FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of Last Things

He Who Was, and Who Is, and Who Is to Come

UNIT 3: THE KINGDOM OF GOD — ALREADY AND NOT YET

Lessons 7–9: The Reign of Christ Between the Two Comings

Lesson 9

THE KINGDOM CONSUMMATED

Christ's Return and the Completion of All Things

The Consummation of the Kingdom as the Goal Toward Which All Redemptive History and Inter-Advent Suffering Moves

"The kingdom that arrived in a manger and was secured at an empty tomb will be publicly and permanently declared at the sound of the last trumpet."

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Revelation 11:15; Matthew 25:31–46; Acts 1:9–11; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:19–23

> *"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*
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> **Titus 2:13, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Unit 3 has moved through the full arc of the kingdom's redemptive-historical existence. Lesson 7 established the kingdom's inauguration in the first coming of Jesus Christ, the announcement and demonstration of the kingdom's arrival in His preaching, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension. Lesson 8 established the kingdom's inter-advent character, the not-yet dimensions of tribulation, groaning, apostasy, moral declension, and cosmic conflict that characterize the age between the King's first and second comings. This lesson, the third and final lesson of Unit 3, completes the arc: the kingdom's consummation at the return of Jesus Christ, the moment when the not-yet becomes the forever, when the groaning of Romans 8 gives way to the glory of the new creation, when the already-accomplished victory of the Lamb becomes the publicly and permanently declared reality of the age that will have no end.

The consummation of the kingdom is the telos, the goal, the destination, the appointed end, toward which every lesson of this series has been pointing. The definition of eschatology in Lesson 1 identified the consummation as the goal of all theology. The hermeneutics of Lesson 2 established the two-stage fulfillment framework in which the first coming inaugurates and the second coming consummates. The historical survey of Lesson 3 showed how the church's greatest theological minds have consistently understood the kingdom's consummation as a single event accompanying the return of Christ. The individual eschatology of Lessons 4–6 established the destiny of the person who dies before the consummation, a destiny that is genuine and blessed but incomplete, awaiting the resurrection and the new creation for its full realization. And Lessons 7 and 8 have established the already and the not-yet of the kingdom in the inter-advent age. All of this has been preparation for the question this lesson addresses: what exactly happens when the King returns?

This lesson examines the consummation under seven headings: the nature and certainty of the parousia as the event that terminates the inter-advent age and inaugurates the eternal state; the manner of the return, what Acts 1:9–11 establishes about how Christ will come; the sequence of consummating events as Paul lays it out in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, the resurrection, the judgment, the handing over of the kingdom to the Father, and the abolition of death; the universal scope of the kingdom's consummation in Revelation 11:15 and the seventh trumpet's declaration; the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25:31–46; the renewal of the creation in 2 Peter 3:10–13 and Romans 8:19–23; and the doxological character of the consummation, why the whole story ends where it ends, in the glory of the triune God who is all in all. Together these passages portray a consummation that is not an escape from history but its fulfillment, not the abandonment of creation but its redemption, not the suppression of human identity but its glorification, and not the conclusion of the kingdom's story but the beginning of its fullest and most glorious chapter.

A word of pastoral encouragement is fitting as we conclude this unit. The consummation is not merely a doctrine to affirm but the living hope of every suffering, grieving, and persevering believer. After considering the trials of this present age, we now turn to the promise that gives us endurance: Christ is coming. Our groaning will give way to glory, our suffering to the appearing of the King, and the kingdom inaugurated in Christ will be revealed in all its fullness. That certain hope is the purpose of this lesson.

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE PAROUSIA

The Return of Christ as the Inviolable Terminus of the Inter-Advent Age

A. The Parousia as Promised, Personal, and Certain

The return of Jesus Christ, the parousia, is the most frequently promised future event in the entire New Testament. A count of the relevant passages reveals that virtually every New Testament book either directly promises or explicitly presupposes the return of Christ as the certain and appointed end of the present age. It is promised in the Gospels (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 17 and 21; John 14:3), in the epistles (Romans 11:26; 1 Corinthians 15:23–28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; Philippians 3:20–21; Colossians 3:4; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7–8; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 2:28; 3:2), and in the Apocalypse (Revelation 1:7; 2:25; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20). The sheer density of this testimony is itself a theological statement: the return of Christ is not a peripheral or optional element of the gospel; it is structural to the entire apostolic proclamation of what God has done in Christ and what He intends to do through Him at the appointed time.

The certainty of the parousia is grounded not in human calculation or prophetic extrapolation but in the faithfulness of the God who promised it. The One who promised is the same God who raised Christ from the dead (Acts 17:31), who cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and who has set a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through the man He has appointed, furnishing proof to all by raising Him from the dead. The resurrection of Christ is simultaneously the guarantee of the parousia and its prototype: the God who raised the One who was crucified will also bring back the One He raised, in accordance with the promise He made through all the prophets. The parousia is as certain as Easter.

It is important to note what the certainty of the parousia does not imply. It does not imply knowledge of the time: "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36). The certainty of the event is absolute; the timing of the event is known only to the Father. This is not a concession of ignorance but a design feature of the inter-advent age: the concealment of the timing is what produces the posture of watchful readiness that Jesus consistently commends. The servant who knows the exact date of the master's return can calculate the last possible moment to begin preparations; the servant who does not know is compelled to maintain continuous readiness. The unknown timing of the parousia is the engine of the church's perpetual eschatological alertness, and the church that has succumbed to either the presumption of certainty about the timing (date-setting) or the complacency of indefinite delay has equally misread the eschatological situation.

B. The Uniqueness and Finality of the Parousia

The New Testament presents the parousia as a single, unrepeatable, final event that terminates the inter-advent age and inaugurates the eternal state. This stands in sharp contrast to the dispensational scheme, which posits a two-stage return of Christ: a secret coming at the pretribulational rapture and a subsequent visible coming at the conclusion of the tribulation period and the inauguration of the millennium. The amillennial position, consistent with the entire structure of the New Testament's eschatological testimony, holds that there is one return of Christ, one resurrection of the dead (both just and unjust), one final judgment, and one immediate inauguration of the eternal state. No intermediate earthly millennium separates the parousia from the new creation.

The grammatical and theological evidence for this unified eschatological sequence is extensive. In 1 Corinthians 15:23–28, Paul describes a sequence in which Christ rises first, then at His coming those who belong to Him, then the end when He delivers up the kingdom to the Father. There is no gap between the coming and the end; the end is the immediate consequence of the parousia. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, the descent of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the transformation of the living all occur in immediate sequence with no temporal gap for a millennium between them and the final state. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, the revelation of the Lord Jesus is simultaneously the event of the saints' relief and the wicked's destruction, one event, not two stages separated by seven or a thousand years. And in John 5:28–29, Jesus speaks of a single "hour" in which "all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." One hour, one coming, one resurrection of all the dead.

The uniqueness and finality of the parousia is also established by the New Testament's consistent use of the term itself. Parousia, presence or royal arrival, refers to the definitive royal visit, the arrival that changes everything. It is not a preliminary visit followed by a more complete one; it is the single, supreme, historically terminal event at which the King arrives to receive the completed kingdom from the hand of history and to establish the eternal order that His arrival inaugurates. The church that awaits this event lives under its horizon with the sobriety, the urgency, and the hope that the uniqueness of the event demands. It is the most important appointment in the history of the universe, and it is coming.

II. THE MANNER OF THE RETURN, ACTS 1:9–11

Personal, Visible, Bodily, and Glorious

A. The Ascension Scene as the Template for the Return

The most specific description of how Christ will return is provided by the angelic word at the ascension in Acts 1:9–11: "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.'" The angelic promise is remarkably specific in its form: the same Jesus, in the same manner, will come as He went. The manner of the ascension is the template for the manner of the return.

What does the manner of the ascension establish? First, the return will be personal: it is this Jesus, not an anonymous divine presence, not a spiritual manifestation, not a symbol of divine judgment, but the specific, named, identified person who ascended from the Mount of Olives. The One who returns is the same One who was crucified, who rose from the dead, and who ascended in the disciples' sight. The wounds that Thomas touched will be the wounds that every eye sees. The voice that called Lazarus from the tomb will be the voice that calls the dead from every grave. The return of Christ is the return of a Person whose personal identity is continuous with the One the disciples knew, and it is a return that demands personal recognition and response.

Second, the return will be visible and bodily: He was seen going, and He will be seen coming. The ascension was a literal, spatial, observable event in which the physical, glorified body of the risen Christ was lifted up and received

by a cloud. The return will be a corresponding literal, spatial, observable event in which the same body, glorified, but continuous with the body that was crucified and raised, will descend. This is confirmed by Revelation 1:7: "Be hold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him." The universality of the vision rules out any interpretation of the return as a hidden, secret, or spiritual event available only to those with special perception. Every eye will see Him, the redeemed and the unredeemed, the living and those raised from the dead, the willing and the unwilling. The return of Christ is the most publicly visible event in the history of the universe.

B. *Glory, Sovereignty, and the Accompaniment of the Return*

The manner of the return is also described in terms of the glory, sovereignty, and accompaniment that attend the parousia. Matthew 24:30–31 describes the coming of the Son of Man "on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory," accompanied by the sound of a great trumpet and the gathering of the elect from the four winds. 2 Thessalonians 1:7–8 describes "the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire." 1 Thessalonians 4:16 describes "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God." The return is not a quiet arrival but a cosmic announcement, accompanied by the full panoply of divine sovereignty, the company of the heavenly host, and the unmistakable sonic declaration that history has reached its appointed climax.

The specific language of clouds in both the ascension account and the return passages is drawn from the Old Testament's imagery of the divine presence and the Danielic vision of the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13). Clouds are the vehicle of divine self-disclosure, the pillar of cloud in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21), the cloud that descended on Sinai (Exodus 19:9), the cloud that filled the temple (1 Kings 8:10–11), the cloudy chariot of Ezekiel's throne vision (Ezekiel 1:4). When Jesus returns with the clouds, He returns in the full disclosure of the divine glory that has been provisionally concealed during the inter-advent age, the glory that was veiled in the humility of His incarnation, revealed partially at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8), and will be fully unveiled at the parousia. The return of Christ is the unveiling of the glory that has always belonged to the Son.

The accompaniment of the angels, the mighty shout, and the trumpet of God all point to the cosmic, universal, and irresistible character of the parousia. This is not a private event confined to a believing community or a spiritual encounter available to the spiritually attuned; it is a public, cosmic, undeniable declaration that the King has returned and that history as the inter-advent age has known it is over. The trumpet in the Old Testament was the instrument of assembly, of warfare, and of sacred announcement, the Jubilee trumpet (Leviticus 25:9), the trump of the theophany at Sinai (Exodus 19:16–19), the final trumpet of Isaiah 27:13. When Paul speaks of the "last trumpet" at the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:52), he is reaching for the full weight of this Old Testament background: the last, decisive, history-terminating announcement that the appointed time has come and that the age of the last trumpet's blast has arrived.

III. THE SEQUENCE OF CONSUMMATING EVENTS, 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–28

Resurrection, Judgment, Kingdom, and God All in All

A. Christ the Firstfruits and the Sequence He Initiates

The most systematic and theologically comprehensive account of the sequence of events at the consummation is Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28. The argument proceeds from the resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (v. 20) through the eschatological sequence that His resurrection initiates: "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (vv. 23–26). The sequence is clear and the logic is compelling: Christ rose first, establishing the eschatological order; those who are His rise at the parousia, which is His coming; and then the end comes, immediately and without gap, when Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father after having abolished every enemy, including death itself.

The firstfruits metaphor is one of the most productive in the entire Pauline eschatological vocabulary. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits (reshit, bikkurim) were the initial portion of the harvest offered to God in the temple, and they carried a double significance: they were a genuine portion of the harvest (not merely a symbol or a token), and they guaranteed the full harvest that was to follow. Christ's resurrection is the eschatological firstfruits in precisely this double sense: it is genuinely the resurrection, not a resuscitation, not a vision, not a spiritual experience, but the actual bodily raising of the crucified Jesus from the dead, and it guarantees the full resurrection harvest of all who are His, which will be gathered at the parousia. The firstfruits and the harvest are continuous and connected: the same resurrection power that raised Christ will raise those who are in Christ, in the same kind of bodily resurrection, at the appointed time.

The phrase "each in his own order" (hekastos en to idio tagmati) is significant for the amillennial interpretation of the eschatological sequence. Paul identifies two orders of resurrection: Christ the firstfruits, and then those who are Christ's at His coming. After these two, he says "then comes the end", not "then comes the millennium" or "then comes another stage." The end follows immediately upon the resurrection of those who are Christ's, without any temporal gap for an intermediate earthly kingdom. The amillennial reading of this passage is that Paul's "then comes the end" rules out the dispensational insertion of a thousand-year interval between the resurrection of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked. The parousia, the resurrection, and the end constitute a single, unified eschatological event-complex, not a sequence of events spread across a millennium.

B. The Handing Over of the Kingdom and God All in All

The most Trinitarian and the most doxologically profound dimension of the 1 Corinthians 15 passage is the description of the parousia's ultimate goal: "then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power" (v. 24), and the conclusion: "When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (v. 28). The consummation is not merely the arrival of the King at the end of history; it is the ultimate Trinitarian event, the moment in which the Son's mediatorial kingdom, established at the ascension for the purpose of the inter-advent age, is handed over to the Father, and the purpose of all redemptive history reaches its appointed Trinitarian goal.

The Son's subjection to the Father in verse 28 is not a statement of ontological subordination, as though the Son were less than the Father in His eternal being. The entire argument of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 has been about the

mediatorial kingdom established by Christ's resurrection and ascension, the kingdom through which the Father's purposes for history are being accomplished during the inter-advent age. When that kingdom's purposes have been fully achieved, every enemy abolished, death itself destroyed, all things subjected to the Son and through the Son to the Father, the mediatorial structure is dissolved and the eternal Trinitarian communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit, unmediated by the structures of redemptive history, becomes the defining reality of the eternal state: God all in all. This is the Trinitarian goal of eschatology, and it is the most comprehensive and the most doxologically satisfying statement of the consummation's purpose in the entire New Testament.

The practical and pastoral implications of this Trinitarian eschatology are significant. The goal of the consummation is not human flourishing in isolation, not the vindication of the church's suffering in isolation, and not even the salvation of the redeemed in isolation. The goal is the Trinitarian glory of God: God all in all. Every other good that the consummation brings, the glorification of the saints, the renewal of creation, the vindication of the righteous, the judgment of the wicked, the abolition of death, the new creation's unending joy, is a dimension of and a contribution to this ultimate Trinitarian goal. The church that understands this understands why the consummation is not first of all about human happiness (though human flourishing is genuinely included in it) but about the glory of the God who made all things, redeemed all things through the blood of His Son, and is bringing all things to the consummation that serves His eternal Trinitarian purposes. This is the eschatology that produces genuine worship rather than mere self-interest.

IV. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET, REVELATION 11:15

The Kingdom's Universal Declaration at the Consummation

A. The Announcement of the Eternal Kingdom

Revelation 11:15 provides the most concentrated and the most doxologically exhilarating statement of the kingdom's consummation in the entire New Testament: "The seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'" This is the declaration that the entire inter-advent age has been preparing for, the announcement that the not-yet has finally and permanently become the always. The kingdom of the world, the domain that has been contested throughout history, in which the forces of darkness have exercised their temporary and restrained dominion under the oversight of the sovereign God, has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. The transition is decisive, universal, and irreversible.

The seventh trumpet in Revelation's structure is the climactic and conclusive announcement in the series of divine judgments that span chapters 8–11. It is the "last trumpet" in the eschatological sequence that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 15:52: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." The sounding of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 is the apocalyptic representation of the same event that Paul describes in propositional terms in 1 Corinthians 15: the final, cosmic, history-terminating declaration that God's kingdom has come in its fullness. The two passages illuminate each other: Paul provides the theological logic, Revelation provides the doxological and cosmic imagery, and together they describe the same singular event from complementary perspectives.

The response of the twenty-four elders in Revelation 11:16–18, falling on their faces and worshipping God, saying "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign", is the response the consummation deserves and will receive from the full company of the redeemed. The kingdom's consummation is not merely an eschatological event to be endured by the church or a prophetic scenario to be decoded by the theologically curious; it is the occasion of the deepest and most unrestrained worship the redeemed community has ever offered or will ever offer, because it is the moment at which every promise has been kept, every enemy has been defeated, every tear has been wiped away, and every longing of the inter-advent age has been fully and permanently satisfied. The church that worships now in hope worships then in sight, and the sight exceeds the hope in the measure that the fullness exceeds the firstfruits.

B. *The Reign Forever and Ever*

The concluding phrase of Revelation 11:15, "and He will reign forever and ever", is the eschatological baseline of the eternal state. The kingdom that arrived in time does not terminate in time; it is transformed by the consummation into the eternal kingdom that will never end. The distinction between the mediatorial kingdom of the inter-advent age, established at the ascension for the purposes of redemptive history, and the eternal kingdom of the consummation is not a distinction between two different kingdoms but between two forms of the same kingdom: the former provisional, functional, and oriented toward the achievement of specific redemptive-historical purposes; the latter final, eternal, and oriented toward the endless, unchallenged, fully realized glorification of the triune God through the unending flourishing of the redeemed in the new creation.

The eternal reign of Christ does not mean that the mediatorial structures of the inter-advent age continue unchanged into the eternal state. The Son hands over the mediatorial kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24), and the eternal state is characterized by the unmediated Trinitarian communion of the triune God with His redeemed people, "God may be all in all" (v. 28). This does not mean the Son ceases to be the Lord of the eternal state; it means that in the eternal state, the Son's lordship is no longer exercised through the specific structures of inter-advent mediation (the proclamation of the gospel, the intercession of the high priest, the building of the church) but through the direct, face-to-face, unmediated fellowship with the Father and the Spirit that defines the eternal life the saints will share. The Son reigns forever, but the character of His reign in the eternal state is the reign of the God who is all in all, not the reign of the interadvent mediator pursuing the completion of a task still in progress.

The phrase "forever and ever" (eis tous aionas ton aionon, into the ages of the ages) is the New Testament's strongest expression of unending duration. It is the same phrase used for the eternity of God's reign in Revelation 4:9–10 and 5:13, for the endless torment of the wicked in Revelation 14:11, and for the endless blessing of the righteous in Revelation 22:5. In each case, it marks a condition that admits of no termination, no revision, and no subsequent alteration. The kingdom's consummation is not a temporary arrangement that will eventually be replaced by something else; it is the final, permanent, irreversible establishment of the reign that has been advancing through all of redemptive history toward this appointed end. Forever and ever: the inter-advent age's provisional is exchanged for the eternal's permanent, the groaning's temporary is exchanged for the glory's everlasting.

V. THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS, MATTHEW 25:31–46

The Consummation's Assessment of Every Human Life

A. The Son of Man on the Throne of His Glory

No passage in the Gospels provides a more vivid or more theologically comprehensive picture of the final judgment that accompanies the kingdom's consummation than Matthew 25:31–46: "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." The scene is staggering in its scope: the Son of Man on the throne of His glory, all the angels in attendance, all the nations gathered before Him. This is the universal, all-encompassing, nothing-excluded assessment of every human life before the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

The judicial authority of the Son of Man at the final judgment is the consummation of the authority He received at the ascension. When the Father gave the Son all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), that authority included the authority to judge: "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). The One who was judged unjustly by the highest courts of the first century, condemned by the Sanhedrin, sentenced by Pilate, executed by the Roman state, is the One before whom every court, every ruler, every power, and every human person will stand on the final day. The reversal is total: the condemned becomes the judge, the executed becomes the One by whom every execution is assessed, and the One who cried "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" is the One before whom the forsakers of God will stand in their own account.

The criterion of the judgment in Matthew 25:35–40 is the treatment of "one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them", a phrase that has generated extensive interpretive debate about its reference. The most exegetically defensible reading, consistent with Matthew's broader usage of "brothers" in contexts of discipleship (Matthew 12:49–50; 28:10), understands "the least of these brothers of Mine" as the disciples of Jesus, those who bear His name and His gospel in the world. The judgment of the nations is then based on their response to the proclamation of the gospel in the persons of those who carried it: those who welcomed, fed, clothed, visited, and cared for the messengers of the King welcomed, in effect, the King Himself. The judgment is not a works-righteousness criterion but an evidence-of-faith criterion: the love that was genuinely present in the heart was expressed in the treatment of those who bore the King's name. The sheep are not surprised to have been doing these things; they did them without calculation because genuine faith in the King produces genuine love for those who are His.

B. The Dual Outcome of the Judgment

The judgment of Matthew 25 results in two outcomes, stated with equal finality and equal clarity: "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (v. 46). The duality of the outcome is a structural feature of the New Testament's eschatological witness that cannot be dissolved by any theological maneuver, however sophisticated. Both outcomes are described with the word aionios, eternal, age-long, unending. The eternal life and the eternal punishment are grammatically, semantically, and logically parallel: the

same word describes both, and if the eternity of the life is genuine and unending, so is the eternity of the punishment. Any attempt to affirm the one while denying or qualifying the other does violence to the grammar and the logic of the sentence.

The eternal punishment of Matthew 25:46 is the final disposition of the wicked that the New Testament consistently describes in terms of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), outer darkness, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15), the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8), and the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The various images and descriptions are not strictly literal in every detail, but they are consistently and emphatically negative, consistently and emphatically final, and consistently and emphatically conscious. The New Testament does not present a pleasant alternative to eternal life; it presents the second death as the final consequence of refusing the One who is Life. This teaching is not comfortable, not popular, and not susceptible to revision by appeals to the love of God, because the same Jesus who most fully revealed the love of God also most clearly and most often warned of the reality of hell. His love is the love that tells the truth about the consequences of rejecting it.

The eternal life of the righteous is not merely the extension of the present life into an indefinitely prolonged future; it is the specific quality of life that participation in the age to come provides, life in the immediate, unmediated, unending presence of the triune God, in the glorified resurrection body, in the new creation that has been liberated from its subjection to futility and corruption. The Johannine definition of eternal life is the most concise and the most personal: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is eternal knowledge of the Father and the Son, the relational, personal, experiential knowing that the new creation makes possible without any of the limitations, distortions, and interruptions that sin, finitude, and death imposed on the present life. It is what Psalm 16:11 anticipates: fullness of joy in the presence of the Lord, pleasures at His right hand forevermore.

VI. THE RENEWAL OF CREATION, 2 PETER 3:10–13 AND ROMANS 8:19–23

The Consummation of the Created Order

A. The Day of the Lord and the Renewal of All Things

The consummation of the kingdom is not the evacuation of creation but its renewal. This is one of the most important and most frequently misunderstood dimensions of the biblical eschatology of the consummation, and it has profound implications for the theology of creation, for the theology of the body, and for the church's understanding of its relationship to the material world. The consummation is not the annihilation of the present creation and its replacement by a different, purely spiritual reality; it is the purification, transformation, and glorification of the present creation into the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Second Peter 3:10–13 provides the most challenging and the most frequently misread account of the consummation's effect on the present creation: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the

heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." The imagery of fire, dissolution, and intense heat has frequently been read as the annihilation of the present universe and its replacement by a wholly new creation. But the Greek verb translated "burned up" in verse 10 (some manuscripts read "found" or "disclosed", heurethēsetai) and the broader canonical context suggest a more nuanced picture.

The Old Testament uses fire as the instrument of purification, not of annihilation, the refiner's fire that burns away the dross and purifies the precious metal. The flood of Noah's day, which Peter explicitly parallels with the coming day of fire (2 Peter 3:5–7), did not annihilate the world; it purified and renewed it. The same world that was overwhelmed by water survived and was repopulated. By analogy, the day of the Lord's fire does not annihilate the present creation; it purifies and transforms it into the new heavens and new earth that Peter describes. The new creation of Revelation 21–22 is not a second creation ex nihilo but the renewed and glorified form of the first creation, the same heaven and earth, transformed by the fire of judgment into the condition of righteousness and glory that God always intended for His creation but that sin had distorted. The river of life, the tree of life, the city, the nations, the kings, all of these in Revelation 21–22 imply genuine material continuity with the present creation, even as they describe its radical transformation.

B. *Creation's Liberation and the Eschatological Ecology of the New Creation*

Romans 8:19–23, the passage of creation's groaning that Lesson 8 examined from the not-yet side, must now be read from the consummation side: "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." The liberation of creation is the eschatological goal that the creation's groaning has been oriented toward throughout the inter-advent age. When the children of God are revealed, when the resurrection occurs and the saints are publicly manifested in their resurrection glory, the creation that has been groaning in subjection to futility will be set free.

The phrase "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" is one of the most beautiful in the entire Pauline corpus. The liberation the creation receives is described in terms of the glory that the children of God will share, as though the creation's liberation is the overflow of the saints' glorification. When the sons of God are revealed in glory, the creation participates in that glory, it is released from its slavery to corruption into the same freedom that the glorification of God's children represents. This is not a metaphor; it is a description of the actual eschatological ecology of the new creation. The new heavens and new earth are not a replacement creation in which the saints exist as disembodied spirits; they are the renewed and glorified material creation in which the embodied, glorified, resurrected saints dwell in the unending freedom of the glory that God has prepared for those who love Him.

The practical implications of this eschatology of creation renewal are significant for the church's engagement with the material world. If the new creation is the renewed form of the present creation, then the present creation is not ultimately disposable, and the church's relationship to it is not one of indifference or contempt. The creation that God called "very good" at the beginning and that He will liberate from corruption at the end deserves the care, stewardship, and respect that its eschatological destiny implies. The bodies of the saints that will be raised in glory and that will inhabit the new creation are worth honoring and caring for in the present. The cultural works that the saints perform in the present creation, the beauty they create, the justice they pursue, the communities

they build, are works performed in a creation that will be renewed, not annihilated, and that eschatological orientation gives those works a significance that the annihilationist view cannot provide. The new creation is the goal of the present creation's groaning, and that goal makes the present creation's care a genuinely eschatological act.

VII. THE DOXOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE CONSUMMATION

Why the Kingdom's End Is the Beginning of Everything

A. The Consummation as the Vindication of God's Character

The consummation of the kingdom is, above all else, the vindication of the character of the God who promised it. Throughout the inter-advent age, the church has lived with the tension between the already of the kingdom's arrival and the not-yet of its consummation, a tension that has always been susceptible to the objection that if God is truly sovereign, truly faithful, and truly the Lord of history, why does the not-yet persist? Why does death continue? Why do the wicked prosper? Why does the creation groan? The consummation is God's answer to those questions, delivered not in words but in the irreversible act of bringing history to its appointed end: the raising of the dead, the judgment of all, the renewal of creation, and the establishment of the eternal state in which righteousness is at home and the God who promised is seen to have kept every word He spoke.

The book of Revelation is, at its most fundamental level, a book about the vindication of God's character in the face of the apparent triumph of evil during the inter-advent age. The churches to whom John writes are suffering under the weight of Roman imperial power, tempted to accommodate to the pressures of a culture that demands their compromise and threatens their lives. Revelation's answer to their situation is not a political strategy or a pastoral encouragement to make the best of a bad situation; it is a vision of the throne room of heaven and the consummation of history in which every apparent triumph of the dragon is revealed as the penultimate reversal that God was always weaving toward His ultimate purpose. The consummation vindicates the martyrs (Revelation 6:9–11; 20:4), vindicates the faithful witnesses (Revelation 11:11–12), vindicates the woman and her children (Revelation 12), vindicates the Lamb who appeared to be defeated at Calvary (Revelation 5:6–14), and vindicates the God who allowed all of this to happen in accordance with a purpose that the consummation finally discloses in its fullness.

The theological import of this vindication for the church's present life is immeasurable. The community that knows the consummation is coming, that knows the God who allows the inter-advent age's suffering is the same God who will bring it to a vindication so complete and so glorious that the suffering will be seen in retrospect as the necessary path to the glory, is the community that can endure the inter-advent age's pressures with a freedom and a confidence that no other eschatological framework can produce. Paul's stunning declaration in Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us", is not a minimization of present suffering but an eschatological calibration of it against a glory so large and so certain that the suffering, however acute in the present, cannot fill the frame when the frame includes the consummation.

B. *The Consummation as the Beginning, Not the End*

The language of consummation, the end, the final state, the termination of history, can mislead if it is taken to imply that the new creation is a conclusion rather than a beginning. The eternal state is not the church's retirement from meaningful activity into a static condition of passive bliss; it is the beginning of the fullest, most purposeful, most gloriously human existence that the people of God will ever inhabit. The groaning, the not-yet, the tribulation, the moral conflict, the eschatological warfare, all of these will be finished. But what replaces them is not a vacancy but a fullness: the fullness of the presence of the triune God, the fullness of the resurrection body's capacities, the fullness of the new creation's possibilities, and the fullness of the relational communion between God and His people that sin had always been preventing from reaching its intended depth and richness.

Revelation 22:3–5 provides the most specific New Testament description of the activity of the redeemed in the eternal state: "There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever." Serving God, seeing His face, bearing His name, reigning, these are not descriptions of passive existence but of active, purposeful, worshipful engagement with the God who made them and the creation He has renewed for their dwelling. The saints of the eternal state are not reduced to a condition of endless spiritual vacation; they are elevated to the full exercise of their renewed human capacities in the service of the God whose face they see and whose name they bear.

This lesson, and with it Unit 3, closes where the entire eschatological story closes: not in a conclusion but in a beginning. The kingdom that was promised to the patriarchs, announced by the prophets, inaugurated in the first coming of the Son, advanced through the suffering testimony of the inter-advent church, and consummated at the return of the King, that kingdom does not end when it is consummated. It becomes, at its consummation, the eternal kingdom of the God who is all in all, the unending reign of the Lamb who was slain, the permanent home of the redeemed, the final answer to every question the inter-advent age has raised, and the beginning of an existence so full, so glorious, and so free from everything that has diminished human life under the conditions of sin, death, and the not-yet that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has yet fully conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him. But the Spirit has revealed it to us through the Word. And the Word says: He is coming. And all shall be well.

> *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."*
>
> **Revelation 11:15, NASB 1995**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Consummation	The final, complete, and irreversible fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes at the return of Jesus Christ, encompassing the general resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the renewal of all creation, and the establishment of the eternal state. The consummation is the telos toward which all of redemptive history moves and the goal that gives the inter-advent age its orientation and its hope. Distinguished from the inauguration (the kingdom's arrival at the first coming) and the inter-advent period (the kingdom's advance under the conditions of the not-yet).
Parousia	Greek for "presence" or "royal arrival," the primary New Testament term for the return of Jesus Christ. The parousia is the single, unrepeatable, final event that terminates the inter-advent age and inaugurates the eternal state. Distinguished in the amillennial framework from the dispensational two-stage return (rapture followed by second coming); on the amillennial reading, the parousia is one event, accompanied simultaneously by the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the inauguration of the new creation.
Firstfruits (Aparche)	The Old Testament offering of the first portion of the harvest to God, carrying a double significance: genuine participation in the harvest (not merely symbolic) and guarantee of the full harvest to follow. Applied in 1 Corinthians 15:20 to Christ's resurrection as the eschatological firstfruits: the actual bodily raising of Christ is simultaneously the genuine beginning of the eschatological resurrection and the guarantee of the full resurrection harvest of all who are His at His coming.
God All in All (Theos ta panta en pasin)	Paul's designation in 1 Corinthians 15:28 of the ultimate Trinitarian goal of the consummation: "so that God may be all in all." After the Son has delivered the mediatorial kingdom to the Father and all enemies have been abolished, the eternal state is characterized by the unmediated Trinitarian communion of the triune God with His redeemed people, the fullest possible expression of the divine glory through the glorified human community. The supreme Trinitarian statement of eschatology's ultimate purpose.
New Creation (Kaine Ktisis)	The renewed and glorified form of the present heaven and earth that will exist after the consummation, described in Isaiah 65:17–25; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21–22. The new creation is not a second creation ex nihilo (from nothing) but the purification and transformation of the present creation by the fire of the day of the Lord into the condition of righteousness, glory, and the unhindered presence of God that God always intended for His creation. Continuous with the present creation yet radically transformed.
Eternal Life (Zoe Aionios)	The specific quality of life that characterizes existence in the age to come, defined in John 17:3 as the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. Eternal life is not merely unending duration but the relational, personal, experiential knowledge of the triune God, fully realized in the new creation without the limitations, distortions, and interruptions of the present age. The eternal life of the righteous at the consummation is the fullest possible form of the life that the new birth has already begun to produce in the inter-advent age.
Eternal Punishment (Kolasin Aionion)	The eternal, conscious, and irreversible condition of the wicked after the final judgment, described in Matthew 25:46 as the parallel and opposite of eternal life, and elsewhere as the second death (Revelation 20:14–15), the lake of fire, outer darkness, and eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The eternity of the punishment is grammatically parallel to the eternity of the life: the same Greek adjective (aionios) governs both, and the one cannot be affirmed while the other is denied without violating the text's plain grammatical structure.

Mediatorial Kingdom	The kingdom established by Christ's resurrection and ascension for the purposes of the inter-advent age, the reign He exercises as mediator between God and humanity, through the Spirit, the proclamation of the gospel, and the building of the church, for the achievement of the Father's redemptive purposes. Distinct from the eternal kingdom: when the mediatorial kingdom's purposes have been fully achieved (all enemies abolished, the full number of the redeemed gathered), the Son delivers it up to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24), and the eternal state begins.
Last Trumpet	The eschatological trumpet described in 1 Corinthians 15:52 ("at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised") and identified with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15. Drawing on the Old Testament's use of the trumpet for divine assembly, judgment, and sacred announcement, the last trumpet is the cosmic, history-terminating declaration that the consummation has arrived, the dead are raised, the living are transformed, and the eternal kingdom is inaugurated.
Aionios	Greek adjective meaning "eternal," "age-long," or "unending", the term used in Matthew 25:46 for both eternal life (zoe aionios) and eternal punishment (kolasin aionion), and throughout the New Testament for the unending duration of the divine kingdom (Revelation 11:15), the eternal God (Romans 16:26), and the eternal glory of the redeemed (2 Corinthians 4:17). In the eschatological context, aionios denotes a condition that belongs to the age to come and that participates in the endless character of the divine life itself.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the parousia is coming, certain, personal, visible, bodily, glorious, and imminent in the eschatological sense that the church must always live as though it could be today. This belief is not a peripheral doctrinal commitment; it is the structural conviction of the New Testament's entire apostolic witness. The church that has functionally abandoned the expectation of the parousia, that lives as though the present age will continue indefinitely, as though the King has no fixed intention of returning, as though the not-yet is simply the permanent condition of history rather than the temporary condition of the inter-advent age, is a church that has lost its eschatological nerve and that will inevitably suffer the consequences in its worship, its mission, and its ethics.

We must believe that the consummation is not the annihilation of creation but its renewal. The new creation that the returning King will inaugurate is the renewed form of the present creation, the same heaven and earth, purified by the fire of judgment and liberated from its slavery to corruption, glorified into the condition of righteousness and divine presence that God always intended for it. This belief transforms the theology of the body, the theology of cultural engagement, and the theology of creation care: the material world matters eschatologically, the body matters eschatologically, and the works performed in the present creation have a significance that the annihilationist view cannot provide. We are not tending a garden that will be burned to ash; we are tending a garden that will be made new.

We must believe that the consummation's ultimate goal is not human flourishing in isolation but the Trinitarian glory of God, God all in all. This belief determines the entire orientation of eschatological hope: the hope is not primarily for what we will receive but for who we will be with and what we will see. The face of God in Christ, the unmediated knowledge of the Father and the Son, the full realization of the Trinitarian communion for which human beings were made, this is the center of the eternal state. Everything else, the resurrection body, the new creation, the absence of death and tears and suffering, is genuine and glorious, but it is the setting in which the central jewel shines. The central jewel is God Himself, and the eschatology that loses that center has lost its soul.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

We should feel the Maranatha longing that the consummation is designed to produce and sustain. The church's cry "Come, Lord Jesus" is not a liturgical formality or a theological affirmation; it is the cry of the community that genuinely wants the consummation because it genuinely knows what the consummation means and genuinely loves the One who is coming. The extent to which we feel this longing is a measure of the extent to which the eschatological hope has become genuinely our own, not merely a doctrine we hold but a desire that holds us, pulling us forward through the not-yet toward the eternal now that the returning King will bring.

We should feel a profound and specific gratitude for the suffering of the inter-advent age in light of the consummation's glory. Not a forced or performed gratitude that denies the genuineness of the pain, but the genuine, deep, eschatologically calibrated gratitude of those who have read Romans 8:18 and believed it: the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. The consummation does not retroactively justify the suffering; it reveals the suffering as the path through which the glory arrived, the birth pains through which the new creation was born. And that revelation, when it comes, will be more than adequate to the weight of everything the inter-advent age has cost.

We should desire above all else to be found faithful at the parousia, to be among those to whom the Son of Man says, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21, 23), to have our works survive the fire of the judgment day (1 Corinthians 3:12–15), and to enter the joy of the Master whose return we have been awaiting with trimmed lamps and genuine love. That desire, the desire for faithfulness in the light of the consummation, is the most practically productive eschatological motivation available to the Christian soul. It makes every day of the inter-advent age a day with eschatological weight, every act of faithfulness a brick in the edifice that will survive the day, and every morning a fresh opportunity to advance the kingdom whose consummation is one day closer than it was yesterday.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 slowly and trace the sequence of events Paul describes: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are His at His coming, then the end, the handing over of the kingdom to the Father, the subjection of all things, and God all in all. Identify where the amillennial reading of this sequence, no millennium between the parousia and the end, finds its exegetical support in the text. Then write a brief, clear, non-polemical explanation of this reading that you could give to a friend who holds a premillennial position, one that explains the amillennial view charitably and from the text.
- Read 2 Peter 3:10–13 and Romans 8:19–23 together in one sitting, as companion texts on the consummation of the created order. Note where they address the same reality from different angles. Then reflect: how does the conviction that the new creation is the renewed form of the present creation, not a replacement but a glorification, change the way you relate to your own body, your work, your community, and the physical world? Name one specific area where this conviction would produce a more faithful and more joyful engagement with the present creation.
- Spend ten minutes in quiet reflection on Revelation 22:3–5, the description of the saints serving God, seeing His face, bearing His name, and reigning forever and ever. Let your imagination engage with what each of these realities means. What does it mean to see His face? What does it mean to bear His name on your forehead? What does it mean to reign forever? Write a brief prayer from that reflection, addressed to the God whose face you will one day see, expressing what you most deeply long for in the eternal state.
- As Unit 3 concludes, take stock of the three-lesson arc: the kingdom inaugurated (Lesson 7), the kingdom in the not-yet (Lesson 8), and the kingdom consummated (Lesson 9). Write a brief personal synthesis of what this unit has given you: what has changed or deepened in your understanding of the kingdom of God, the inter-advent age, and the consummation? Identify the single most practically significant conviction this unit has produced in you, and describe one specific way you intend to embody it in the coming week.
- Memorize Revelation 11:15 this week: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." Carry this verse as the declaration of the consummation's arrival, the eternal answer to every not-yet the inter-advent age has raised. When you encounter a manifestation of the not-yet this week, suffering, injustice, the cooling of love, the power of death, speak this verse over it. Not as a magical formula but as the eschatological reality that relativizes every not-yet by setting it against the forever and ever of the Lamb's reign.

Key Texts: *1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Revelation 11:15; Matthew 25:31–46; Acts 1:9–11; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:19–23*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Looking back across the three lessons of Unit 3, the kingdom inaugurated (Lesson 7), the kingdom in the not-yet (Lesson 8), and the kingdom consummated (Lesson 9), which of the three has most significantly changed or deepened your understanding of the kingdom of God? What specific conviction from this unit are you carrying forward into the rest of the series, and why?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:20–28. Map the sequence of events Paul describes, identifying the "orders" of resurrection (v. 23) and the events that follow "the end" (vv. 24–28). What does Paul say the Son hands over to the Father (v. 24)? What enemies must be abolished before this happens (v. 25–26)? What is the ultimate goal Paul names in verse 28? Where in this sequence does Paul provide, or not provide, a temporal gap for an intermediate earthly millennium?
- Read Acts 1:9–11. What four features of the ascension does this passage describe? What does the angels' promise, "this Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way", establish about the manner of the return? How does the specifically observed, spatial, bodily character of the ascension bear on the question of whether the return will be secret or visible, spiritual or bodily?
- Read Revelation 11:15–18. What does the seventh trumpet announce (v. 15)? What is the content of the twenty-four elders' praise (vv. 17–18)? What events does verse 18 describe as accompanying the consummation? How does this passage relate to the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:52, and what does the connection between the two texts establish about the timing of the events they describe?
- Read Matthew 25:31–46. What is the scene of the judgment (vv. 31–32)? What is the criterion of the judgment (vv. 35–36, 42–43)? What is the surprised response of both the sheep and the goats (vv. 37–39, 44)? What are the two outcomes of the judgment (v. 46), and what word does Jesus use to describe the duration of each? What does the grammatical parallel between the two outcomes in verse 46 establish about the doctrine of eternal punishment?
- Read 2 Peter 3:10–13 and Romans 8:19–23 together. What does 2 Peter 3 say will happen to the present heaven and earth? What does Romans 8:19–21 say creation is waiting for, and what will it be set free from? How do these two passages, read together, support the understanding that the new creation is the renewed form of the present creation rather than an entirely different reality?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that 1 Corinthians 15:23–28's sequence, "then those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end", rules out a millennium between the parousia and the eternal state on the amillennial reading. Do you find this exegetical argument persuasive? What would the premillennialist need to demonstrate from the text to allow for the temporal gap between "the coming" and "the end" that a millennium requires?
- The lesson describes the consummation's ultimate goal as "God all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28) and argues that this is the Trinitarian goal of all eschatology. What does it mean for God to be "all in all"? How does this goal shape the way we understand the purpose of the new creation, the resurrection body, and the eternal

life of the redeemed? What would be lost if the goal of the consummation were described primarily in terms of human flourishing rather than Trinitarian glory?

- The criterion of the final judgment in Matthew 25, the treatment of "one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them", has been interpreted variously as referring to the poor in general, to Christians in general, or to the missionary disciples of Jesus specifically. Which interpretation do you find most exegetically defensible, and why? What difference does the interpretation make for the practical and missiological application of the passage?
- The lesson argues that 2 Peter 3's language of fire and dissolution describes the purification and renewal of the present creation rather than its annihilation. What exegetical and theological arguments does the lesson marshal for this reading? Are you persuaded? What are the practical implications, for the theology of the body, for cultural engagement, for creation care, of the renewal reading versus the annihilation reading?
- The lesson closes by describing the eternal state not as a conclusion but as a beginning, the beginning of the fullest, most purposeful, most gloriously human existence the people of God will ever inhabit. How does this description of the eternal state as active, serving, reigning, and face-to-face with God differ from the harp-and-cloud caricature examined in Lesson 6? And how does it connect with Revelation 22:3–5's specific description of the saints' activity in the eternal state?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the parousia is "imminent in the eschatological sense that the church must always live as though it could be today." What would change in your daily life if you genuinely lived as though the return of Christ could be today? Name three specific areas, in your priorities, your relationships, your use of money, or your engagement with mission, where living under the imminent parousia would produce genuine and specific change.
- The lesson describes the desire to be found faithful at the parousia, to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant", as the most practically productive eschatological motivation available to the Christian soul. As Unit 3 concludes and the series moves into Unit 4 (the millennial debate and Israel in biblical prophecy), what specific commitment are you making on the basis of this motivation? What will be different about the next unit's engagement because of what this unit has produced in you?
- Unit 3 has established the full arc of the kingdom: inaugurated (Lesson 7), contested and advancing in the not-yet (Lesson 8), and consummated in the eternal glory of God all in all (Lesson 9). How do you carry this arc forward into the more contested and specific eschatological debates of Units 4–10? What hermeneutical, theological, and pastoral convictions from Unit 3 will you bring as resources to the engagement with the millennium, the signs of the times, the return, the resurrection, the judgment, and the eternal state?

Prayer Focus

Open this prayer time by reading Revelation 11:15 aloud in unison, then Revelation 5:12–13, then 1 Corinthians 15:54–57, three layers of the consummation's doxology, laid over one another like the movements of a symphony that is building toward its fullest expression. Let the congregation hear the cumulative weight of the praise: the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. Death is swallowed up in victory. These are not three separate eschatological facts to be filed away; they are the single eschatological reality toward which all of redemptive history has been moving, and the congregation that has spent three lessons in Unit 3 inhabiting this reality should feel the gathering momentum of its approach. Pray that the congregation would hear the consummation's praise not as something distant and theoretical but as the sound that is already filling the throne room of heaven and that will one day fill every corner of the new creation.

Pray for the congregation's eschatological hope, specifically, that it would be anchored not in the certainty of a comfortable future but in the certainty of a Person. The consummation is not primarily an event; it is the arrival of the King who is coming. Pray that the members of this congregation would love Christ's appearing (2 Timothy 4:8), that the Maranatha cry would be not a liturgical formality but a genuine expression of genuine longing for the genuine Person who is genuinely coming. Pray that the not-yet of the inter-advent age would not dull that longing but sharpen it: every groaning of creation, every manifestation of tribulation, every experience of the not-yet should be a fresh fuel for the Maranatha prayer of the community that knows the King is coming and that means it when it says, come quickly.

Pray for those in the congregation who are closest to the not-yet, those whose suffering makes the consummation feel most urgently necessary. The person with the terminal diagnosis for whom the abolition of death is not a theological proposition but the most personal of all promises. The person who has been treated unjustly and who needs the final judgment's vindication more than they need another human apology. The person who is watching the creation's groaning most acutely in their own body, in the body of their child, in the devastation of a community struck by natural disaster. For each of these, pray the consummation's promise over them specifically: the kingdom is coming. The groaning will give way to glory. The tears will be wiped away by the hand of God. And the One who is coming is the One who wept at Lazarus's tomb and then called him out of it.

Pray for the church's mission in light of the consummation. The great multitude of Revelation 7:9 is not yet complete; the gospel of the kingdom is still being preached to the nations; the end of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:14 has not yet come. The inter-advent age in which we live is the age of the gospel's worldwide advance, and every person who trusts the Lamb adds their voice to the consummation's praise. Pray for the specific mission commitments of Crosspoint Fellowship, for the missionaries, the evangelists, the teachers, the servants who are carrying the treasure in earthen vessels to the ends of the earth. Pray that the consummation's certainty would fuel their endurance, the consummation's glory would sustain their sacrifice, and the consummation's reward would be more real to them than any comfort the present age can offer.

Close Unit 3 as it opened in Lesson 7, with a declaration. Read together Mark 1:15 ("The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand") and then Revelation 11:15 ("The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever"). Between these two declarations is the entire sweep of redemptive history: the kingdom that arrived in Galilee two thousand years ago and the kingdom that will be declared at the last trumpet are the same kingdom, advancing from inauguration through the inter-advent

age to consummation. The church that stands between these two declarations stands in the middle of the greatest story ever told, commissioned by its King, sustained by its Spirit, and moving toward the end that is also the beginning of everything. Let the congregation say together: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

> *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."*
>
> **Romans 8:18, NASB 1995**

Key Texts: *1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Revelation 11:15; Matthew 25:31–46; Acts 1:9–11; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:19–23*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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