

COME LORD JESUS

Revelation 22.12-21

Introduction

“Surely I am coming soon”. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

On this subject we live in a world of divided opinion. The millennial movements of the 19c have left their mark on American fundamentalist Christianity

So they go on to say we are now living in the end times and the world is about to be destroyed. Christ will come, destroy the world and rescue the faithful in the great war against evil. Then we all go to heaven whatever that is.

The other opinion is the very opposite. Forget about Christ coming again. Put it in the too hard basket. Quietly drop the topic and marginalize it. After all, the early church expected Jesus to come very soon and he didn't. Let's work for world renewal as our best hope.

I suspect you would guess that I don't hold either of those views to be correct assessments of early Christianity. They are both mistaken about the big picture that John (and others paint). I have suggested to you that there is no evidence in NT that God will destroy the world in a great cataclysm or that early Christians were the least bit worried that Jesus did not return immediately. Both are myths concocted in 19th and 20th C.

I am Coming 12-13, 16, 17, 20

For John it is of first importance that we remember whose we are. We are the servants of the Coming One.

The readers are well aware that Jesus 'came' some 60-70 years before in Palestine. They were well aware also that in that coming he had wrought salvation on a cross and through resurrection. He is the bloodied Lamb who has taken humanity onto the throne to rule (chapters 1-4)

They are also well aware that the risen one 'comes' among them in the Spirit often represented in Revelation as seven spirits going from the throne into the world. But the disciples looked for another coming, the complete establishment of God's reign when all would be set to rights. It was not yet.

The beasts of the apocalypse representing the political and economic powers opposed to God's rule of justice, love, peace and truth still exercise vast power and wield it in violent and deceitful ways. Disciples who oppose their wiles are persecuted and destroyed. So they long for God to reign.

This is the ancient prayer of longing that finds beautiful expression in Psalm 97 today: that God would put all things to rights, that evil would have an end.

In Christian terms that translates into the Eucharistic prayer, Come, Lord Jesus. It is final act of the salvation and renewal of all things.

And John's view, like that of the rest of the NT is that we must treat that event as though it was it was right next to us, overlapping our world, more real than anything else. That is what the Eucharist signifies and means. Hence we pray Come Lord Jesus.

And it is what the coming of the Spirit means. The Spirit lives with us in the overlapping worlds, and leads us in groaning prayer for the renewal of the world.

Human beings have a high destiny. They have a calling to be the priests and kings of God. Their calling is to be the rulers who govern in righteousness and justice, bringing forth peace and truth so that all may live rejoicing. That skeletal statement is the nub of human greatness and human disaster. That is what we were made for.

Comings in the Eucharist and the spirit are about making clear things as they really are in the overlap between heaven and earth. This coming to bring in the final acts of salvation will differ from other comings as it is the final coming of the Lamb bringing heaven and earth together.

But note it is a 'coming'. For now the Lamb comes to us in gracious invitation as one wounded by his adversaries, one upon whom evil has wreaked violence and pain.

In this final coming he comes to call all that evil to account and to make clear the real meaning of the world. He is the one human being who has fulfilled his calling of being priest and king who in his life and death brings justice and righteousness to all, with its consequences of peace and truth and love.

Jesus has that right to call all to account because he is the Alpha and the Omega the very name of God who puts things into play and then brings them to their final conclusion. Not only that, he is both the root and descendant of David, the just king who has the right to rule God's people in justice and peace (16). And he has done that in his life and cross and resurrection.

So far so good but there is a troubling matter; of faithfulness and exclusion.

Faithfulness and Exclusion 14-15

The disciples knew that their task was to remain faithful to their calling to be kings and priest in this world; that was the one great work of the disciple. These are the ones who have washed their robes (14). Remember 7.14; the faithful disciples have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and they are white. The work that Jesus is talking about here is not some little list of rules we must keep but the work of being faithful to their calling to live out Jesus' kingship in the world. That is the only work the book of Revelation knows. As I have said human beings have a high calling under God and Jesus is the one human being who has fulfilled that calling.

That calling was contested then and it remains contested now.

Jesus as the Alpha and Omega is the source of blessing, the water of life and the tree of life. That is the gift that awaits those who have faithfully followed the contested path Jesus trod and lived their calling as displaying God's justice and righteousness to its opponents. For many there has been a cost, a personal cost that now is rewarded with life.

But the same Alpha and Omega is also the One who has the proper authority to judge evil because this Alpha and Omega has contested evil and it has done its worst to him and he has triumphed over it.

At root evil for John is idolatry (9.20 and see Psalm 97). The failure to restrain idolatry in human life has corrupted the created order and turned the works of God into demonic powers. Idolatry is about human beings wishing to rule in their own right and putting anything in the God shaped hole at the centre of personal and social life.

The vast reservoir of evil that emerges from the abyss in the Apocalypse is not generated outside human history but within it and its source is us. That is why the locust plague that issue from the

abyss has human faces; that is the imaginative power of such an image. We can scoff or we see through it to a frightening reality.

Once idolatry, filling the God-shaped hole with anything, feeds the powers and lets them loose they have a cumulative effect far beyond the control of individuals. The two chief symbols of this in Revelation are the beast and the whore representing the political tyranny and the economic seductions of the omniscient state.

John uses highly offensive language to describe the opponents of the Lamb because their essence is to dress themselves up in a most attractive light. They are a lie and the essence of evil is deception and counterfeit, hence the emphasis on lies. Satan is the deceiver of the whole world who tells lies about God.

Hence the emphasis on those who lead people astray, those who destroy other's lives by murder or the abuse of sexuality, and those whose lies wreak havoc in the affairs of men and women. At the heart of God is truth; at the heart of evil is deceit.

One of the important things John has to say about evil is that it is self-destructive. Finally it cannot conquer no matter what its seeming power because it contains the seed of its own destruction; it fouls its own nest.

There are many images of this in John's book but perhaps the most telling in our day is the way in which Babylon destroys the whole earth and in so doing pollutes the sea, both of which it depends on for its wealth and power. Idolatry is self-destructing.

So he is coming and his coming has to do with faithfulness and idolatry so a third salient point is the ongoing offer of the invitation.

The invitation 17c

In verse 17 there are two comings; the Spirit and the bride say “Come” and the hearers say “Come”. These are the ancient Christian prayer ‘Come Lord Jesus’.

But in the next part of the verse there is another call to come.

“Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes to take the water of life as a gift.”

We would do well to listen to the words of the invitation so that, like the gaoler in Philippi, or the possessed slave girl, or Lydia we can drink deeply of the wells of the water of life. The mission of the church is so beautifully describes in verse 17 as offering the invitation to come and drink in the power of the Spirit. That is the voice of the true Bride. No one is shut out or turned away from the water of life.

To come to the waters of life is the way to return to our high human vocation that has been debauched. We need to do that ourselves and we need to bring that to our neighbours. They need to have the opportunity to hear the gracious word of the Lamb and the experience of the Spirit.

That is our high calling.