

Wake Up, Church: Jesus Is Coming!

The Heart-Cry of the One in Christ

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When I was a boy the cry of the church was, "Jesus is coming!" All through my teenage years, every evangelist who came to preach in my father's church had a stirring message about the soon return of Christ. Even today their sermons remain burned in my memory: "The Bible says Christ will come like a thief in the night, when you least expect him. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye, with the sound of a trumpet. You must be ready at all times."

The powerful cry, "Jesus is coming!" is seldom heard in God's house today. Very few Christians live with a sense of expectancy, looking and yearning for Jesus' return. How has this happened?

The New Testament gives many warnings that mockers will appear in the last days, ridiculing the doctrine of Christ's coming. Peter writes, "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4). This mocking can be heard today: "What does anyone have to fear? All things continue just as they always have. There is no reason to fear a Judgment Day, because it simply isn't coming."

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, people flocked to churches and prayed with a fervor that hasn't been seen in recent times. Yet, just six months later, fewer people were attending church than before the 9/11 attacks. Just as Peter prophesied, the mockers have arrived.

The devil has whispered a different lie into the ears of many believers. That lie is, "Christ has delayed his coming." Jesus addresses this in Matthew 24 in his parable about being ready for his return: "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

"But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:45-51).

Jesus is speaking here about believers, identifying them as servants. One of these servants is faithful while the other is evil. What makes the second servant evil in the Lord's eyes? According to Jesus, it is something "he shall say in his heart" — that "the Lord delays his coming." In other words, he's convinced Jesus won't come suddenly or unexpectedly. He has been instructed to "watch," to "be ready," "for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40). But instead this servant eases his conscience by believing Satan's lie.

Once he accepts the devil's lie, here is the fruit: Because he sees no need to watch for Christ's coming, he doesn't see any need to make peace with his fellow servants. There is no need to preserve unity at home, at work, in the church, no need to make things right with others. Instead, he feels he could "smite his fellow servants," accusing them, holding grudges and destroying others' reputations. This servant seeks only to play, to have pleasure, to live with no conscience. In short, he wants both Jesus and the world.

Paul constantly cried, "Wake up! It is past midnight, and the Lord's coming has drawn near. Stir yourself and don't be slothful. Jesus is coming for those who are expecting him." He wrote to the church in Rome: "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12). He also wrote to the church in Philippi: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5).

This brings me to the heart of my message: the heart-cry of the one in Christ.

In Revelation 22:17, we read, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." The bride of Christ consists of a worldwide body of believers who are under the lordship of Jesus. These are born-again, blood-cleansed believers.

This verse shows us the very last cry, or prayer, of the Holy Spirit, when he knows his work on earth is about to be completed: "Come, Lord Jesus!" This cry of the Spirit is not directed to men but to Christ. It means, in essence, "Lord, hasten your coming."

All who make up the body of Christ know this cry of the Spirit. They live and walk in the Spirit, with their souls seated in heavenly places, and their bodies are his temple. The Spirit himself prays within them, "Come, hasten, Lord Jesus," and so this becomes their heart-cry also. In verse 7 of this chapter, Jesus announces, "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophesy of this book." Verse 12 adds, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." If I believe the world is racing toward unrestrained chaos, and that Christ is coming, then this must be my cry to my family and friends who are unprepared. My prayer must be, "Come, Lord. But first, give my unprepared loved ones ears to hear. Save them, Jesus."

Have you made this your cry for your loved ones? May they no longer believe mockers who say, "All things are continuing in good order. Enjoy yourself, indulge, do whatever makes you happy." May all such blindness be removed! Terrorists have blown up New York's twin towers. Rogue nations with nuclear bombs are preparing to hold the world hostage. New diseases never before known to humankind, such as SARS and ebola, can destroy bodies within a week. Some 700,000 innocent Rwandans died at the hands of their own countrymen. The list goes on and on.

All things continue as they have? What willful ignorance! The truth is that God is shaking all that can be shaken. And what is still to come is too dreadful to think about.

The Holy Spirit knows what is soon to take place, when there is no longer any restraint.

When that time comes, every man will give himself over to his lusts. Every militant religion will force its gods on others. And every holy thing will be despised, with every law broken. Meanwhile, the backslidden church will preach the most corrupt, damnable doctrines of hell.

In the midst of all this, I hear Jesus saying, "Surely I come quickly" (Revelation 22:20). I also hear the bride of Christ answering, as John did, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (same verse).

I urge you: For a moment try to set aside all thoughts of differing doctrines about Christ's coming. Instead, listen to the heart-cry of the man and woman who love the thought of our Lord's appearing. This cry is at the heart of the entire matter: "We shall see him face to face. We shall behold him" (see 1 Corinthians 13:12).

Jesus' coming ought to thrill your heart. It ought never to disturb you. Can you imagine what it will be like when he calls you by name? If you truly love someone, you want that person to be near you.

Imagine a newlywed couple, with the husband quickly called away, perhaps into the military or on business. He tells his wife, "I'm coming back but I don't know when." For the first few years the wife writes him often with beautiful love letters. But she never says in them, "Come back soon." Years pass and she writes him less and less, still never saying, "Come quickly, I beseech you. I pray for your soon return."

Beloved, how can we tell Christ we love him and miss him yet never pray he comes back for us? How can we never express to him our cry that he must come back and take us with him so we can be in his constant company?

May this be our cry continually: "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

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