

START AT THE ENDING: THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The End of it All

Revelation 21:1-5, 22:8-13

February 8, 2026

There is a particular kind of silence that only lives in hospital rooms. It has weight. Speaking in that space is a heavy privilege. You choose your words with extra care.

A few summers ago, I was sitting on one of those vinyl chairs, pulled right up next to the bedside. The doctor had just walked out of the room, but her words still hung in the air. "I'll give you some time with your pastor. I know this is hard news." The man in the bed looked at his hands, and then he reached for mine. The strength of his grip caught me off guard. He didn't ask me about the prognosis; he didn't even look up from his hands as he said, "Chris, I've made some big messes with my life. It's been a long time since I felt God. Do you think He is still there? What comes next?"

We've spent six weeks in Revelation. We've wrestled the dragons. We've stared down beasts. We've worshipped a slaughtered lamb on a throne. We've tried our best to make sense of it all. But when you get right down into the marrow, into the heart, every vision John shares—every scroll he digests, every trumpet he hears, every heavenly chorus he joins—is an attempt to answer that man's question.

What comes next?

John, an old man on a rocky island in the middle of the Aegean Sea, was writing to a people who felt they were being erased. Rome did not just demand their taxes, it wanted their worship. The emperor had all the weapons and all the words. To those tiny house churches, the monsters John described were not mere metaphor. They walked the streets. Hope was beginning to feel like a luxury they could no longer afford.

John knew that what you refuse to name out loud will rule you. So John named it. He painted the Empire in the language of apocalypse—all bright colors, bold lines, beasts with too many heads, a lake filled with fire.

And then here at the end of the book, at the close of the story, he did something far more dangerous. He leaned in, and he whispered a secret about how the story ends. *Psst. This is what comes next.*

I caught a glimpse of that secret a few years ago, thirty thousand feet in the air. I was on a plane to Austin, Texas, with our son, Samuel, who was three years old. I remember how he looked, buried in those oversized headphones, staring at the seatback screen. He was watching *Finding Dory*. I was reading when Sam let out a sharp gasp. "Oh no, Daddy! Dory got captured!" And so, I did what you do. I reached for his headphones, and I was ready to give him that well-prepared speech, the one about "it's all pretend." It's just a story, just a movie. But Sam didn't let me take the headphones, and he didn't even look at me. He kept watching, and in a voice that was way too loud for the tight quarters of an airplane, he announced to all our fellow passengers, "It's okay, Daddy. At the end she comes back. I already know that."

Now Samuel had not seen that movie, but he knew how the story had to end.

The poet Ullie Kaye captures that confidence in these words:

You see, I already know the ending.

Good wins. Peace prevails. The dragon is slain and the sword is raised.

But first we must go through the part where the plot has not yet twisted.

The battle is not yet won. The storm is raging.

The tower is locked. The apple is poisoned.

The wolf is ready and waiting in bed, wearing grandmother's clothing.

But I already know the ending. I already know the ending.

The defiance of a poet and a three year old. When you know the ending, the middle loses its power to terrify you. This is Revelation's secret. It is not a map of fear; it is an anchor of hope in a raging storm.

When John turns the final page, all the beasts fall silent. And from the throne comes a different voice—not shouting war cries, but vowing restoration.

See—I am making all things new.

I think we're meant to pay attention to the grammar. I think the revelation is in the syntax. God does not say, "I am making all new things." God says, "I am making all things new." The first is replacement; the other is redemption. Replacement is the work of Empire, but God is in the redemption business.

If, in the end, God simply makes all new things, the nihilists are right. Nothing matters. Not the tenderness of love or the striving for justice. Not the walk of faith or compassion for each other. All of it is simply a footnote in a story to be scrapped, left on the cutting room floor. But that is not our God. Our God is a scavenger who searches the wreckage for what still has value. Our God is a potter who refuses to throw away the clay. Our God gathers the scattered. Our God takes the jagged, the corrupted, the forgotten, and our God says, "I am not finished with this—with you—yet."

In the story God writes, there is no such thing as collateral damage. There is no such thing as a soul that is lost. No neighborhood or nation is forgotten, and no life is disposable.

Knowing the last page does not let us off the hook. No, it pins us to the present moment with a powerful clarity. When you've seen the world that God is building out of the broken pieces, you cannot stay on the sidelines. You have to join the work.

Just imagine if you knew deep in your soul that every tyrant is already a ghost and every ounce of mercy a monument to God's kingdom. Would you still be afraid? That's the promise John gives. That's the promise of faith. That knowing the end should not make us comfortable. It should make us dangerous. It should make us the kind of people who cannot be bought or coopted, the kind of people who won't be quiet, the kind of people who refuse to mock what God names sacred.

Revelation is a radical counter-catechism. It re-forms these imaginations dulled by the calculated cruelties of the age. It retrains minds sedated by liturgies built on lies.

We need a different story, because the one we're being fed is crushing our souls, weaponizing humiliation as a tool of power. For shame. Let me be clear. To deny the image of God in another person is an act of desecration. Followers of Christ must respond with the witness of our lives.

Do you know who understood this at a deep level, a soul level? Fred Rogers. You remember the cardigan, but behind the sweater and the puppets, there was a Presbyterian minister. Rev. Rogers. Mr. Rogers spent his life leading a liturgy of dignity. Every day, he preached the practice of reverence.

The same question, the same promise: Won't you be my neighbor? I like you just the way you are.

Now, do not mis-hear these statements as sentimentality. They are counter-formation. They are a man living as if John's vision could come true, living as if God has already made a home among us, as if the neighbor is not a threat but an image of God's own face.

And perhaps you know this, but tonight, in the middle of the Super Bowl—the biggest spectacle in American culture, in the swagger and the noise—that song is going to make a return in Lady Gaga's voice. Just imagine that. Imagine if Mr. Rogers only knew that this Presbyterian minister who died twenty-three years ago would break through the cacophony to ask a hundred and twenty million people: Can't we be neighbors? Can't we live by a different story? Can't we go another way?

The question is not rhetorical. Too much depends on our answer.

I know how easy it is to lose our way. I know the siren song of cynicism sounds appealing when you are afraid. I know it's tempting to wage war on our enemies and retreat into our bunkers. I know we can develop the capacity to justify what we ought to condemn, to ignore what we must name, to nod along when we should raise our voice.

If that is you, if you carry the weight of a compromise that is corroding your heart, hear me now: The credits

haven't yet rolled. The door stands open. Our story is rooted in the reality of redemption, and it is okay to change your heart.

John is clear: there is a reckoning. One day, the powerful who crushed the weak, the ones who dehumanize and divide, who twist the truth and ignore the vulnerable—they will answer for the work of their hearts and their hands.

This is the judgment scripture promises, that we will stand before the throne of God, where the Lamb of God will not ask for our credentials.

You remember the question.

When I was suffering, where were you?

When my image was mocked, what was your answer?

When you saw me in pain, how did you respond?

When I was hungry.

When I was thirsty.

When I lacked the basic necessities.

When I was a stranger in your midst.

When I was afraid at your doorstep.

When I was a child in need.

When you saw me, how did you respond?

Did you turn away? Or did you draw close?

I believe the tears of the forgotten are remembered. I believe that all that was done in secret will be named, and that all that was excused will be seen for what it was. A choice.

The monsters want you to believe they are permanent, but Revelation knows better. Revelation knows the clock is running out on the reign of terror. Revelation knows that truth is not a concept. Truth has a name. Jesus. Merciful savior. Jesus. Righteous judge.

We know how this ends because we know the one who writes the story.

John heard a voice: "Write this down. These words are trustworthy and true."

In a world drowning in lies, here is something you can stake your life on.

John saw God moving in. A city descending. Gates that never close because there's nothing to fear. No walls or weapons. Only a river, bright as crystal, and a tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

And then, something so tender it feels out of place in a book of dragons. At the end of it all, God Almighty reaches out to wipe a tear from a human eye. If you remember nothing else from the book of Revelation, remember that image. That's the end of the story. Not overwhelming force, but a gentle hand on a tear-streaked face. Not the conquering army of a vengeful king, but the Sovereign God stooping low to comfort a weeping child.

At the end of it all, everything else falls away. Every beast. Every dragon. Every empire. And all that remains is a God who knows your name and shares your pain. That's the end of the story. Not all new things, but all things new.

Yes, the tower is locked. The apple is poisoned. The wolf is waiting. But you already know the ending.

People of God, do not be afraid.

Pray with me: God of new beginnings, give us courage to walk in your way. Amen.