

May 8, 2016

*Revelation 22:1-7: **“Jesus Is Coming!”***

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“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only (Matthew 24:36).”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 1563, Lutheran theologian David Chytraeus (1530–1600) wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation in which he calculated the date of Christ’s second coming. This is surprising. Chytraeus was a good Lutheran theologian and knew full well that God alone has determined the date - “no one knows.” Nevertheless, that didn’t stop him from indulging in a series of mathematical computations that led him to believe that the end of the world would come in 1695. I’m sure that he would have been stunned and embarrassed if it had been revealed to him that I would be preaching a sermon about this in 2016.

History is littered with people trying to calculate the year. It is a monumental exercise in futility. The Scriptures teach that each generation of Christian is to live as if Christ might return at any given moment. Jesus says, “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:7).” And yet, there is also a tension with this. Jesus “coming soon” could be “awhile.” The apostle Peter warns us that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires, and “They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3:4).’” This is a warning that people will get lost in time. May we not get lost!

As you can see, there is a tension. A Christian can say, “It could be today, or it could be tomorrow. It could be in my lifetime, or another generation.” God forbid that we become like the five foolish virgins waiting for the bridegroom in the parable (Matthew 25). The bridegroom comes at midnight - which is quite a surprise. They did not have oil for their lamps. That means that they had fallen away from the faith and embraced wickedness. And the parable goes on to tell us that when they awoke and went to the marriage feast, the door was shut, and they said, “‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

I would suspect that if we knew the year of the Lord’s coming, or if we thought that it might be down the road a bit or not in our lifetime, our sinful flesh would have a field day with this. Who needs to pack anything today for a vacation that is ten years down the road? We would tend to be rather unconcerned about much of anything until we get to what we think is a little bit closer. To me, as a side note, this has always been a fatal flaw of the delusion of purgatory. Not only is there no Scriptural evidence for it, but if I knew that I could sin a lot and still make it into heaven, I might just let it rip. In all seriousness though, this raises another issue. How then should we understand and apply the Scriptural signs of the end to our lives? Now, that is a very important question.

The answer is simple. However, the details are far too great for this sermon. So, for now, we will have to listen only to the very simple answer with a preface. If you boil down all the signs of the end of time, they fall into four categories: 1) Signs of God’s Judgment in the Present, such as wars and rumors of wars, famine, plague, natural disasters, etc.; 2) Rebellion against God in the World; 3) Rebellion

against God's Word in the midst of the Church; and 4) the Sign of the Preaching of the Gospel in the Whole World. Now if you seriously consider the four categories in the light of Scripture, you will eventually come to the conclusion that every generation of Christian lives to some extent in all the categories. It becomes a matter of intensity. The question then is raised, "how bad will things get?" and when will God say, "Enough!?" Jesus says, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day (John 6:39)." Here we can be certain that the last day will not come until all of his sheep have been found and safe in his hands! And none of us knows that day, month, or year.

So, then, what sort of people ought we to be knowing these things as we now do? We are supposed to be like the five wise virgins who had plenty of oil in preparation for the coming of the bridegroom. Peter writes in his second epistle (2 Peter 3:14-18):

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these [the new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness], be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation . . . knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Let it be so!

May God forgive us for the times in which we have been like the five foolish virgins. How easy it is to get lost in time! How easy it is to fall away into lethargy when it comes to the oil that keeps our lamps burning. The weariness of the night can easily take its toll on us. Therefore, may our eyes turn and focus on the undeserved love and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and all that he has done for us on the cross. May we never forget that his sufferings and death on the cross have brought us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. As it says in Hebrews 12:1-2,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

As it was the joy set before Jesus that gave him the strength to endure the cross, may it be that same joy that causes us to endure whatever it is that we have to endure in this life.

The joy that was set before Jesus was the consideration that we will be with him in eternal love. The joy is about being with our groom forever in heaven. The joy is realizing the design that God has had since the foundation of the world. And this is much of what is explained to us in our epistle lesson for this morning. In the final chapter of Revelation John sees God's paradise. It is like the garden of Eden in its terminology, but it is more than that. In the garden, Adam and the woman knew God through all that had been made and through His sermon about the two trees. In the new heaven and new earth, we will know

him face to face. We will know him as he is, and all that the new heaven and earth is will be understood in the context of God's face. Therefore, it is impossible for us to really know with absolute certainty as to what it will be like, but one thing is for sure, it is only for his children. John writes, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3)." Or, as Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8)."

The language is exciting as God speaks to us in ways that we can comprehend. God's people will live with him in the new heaven and new earth sustained by "the river of the water of life" (22:1). We will drink God. Once banned (Gn 3:22), access to the tree of life now has been restored. We will eat his word with all its eternal possibility. In this paradise, the curse of sin is no more (22:3) and will never be. God's gracious blessing, won by Christ's work of redemption, has replaced it. He who is light will reveal all things for what they are. There is pure love and all it is. God's righteous "slaves," gathered before the throne of the Lamb, will see his face. And their slavery will be to receive Him and live according to He who is forever. In this, God will reign and we will reign with him (22:3-5) without pause and without boredom.

At the end of our text, it says "Come, Lord Jesus!" That is a bold thing for God's people to pray, especially since it means also the coming of his wrath and the end of this world by fire. But it is because we are redeemed sinners that, in faith, we can pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" We pray because he took our sin upon himself, and gave his resurrection life in exchange for our shameful death. We pray because he has promised to come quickly. We know what he brings with him. Therefore, we do not flinch when we consider that Jesus is Coming Soon!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott