

May 20, 2007
Easter 7

"Lord, Jesus, Come Back to Us Soon"

REVELATION 22:12-17,20

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. ¹⁴ "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. ¹⁶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." ¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Do you recognize these words? "The sun'll come out Tomorrow Bet your bottom dollar That tomorrow There'll be sun! Just thinkin' about Tomorrow Clears away the cobwebs, And the sorrow 'Til there's none! When I'm stuck with a day That's gray, And lonely, I just stick out my chin And Grin, And Say, Oh The sun'll come out Tomorrow So ya gotta hang on 'til tomorrow Come what may Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I love ya Tomorrow! You're always A day A way!" Some of you might even be able to sing this well known song from the musical "Little Orphan Annie."

You have met people like Annie who have an air of optimism about them. If it is a gloomy day today, they are happy because there is a good chance the sun will come out tomorrow. Martin Luther said the Christian is an eternal optimist. Not only do we believe that tomorrow will bring more of the Lord's goodness and mercy to us, but tomorrow could very well bring the greatest event of world history, the return of Jesus to destroy our present troubled world and to take us to the place that he has prepared for us. In the most trying circumstances of life Christians will rally around each other and encourage each by saying, "Maybe you will not have to even face this problem tomorrow because the Lord will return on clouds of glory tonight."

The last book the Bible, the Revelation, ends with a fervent prayer that Christians of every age have prayed fervently with hope. "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. Come and take us home." Pray this prayer more often and the problems of today will vanish like morning fog when the sun shines brightly.

We are ready to meet Jesus when he comes

Are you ready to meet King Jesus when he comes in clouds of glory? You are if you believe that your salvation depends on what he has done for you not on what you might think you can do for yourself. Jesus tells us this morning, "Behold I am coming soon. My reward is with me, and I will give it to everyone according to what he has done." At first glance

it may seem that Jesus is saying, "I am coming soon to reward you on the basis of what you are able to do." This would conflict with what comes next about washing our robes and having the right to the tree of life. In chapter seven we are given a vision of people standing around the throne of the Lamb who have washed their robes and made them white, not by their own good deeds, but by the blood of the Lamb. We are going to be judged by our works, the works that have come to us as a free gift through Christ.

We are approaching the end of the school year when students receive their awards and their recognition for what they accomplished this past year. The student who graduates at the top of the class receives the title of "Summa cum laude" which means, "with the highest praise." If you want to eat from the tree of life and live forever in the place Jesus has prepared for us, then you need to do more than be the best in the class. You will need perfect scores on every test, "A" pluses in every assignment. That is God's standard for eternal life. He will judge us on our works, but these works must be perfect as Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." That is an impossible task. That is why Romans 3 makes the bold, sweeping statement that condemns all of humanity, "There is none who does good, no not one."

So much of the Revelation seems to capture thoughts from the Old Testament. This idea of Jesus coming with his reward is embedded in Isaiah 40 where it says, "You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up and do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God.'" See the Lord God comes with power and his arm is raised for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him." King Jesus is coming with glory and he will bring a reward, the reward of living forever in a new heaven and new earth, but it is a reward based on his performance not ours, his salvation, not my feeble attempts to save myself, his works not my works. Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches attached to him. The fruit we bear in our lives becomes acceptable and worthy and washed clean of all sin because of his blood shed for us. Connected to Jesus we are given the perfect life he has lived. That makes us worthy, that gives us a reward, that puts us at the top of the class with all A pluses in our report card.

Jesus can do this for us, because he is who he says he is. Listen to him describe himself to you. "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Jesus is the eternal God, the unchanging God. He is the one who started the process of saving us, and he is the one that completed it, and he will carry it through to the end. He is the one who has the power to wash you clean and allow you to eat from the tree of life. Remember how Adam and Eve were prevented from eating from the tree of life after they sinned. Two cherubim guarded the entrance with flaming swords. Because of Jesus perfect life and perfect death the gate is open to the tree of life and we can eat and live forever. That was captured so beautifully in the Easter hymn by CFW Walther, "But where is your sting, death? We fear you no more; Christ rose, and now open is fair Eden's door. For all our transgressions his blood does atone; Redeemed and forgiven, we now are his own."

There will be some who will not be able to eat from the tree of life and live forever. "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." When I see this word "dog" here I think of my father who would get angry at a piece of machinery that did not work right and call it a "dirty dog." That was much better than cursing and swearing. In ancient

times, there were the nice dogs that people kept in their homes and the dirty dogs that roamed around in packs feeding on garbage, attacking other animals and even people. Cities were built with walls and gates to protect from enemies and these dogs that were eager to snatch up any bit of garbage that was thrown over the wall. Remember how they eagerly devoured the body of wicked queen Jezebel when it was thrown out of the window in the wall of the city.

People who practice magic arts are like dirty dogs. So are those who are sexually immoral, as well as the murderers, the people who worship idols and people who tell lies. Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever loved or trusted something more than God? Have you ever hated someone or maybe not loved them as much as you should? Have you ever allowed your eyes to see something immoral on the screen? Have you ever found yourself turning to your own resources and strength more than prayer and trusting in the name of the Lord? Look at these dirty dogs again. If it were not for Jesus, the Alpha and Omega who has washed us clean, credited us with his righteousness and given us a reward based on what he has accomplished for us, we would still be among them outside the heavenly gates.

We are eager to meet Jesus when he returns

We are ready to meet Jesus when he returns. We are also eager for him to come back to us as soon as possible. Jesus creates this eagerness and longing in us just as the morning star announces the beginning of a new day. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The bright Morning Star continually reminds us "I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come again and take you to the place where I am going."

Because we live in this constant hope of seeing Jesus, we are deeply concerned about those who do not have this hope that we have. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us witness to people and invite them to come to the blessings that are theirs in Christ. The Holy Spirit creates a deep love and concern in us for people who are lost. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." We are reminded of similar gracious and inviting words in Isaiah 55 where it says, "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, and buy and eat!"

When I see this verse in Revelation I think of one of our churches that started in Las Vegas about ten years ago, Water of Life Lutheran Church. When they first started in a store front, they had a sign on the door that said, "Free water." They had a cooler in the front entry where they offered ice cold water in bottle free of charge to anyone who passed by. It helped them establish contact with people in the community so they could provide them with Jesus the Water of Life.

Jesus has a plan for bringing people into his church and into his glory before the end comes. The plan involves using people like us to invite other people to drink deeply from his salvation, the water of life. He will not have angels do this work. He is depending on us to get it done. As we eagerly wait for his return, we do not sit on a street corner with our bags packed and ready to go. We continue with our jobs in our community, but always

with the prayer that Jesus would provide us with opportunities to invite people to drink deeply of the water of life before the end comes. The night before he died he prayed for people all over the world to come to him and to the Father, using people like us to bring the message to the world. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." The message is so beautiful, "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

How interesting. With one breath we invite people to come to Jesus the water of life before the end comes, but with the next breath we find ourselves inviting Jesus to come quickly and end this world. That is a great paradox. We pray daily for opportunities to invite people to come, and we pray daily for Jesus to return quickly. "Tomorrow. Tomorrow. We gotta hang on to tomorrow. Tomorrow is another day." Tomorrow may be the day that Jesus comes in glory. Jesus says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Then we respond in prayer with Christians of every age, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." Come back to us soon. Amen.