In other words, a human being who becomes a messenger of God. And it may be so in this case, because you notice when he describes himself here in verse 9, he says, I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book. Which would make all the more remarkable the fact that he would fall down and worship at the feet of this one.

But suppose we leave it in the generally accepted sense of the term that this is a superhuman being here, who has come to John with this announcement, behold I come quickly, blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. Beloved, let me ask you this straightforward question this morning. Does the truth of the second coming of Christ, the announcement of it, does it really do this to you? Well, but you say, just what do you mean by doing to you? Well, I mean, does it put you in the frame of worship? But perhaps we ought to define worship.

You know, people have strange ideas about worship. Many of them think that it's simply praying to God or going to church. But it's neither one of those things.

You can pray without ever having worshipped. I'm not saying that worship shouldn't be incorporated in our prayers, but you could pray without ever having worshipped. Worship has been defined as the overflow of a heart that has no requests to make.

When a person is in the frame of worship, he's not out to get anything. He's not asking for anything. He isn't even expressing his gratitude, shall I say, for things that he's already received, wonderful as that is.

And every one of us should have the spirit of gratitude, because we're living in a day when these things are no longer as common as they used to be. We're thankful that we live in a state where it is still quite the custom to say thank you. But one has lived in other parts of the world where things are taken for granted, and the spirit of ingratitude or silence with regard to what has been done, the favors that have been bestowed upon us.

But when you come to worship, this is something different. This is something different. Just to give you a hypothetical case, suppose you met somebody this morning on the way to church.

You say, Hi, where are you going? Well, I'm going to church. I'm going to worship. Oh? Maybe an hour from now you meet him again.

You're both on your way home. But he looks awfully sour. You wonder whether he had a good time at church or not.

So you eventually question. You say, Well, did you have a good time in your service this morning? You said you were going to worship. Well, yes, but you know, I took a friend of mine out to hear my favorite preacher this morning, and lo and behold, the preacher was absent, and there was a substitute there, and it wasn't the same.

Just wasn't the same. Well, I said, But didn't the choir do a pretty good job? Yes, they did, but they took an old anthem that they've done about three times already this year, and maybe he himself was more to blame for that because he wouldn't chip in for any new music for them. But anyhow, this was his criticism.

Did anyone sing a solo? Yes, there was a girl who sang a solo, but you know, he says, I've got a very keen ear, and every once in a while she just slipped about a half pitch. You look at him, you say, I thought you went to worship. Yes, so I did.

No, you didn't. If you had gone to worship, it wouldn't have mattered to you who was preaching if it was the Word of God. And it wouldn't have mattered to you how old that anthem was if it was glorifying the Lord.

And so far as that little girl slipping a half pitch, you would never have noticed it, because you would have been so absorbed with the object before you, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. You know, dear friends, I wish that many of our church services could result in the as they did when they saw no man save Jesus only. And I would suggest to you, dear friends, one good way to begin any day, and particularly the Lord's day, would just get down and tell the Lord that you love him, that you love him, and that you long for his coming, that you long to see him face to face.

You know, this is one of the unique features of our Christian faith, isn't it? You know what? We're in love with somebody we've never seen, and that's the most unnatural thing you can think of. Most of us have to see to love. In fact, I suppose that's nearly universal, general.

Oh, I can understand how people would see a photograph of a lady and then later on actually meet her. We've heard of these kind of marriages, particularly on the Pacific coast, where girls coming from Japan, the only idea the man had of what she looked like was the pictures which she sent. She might have sent a picture of some movie actress ahead of her, and then of course he'd get quite an awakening when he actually saw the girl he was going to marry.

But here is this unique feature of our Christian faith, and Saint Peter puts it in so many words. He says, Whom having not seen, ye love. I was speaking along these lines in the Moody Church in Chicago some years ago, and remarked that naturally we have to see to love.

And here a couple came up to me. I could tell from the white cane the man was carrying that they were blind. He came up.

He said, Pastor, we'd like to greet you, and shook hands. He said, You know, you said tonight that you have to see to love. He said, We have never seen each other, and yet we're very much in love.

Well, of course, I was on the spot. He being blind couldn't see how red my face was, because this was kind of contradictory to what I had just said. Well, it just occurred to me that I'd raise a little question.

I said, Yes, but you have some idea what she looks like, don't you? And with that he put his hand up to her cheek. He says, Ain't she a peach? She was. Well, here's what I call, you know, real love.

They'd never seen each other face to face, blind, but oh, how much they loved. We've never seen the Lord Jesus, but what a wonderful thing it'll be to see Him. I remember when my dear one was lying in her casket, just 22 months ago, just about this Lord's Day morning.

It was on a Lord's Day morning at five minutes after ten that she went home to be with the Lord. And a dear friend of ours looking at her in the casket said, She's having her first long look. Tremendous, isn't it? You know, it just, it just takes away all the pangs of sorrow to know that this one is now looking into the face of the one who loved her and gave himself for her.

My dear friends, I make no apology this morning for these devotional remarks. I think this is one of the effects that the study of prophecy should have upon us, a longing to see our precious Savior and to fill our hearts with worship as we think about seeing Him. But now notice how practical it is as we follow this subject a little further here this morning.

You notice in verse 12, he says, Behold, I come quickly. This is the second time he says this. And my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be.

You'll probably be hearing more about that tonight, so I'll not be enlarging on that when you talk about the payday of a Christian. But you know, some people, when you talk about rewards, they think that you've suddenly become very materialistic. But when the Lord Jesus says, My reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be, I'm sure it's quite all right, it's quite legitimate, it's quite biblical for me to be thinking about a reward.

And what the reward will be, of course, He'll determine that. And I'm sure that when I receive it, I'll be very happy with it. In fact, you know what I think, dear friends? I'll think that it's so much more than I ever deserved that I'll wonder why He ever gave it.

But you know, He has assured us in His holy word that He gives a reward for even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple. Think of that. Some years ago when I was ministering the word in the British West Indies, I was invited one evening to have supper with a very humble Christian couple, elderly people.

When I got to the house, I was introduced into the dining room, and here was a plain pine board which was scrubbed white. And in just one place there was a little placemat with lovely china on it, beautiful pieces of silver, a lovely linen napkin. But at the other places there were just enameled dishes and ordinary forks and knives and so on.

And I looked at this and wondered about it. And then the man of the house said to me, Brother, he said, This is your place here. I said, You mean to say that you've made a difference between me and yourselves? I said, I refuse it.

I said, I'd like to eat out of the same kind of dishes that you eat out if you please. Oh, said the lady, Sir, we didn't do that to honor you. We did that to honor the one whom you serve.

I said, Leave it right there. And here I ate off this beautiful china and with these lovely silver things. Yes, they were put there to honor him, but what a reward for me.

And this coming from one who, as he describes himself here, is perfectly, absolutely competent to give the right kind of reward. Do you notice what he says in verse 13? I'm alpha and omega. The first and last verses of the Greek alphabet.

The same thing as if we were saying in English, I am A and Z. But you say, What's the significance of that? Well, maybe if I ask a question or two, the answer will come. Do you know that no matter how great your library may be here in Dallas, everything in your public library comes in between two limits, A and Z. And if we want to say that a man really knows his subject, we say he knows it from A to Z. So when our Lord says, I'm alpha and omega, this to me says that he's the omniscient one. He knows everything.

There's nothing that he doesn't know, and therefore he's fully competent to give the reward, you see. I'm alpha and omega. Yes, you say, but how long has he been around? Is this just simply something that's happened to him now? Oh no, he says, I'm the beginning and the end.

There was nothing before me, there'll be nothing after me. I'm the first and the last. He's the eternal one.

He's the omnipresent one. All the attributes of deity could be put right into this 13th verse. Think of the one with whom you and I have to deal when we stand before his judgment seat, to receive from him the reward that he says he's going to give according to every man according as his work shall be.

Well, says somebody, it's all right for you theologians to talk about these divine attributes, but oh brother, give me something that's down on my human level. Well, it so happens we've got it. Take a look here at verse 16.

Notice how the Lord Jesus again describes himself. This time he says, I Jesus. Could you ask for anything more human than that? This is the way we introduce him to our little ones, don't we? It was in the providence of God.

God blessed our home with five different children, one of whom is in glory. And since then I have been blessed with in-laws and 16 precious grandchildren. And you know, it's an interesting thing as grandpa sits down with them, and some of them are still young enough to sit on my knee, to introduce them to the Lord Jesus.

And to do what I'm sure my dear mother did, because I saw her do it with the younger ones. I'm the oldest of 10. When she taught me to know him by singing, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

I can remember how some years ago, Dr. James Oliver Buswell, who was then president of Wheaton College, came here to the Dallas Seminary to give us a series of addresses on why he believed the Bible to be the Word of God. And we were on the faculty at that time, we're sitting on the platform with our pencils, poise, and notebooks, to learn to hear what this great philosopher would tell us, why he believed the Bible to be the Word of God. You know what his first reason was? Seems to me it was probably on this very platform on which I stand this morning.

I think Dr. M. A. Stone was pastor of this church then. He said, my first reason for believing that the Bible is the Word of God is my mother told me so. You know, there's something about this dear friends that's heartwarming.

The Lord introduces himself on this human level here, when he says, I Jesus. And then he gives us two more things to describe himself. He speaks of himself here as the root and the offspring of David.

That, of course, is his relationship to the nation of Israel. And then the bright and morning star. Oh, this is something, dear friends, in the pictures which are given us of our blessed Lord, which I think has escaped some because so very few people see the morning star.

Some of them don't even take time to look for the evening star. But to get up early enough to see the morning star, that's something else again. But as a young man, as a boy, I suffered greatly with asthma, for which reason I sat up in a chair rather than go to bed at night.

I couldn't lie down flat. So for weeks on end, months on end, I would be sitting up in what was known in those days as a Morris chair. And my chair was placed right by the window.

And morning after morning, I had the great pleasure of seeing the morning star. Reminding me of my blessed Lord who's coming before the day of the Lord is fully dawned upon this world. Yes, this is the one who's coming for us.

Now, what does this do to us? Well, here's what it does. You notice in verse 17, the spirit and the bride say, come. Now, for many years, I thought this was an invitation to the Lord to return.

But as I read further into the verse, I'm rather convinced that this is a joint invitation on the part of the spirit and the bride to the sinner who is a thirst. You notice the rest of the verse? Let him that heareth say, come, and let him that is a thirst come. In other words, I believe, dear friends, that this announcement of our Lord, and he says, my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be, inspires him with fresh energy to go out into his service and to invite those who are thirsty.

Those who are thirsty. And there are many thirsty souls today. Oh, they don't always tell you this in the first meeting with them.

But as you go on in the conversation with them, you find there's a there's a longing for something. And the the way in which this is pictured for us here, it's a thirst. And probably there's no human emotion experience that that pictures it better than this one of thirst.

And how lovely is the picture of that which satisfies. I remember years ago, we lived next door to a dear Mexican in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico. And my wife gave to our neighbor, gave her this text in Spanish, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Sometime later, I was visiting in that home and saw the text hanging on the wall in the main room of the house. And I said to the man, speaking to him in Spanish, I told him how delighted I was to see this text on the wall there. Yes, he said, we are very proud of that text.

I said, what makes you so proud of it? Well, he said, to think that your wife would give this to my wife as a present. We are very proud of that. It's so polite, you know.

But I wanted something more than that. I said, but what about the verse itself? I said, do you understand what it says? Well, he said, not altogether. Not altogether.

And I thought maybe it was this word whosoever, which in Spanish happens to be two words, todo aquel. But I thought maybe this bothered him. I said, are you bothered about this word whosoever? Oh, no, he

said, I think we know what that means.

I said, what does it mean? Well, he said, we just decided that means for anybody that wants it. I said, that's good enough. Then I said, well, what about this expression, the water of life? I said, do you understand that? Oh, yes, he said, I think we understand that too.

I said, well, now what do you understand by that? Well, translating freely from his Spanish into the English, it was something like this, that it's some great blessing that satisfies your heart's deepest longing. Oh, I said to myself, I've never heard a better definition in any seminary than this. A great blessing that satisfies your heart's deepest longing.

Well, I was puzzled now. I said, well, what verse, word could it be in this verse? And it happened to be the last one. Gratuitamente, or sometimes translated, de balde, freely, without money, without price.

I said, you don't understand that? No, he said, you don't understand that. I said, yes, but that's what it says. Yes, but in religion, you don't get anything for nothing, he said.

I said, yes, but this time you do. He said, you know, when I was born, my parents have to pay. When I'm confirmed, they have to pay.

When I get married, I have to pay. When my children are born and christened, we have to pay. You have to pay for everything in religion.

I said, but this you get for nothing. Then he says, of course, it's cheap. I said, no, it is not cheap.

It is one brato. It was not cheap. I said, the Son of God gave his life for this.

And now he offers it to you and me, without money and without price. Oh, doesn't it thrill your soul that you got a message like that in these days of materialism? Something that satisfies the heart's deepest longing. And how wonderful to think that while he tarries or while he waits, you and I've got the privilege of extending this invitation.

But I must draw this to a close. The last time in verse 20, he which testifies these things says, surely I come quickly. Amen.

Now here, I believe, is the response that I had been putting up in verse 17. Here it is. Here there's no mention made of keeping the saying of the prophecy of this book.

Nothing said here about rewards for service. Just himself. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Oh, dear friends, I don't know of anything that could keep me purer than this very thing. You know, if you and I are really waiting for God's Son from heaven, as the Apostle John puts it, he says, every man that hath this hope in him, what does he do? He purifies himself. Even as he, Christ, is pure.

How pure is he? Oh, beloved, as we were hearing the other night on the new morality and all this, God keep us from ever feeding on this kind of stuff. Do you know what? I ask the privilege of dropping a course in the very middle of it in the university, in a course in the English novel, because I found the reading, the required reading, was so defiling. I said to the professor, I'll have to stop.

He said, but you'll lose your credit. I said, I'd rather lose my credit than lose my soul. And yet this is literature today.

Oh, how we hear it blown up. John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Terry Sutherland, Henry Miller, Mickey Spillane. I can't soil my mind with that.

Oh, to read the word of God, and to get face to face with the Lord Jesus, and to remember, as our dear brother was singing for us a little while ago, it may be today, every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure. Let us pray. Our gracious God and our Father, we do thank thee for that which is ahead of us, oh, to think that before this day is over, when we look for the first time in that lovely face that was once marred more than any man's, but now radiant with thy glory.

Dear Lord, we just pray that some of this may be reflected in us, as with open face we behold thee, Lord Jesus, to be chained into the same image from glory to glory. We ask in thy precious name. Amen.

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