

May 12, 2013
Easter 7
Ascension and Mother's Day

"Jesus Is Your Bright Morningstar"

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.

Our nation anthem has an interesting history. The British were attacking Baltimore after burning Washington DC during the War of 1812. Mighty warships from the British navy pounded Fort McHenry for 28 hours as it tried to guard the entrance to Baltimore. Throughout the night the large stars and stripes flag continued to fly proudly, lit up with the rockets red glare. Then by the dawn's early light the flag was still there providing hope for the American people. Francis Scott Key was so moved by the sight of the flag in the dawn's early light that he wrote the words for a poem that became our national anthem.

Christians know what it is like to be bombarded by enemies. Not a week goes by when Satan does not unleash fierce attacks on people who love Jesus and are willing to give their lives for him. The world is not getting to be an easier place to live your Christian life. We struggle with what goes on inside of us. Some days that gets rather ugly. But then we lift our eyes. We look up and see something shining brightly in the sky. It is the Morningstar that indicates a new day is dawning. Jesus tells us that he is our Morningstar. There is always this hope as a new day dawns that this is the day Jesus will return in clouds of glory and take us to the place he has prepared for us.

Martin Luther once said, "The Christian is always an optimist." With the dawning of each new day comes the very real hope and certainty that Jesus' goodness and mercy will be the same for us today as it was yesterday. With the dawning of each new day comes the very real optimistic hope that this could be the day Jesus returns to take us home.

Jesus wants us to be ready when he returns

If Jesus returns to take us home later today, or early tomorrow then it is hugely important that we be ready to meet him when he comes. Here is what Jesus says about being ready. "Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done." The word for "reward" is the same Greek word also used for payment

for wages. If you are getting paid this week because it is the middle of the month, you are getting paid for work that you have done.

You have heard it said, "An honest day's pay for an honest day's work." Have you ever watched the people pick strawberries at this time of the year? When they fill their boxes with berries they run to take them to the truck and then run with an empty box to fill it as quickly as possible. The harder you work, the more you get paid.

How good do you have to be to be rewarded or paid with the blessings of eternal life when Jesus returns? You know the answer to that question. You know that a perfect and holy God require nothing less than your best performance. He requires perfection. Not just "A's" on the tests of life, but straight "A" plusses. How do you come out on the test? How do I? How do the rest of our fellow human beings on the face of the earth? We fail, we fail miserably. We fall short of God's glory.

What hope is there of a reward when Jesus returns? Our hope lies in what Jesus has done to rescue us not in our feeble attempts to please God. He says "My reward is with me." He will reward you on the basis of what he has done to rescue you and save you. Jesus says "I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Jesus is the eternal God. He also describes himself as the Root and Offspring of David. Jesus was born from the Virgin Mary, a descendent of David. He became one of us with real skin, hair, bones and human flesh. He was fully human. He had to sleep, and eat and even learn his lessons as a child. He was also tempted as we are tempted, but he never sinned. When he died on the cross, he suffered real pain as he died for our sins.

We were speaking about Jesus death at our Bible lesson at the Transitional Shelter a few weeks ago. One mother was listening to the lesson and she said, "But Jesus didn't suffer any pain on the cross because he was God." The pain and suffering Jesus experienced for you was real. The perfect life he lived for you was real. Because he is the eternal God, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, he is able to give this perfect life and perfect death to you as a free gift. Because he is God he is able to credit you with his righteousness. Jesus rewards you with the rewards he has earned for you. Removed from your account are all your sins. Placed into your account is the perfect life he has lived for you.

Jesus says to us "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and go through the gates into the city." Because of Jesus you are ready to meet the Lord when he comes. He has given you a beautiful robe of righteousness. A few weeks ago we preached on Revelation 7 where John asks the elder who these people are stand around the throne of the Lamb with palm branches in their hands. The elder responds, "These are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Who does Jesus want to wash and make clean? Listen to verse 17. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come' and let all who hears say, 'Come.' Whoever is thirsty, let him come and; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." We are reminded of a similar invitation in Isaiah 55 where the Lord says, "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat." Our Morningstar offers

hope to the whole world in this gracious invitation to take the free gift of the water of life. The forgiveness of sins and the beautiful white robe of Jesus' righteousness cost you nothing. Can't you see the open arms of Jesus reaching out to you and the world with the words: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Perhaps a story about a loving mother will help us realize even more how much Jesus wants us in his loving arms now so he can take us home to the place he has prepared for us. The St. Louis Zoo had just opened up a section called "The Big Cat Country." Tigers and lions are allowed to come out of their cages and roam around in large enclosures. Visitors can observe them from an elevated skyway above their habitat. A mother with small children was walking up to one of the skyways when a blanket got caught in the wheel of the stroller. She knelt down to untangle it. Her two sons, five and three, ran ahead. When she looked up she saw that boys had gone through a gap in the fence and climbed up on some rocks twenty feet above the lion pen where they wanted to see the lions and tigers. Pointing to the lions and tigers they shouted excitedly, "Hey, mom we can see them." The boys had no concept how much danger they were in. The mother saw it immediately. What could she do? If she screamed they would panic and slip off the rocks. So she knelt down, spread out her arms, and said, "Boys come and get a hug." And they came running.

Jesus knows the danger we are in. He knows the eternal death and punishment waiting for us because we have fallen short of God's glory. He reaches out his loving arms and invites us to come to him. In his hands we see the nail prints left over from the terrible death he suffered on the cross for your sins. In his face we see the perfect life we could never live. In Jesus our Morningstar we have the full confidence that we are ready to meet him when he returns because his righteousness has become our righteousness.

Jesus wants us to be eager for him to return

Jesus wants us ready to meet him when he comes. He also wants us to be eager to meet him when he comes again in glory. To increase our daily longing, our bright and shining Morning Star describes the place he has prepared for us. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and go through the gates of the city." Wearing the robe of Jesus' righteous you can look forward to living in the place Jesus has for you. He tells us we can go through the gates. Years ago people went into the gates of city for safety. The gates were shut at night to protect the city from enemies, bad people and even marauding packs of dogs who might attack you. The tree of life reminds us that we will live forever with the Lord. As we heard two weeks ago: "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away." There will be no tears in heaven. You will be safe in our Savior's love for all eternity. You will see him face to face.

All the evils we have come to us in life will not be there. Outside the city are the dogs, those who practice magical arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who practices falsehood. There are the good dogs that people have in their homes as pets. Then there are the mean dogs that roam the streets at night terrorizing the community. Jesus creates in us a longing where there will be no people engaged in magical arts, no immorality, no murderers, not people who worship idols and no people who tell lies. The person who is hardest to live with will not be there. That person is you,

and it is me.

Inside all of us there is a ache and yearning for the Garden of Eden. We want a better world. We want a place that is safe. We long for a place where we are loved perfectly and where we can show perfect love. Jesus is preparing such a place for you. The Revelation to John is a very special book of the Bible because it gives us vivid descriptions of what is coming for us in the future.

We long for that day to be here now. "And he who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon!'" Thus we sing, "Soon and very soon. We are going to see the Lord." Jesus gives us signs to remind us that it may not be long before he comes in glory: Wars and rumors of wars, nations rising up against nations, famine, earthquake, false teaching in the church. All these signs are flashing on and off on a daily basis. Jesus is our bright Morning Star. He promises to come soon. So we join Christians of every age in praying, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." Amen.