

Revelation for Today: Living on Full Alert
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17. 20-21

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An evangelistic preacher in a small church announced his text for the day in a booming voice by saying “Behold, I am coming soon.” Unsatisfied with the attention of the congregation the preacher said it even more forcefully a second time. “Behold, I am coming soon.” Still not content with the response, the preacher took a couple of steps back and charging the pulpit said “Behold, I am coming soon.” This time he managed to shove the pulpit off the platform and trying to hang on for dear life, the preacher landed in the lap of a lady in the first pew. Embarrassed and confused, the preacher got up, brushed himself off and apologized to the lady profusely, “That’s quite all right Reverend,” replied the woman. “You warned me three times that you were coming; I should have had the presence of mind to move.”

In our terror stricken world we are constantly asked to live on full alert. Beware of unattended bags at airports. Be suspicious of strange looking people in crowds. Form a neighborhood watch to keep trouble makers out. We tell our children not to talk to strangers.

The Bible teaches us to be watchful, too, not watchful for trouble, but watchful for triumph, not anticipating destruction, but awaiting delight. The Bible begins with *“In the beginning God”* and the Bible ends with incredible good news. Jesus promises *“Behold, I am coming soon.”* And John responds with a one word prayer. It is a simple prayer, one that I try to pray quite regularly and one that I want to introduce to you today. John responds by saying, *“Maranatha Come Lord Jesus.”* Let us even now pray that prayer with the old Apostle. “Come, Lord Jesus.”

INTO OUR TROUBLED WORLD, COME, LORD JESUS.

We live and move and have our being in an atmosphere of anxious concern about huge problems.

Our world is at war. War brings out the worst that is in us. We start wars for noble reasons and then find ourselves reduced to the tactics of our worst enemies. We are not only appalled at the body bags of young Americans coming home to grief stricken families and the despicable sight of an American civilian beheaded and drug through the streets of Iraq, but we are now being confronted with our own injustices, too.

According to the latest news reports, Iraqi prisoners have been ridden like animals, fondled by female soldiers, forced to curse their religion, and required to retrieve their food from toilets, just to mention a few. Somebody said, “War is

hell.” Indeed it is. So the question may be—how can we live in hell and not embrace the ethics of the devil? How can we endure evil without making evil the norm?

So I disagree with my disc jockey friends who tend to justify American behavior by comparing it to the atrocities of Saddam Hussein. Since when is the evil dictator Saddam Hussein the standard of justice for the world? Such slippery slopes of rationalization, however well intended, are bound to damage our integrity. So we in the Church are called to intensify our prayers for this war to end. ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come.’

Into our troubled world, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’ Let justice roll down like rivers and righteousness like a mighty stream. Come deliver us from terror, the terror we have endured and the terror we have inflicted on others. Lord Jesus bring your kingdom of justice and peace. ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come.’ Is that not a prayer on the lips of all of God’s people? Into our troubled world, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’

Our country is deeply divided. Nowhere is that division more sharply expressed than over the institution of marriage. While I happen to support the ongoing position of our denomination that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings, and that marriage is a sacred covenant uniting one man and one woman, I also support the ongoing position of our denomination that all persons are of sacred worth and deserve the ministry of the Church, as well as their civil rights protected.

Of this I am certain. We cannot allow this current cultural challenge to lead us to name calling, hate, ridicule, or anything else other than respect, even if the situation on both sides calls us to love our enemies. Is that not what Jesus taught?

So we pray today, ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come. Fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you. ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come.’ Into our troubled world, ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come.’

INTO OUR THIRSTY LIVES, COME LORD JESUS.

Listen to this winsome invitation in Verse 17, *“The Spirit and the bride say ‘come.’ And let everyone who hears say ‘come’ and let everyone who is thirsty come, let any one who wishes, take the water of life as a gift.”*

Thirst is our most primal human longing. It is more urgent than hunger. It is rivaled only in our need to breathe. We thirst. Thirst signals the absence of something vital to our lives. So these spiritual writers from the desert often used the analogy of thirst to describe our spiritual need for God.

Psalm 63:1, *“O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”*

Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”* Oh, the sheer delight, how happy you will be if you hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you will be satisfied.

Here in Revelation there is a river of life that runs through the city of God that will never run dry. It is bright as crystal, pure and clean. The river of Eden has been reclaimed. Drink from this fountain that will never run dry. Come you who are thirsty; there is a bountiful supply.

Are you thirsty for God? Is there a yearning in your soul that no thing, no created object, no person, no pleasure, can satisfy? Are you in touch with that thirst—that vital, fundamental, spiritual need? We cannot quench that thirst by our own efforts, even though we constantly try. Only God can supply our deepest thirst for life. When will we learn?

We long for significance and settle for things. We stuff our bodies with food and our houses with gadgets, when what we really want is to matter, to drink from the fountain of your true spiritual worth.

We long for love and settle for sex. We long to offer ourselves to someone who will receive us as we are, know us at our depths and delight in us. When this proves impossible, we settle for sex and pornography. Come to the fountain where you are unconditionally loved.

We long for ecstasy and settle for a trip. We want to be taken out of ourselves, find a realm beyond our limitations, experience the outer regions of our human potential. Instead we settle for another cruise, take another drink or pop another pill. Experience the fountain of living water and really live. God alone will satisfy your deepest thirst. Don't forget that.

Our real thirst is for that which money cannot buy and culture cannot produce. Our thirst for God will not be quenched by a better brand of soda. When we get down to what we really want we are led to pray “Come, Lord Jesus,” come quench this thirsting of my soul, and he promises to do just that.

INTO OUR ETERNAL HOME, COME LORD JESUS

Some months ago, I watched Larry King interview Billy Graham. As this skilled television star probed into the life of this renowned evangelist, Larry finally raised the question, “What has surprised you in life?” Without hesitation Billy replied, “The brevity of it all.”

*When I was young, time walked,
When I grew older time ran
Before I knew it, time flew
And much too quickly, I was through.*
—some of us can identify with that.

Surely, I am coming soon. Some impatient person is bound to ask “How soon is soon?” Soon is sooner than it was. Soon is closer than when we first began.

*When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim—My God how great thou art.*

Soon and very soon, we are going to meet the Lord.

Max Lucado in his book Applause of Heaven, a great book on the Beatitudes of Jesus, comes to the last chapter by that title and opens that chapter with these words: “I’m almost home. After five days, four hotel beds, eleven restaurants, twenty-three cups of coffee, I’m almost home. After eight airplane seats, five airports, two delays, one book, fifteen hundred packages of peanuts, I’m almost home.”

Home was my first thought when I awoke this morning. There is no door like the one to your own house. There are no faces like those of the ones you love. There is no meal like the one at your own table; there is no bed that feels like your own bed. That is the wonder about vacation. The best thing about vacation is getting back to your own bed and coming home again.

Then Max moves over into the Book of Revelation and begins to talk about the old Apostle John. John is old now; his body is weary, his friends are gone. Peter is dead; Paul has been martyred. Andrew, James, and Nathaniel have all faded into the background. John is isolated on the tiny island of Patmos trying to encourage a handful of Christians to persevere against the Roman persecution and in the midst of all of that when Jesus says, “*Surely I am coming soon.*” Is it any wonder that John replies “*Amen, Come Lord Jesus, come.*”

And when someday we cross that river, when we have fought life’s final war with pain, when death one day gives way to victory, and over there we are fortunate enough to hear our name, maybe, just maybe, the one who would rather die than live without you, will remove his nail pierced hands from his heavenly robe and say, “I promised to not leave you an orphan, welcome home.”

I don’t know about you, but I want to be ready; I want to be ready. I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem just like John. Even so, Lord, come.

Amen.

