

Sermon – 10/08/2008 pm

I am Coming Quickly

Study Text: Revelation 22:6-7

The glorious vision of heaven has come to an end. All that God chose to reveal to us about the future, about heaven and hell, he has done so in these visions he gave to John – along with other portions of Scripture. This is all we need to know according to God. Indeed John struggled to describe what he saw in this vision of the New Jerusalem and in other visions. We struggle to understand what he has written – a city shaped like a gigantic cube!

The closing words of this book are words of exhortation. We are called to believe what is written as the faithful and true words of God. We are called to act upon these words, to let these words affect the way we live in this world. We live with hope and expectation of the return of Jesus, the same Jesus who came down and gave his life as a sacrifice for our sin.

Let no one say on that Day ‘if only I had known this is what would happen in the future I would have believed’. Many fools call upon God to reveal himself to them. ‘If God exists why does he not show himself’ they ignorantly and arrogantly protest? It is an ignorant declaration because God has revealed himself. He has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. *We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father* wrote John (John 1:14).

Moreover, further revelation about heaven would be beyond our comprehension, and therefore of no benefit to unbeliever. It is hearts hardened by sin that are the obstacle to unbelief, not a lack of revelation on God’s part. *They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them* (Luke 16:29). They have the Scriptures; let them read, let them hear, let them believe what God has spoken.

Be Assured

These closing words of the book of Revelation are called the epilogue. You will notice that they reiterate things written in the prologue. We find at least three voices speaking in this epilogue – the angel, Jesus and John. It is not always clear who exactly is speaking.

The epilogue consists of a group of exhortations. Five exhortations to holiness are identified by one scholar. These exhortations are based on affirmations as to the authenticity of the words John has written in this prophetic letter to the churches in Asia. So sure is John that these words are the words of God that he gives a solemn warning to anyone thinking of adding to them or taking from them.

Then he said to me ‘these words are faithful and true’ (22:6). The angel continues speaking to John but is not showing him any new vision. Rather he is assuring John that all he has seen and heard is completely true. It is in fact divine revelation. Back in 21:5 the One on the throne declared *write for these words are faithful and true*.

Jesus is called faithful and true in a vision where he is sitting on a white horse and coming forth to judge the world (19:11). As the words of the holy God they are true in every detail. God cannot lie. As the words of the omnipotent God they will be fulfilled in every detail. God is faithful in fulfilling his words both in judgment and salvation.

How did God communicate these words? God is in heaven and we are on earth. How do we know these words are Gods words? Some people claim to have found God's words on plates in a cave or some tablets buried in the ground. But God does not communicate through some game of hide and seek. God spoke to men, to prophets to whom he gave the Spirit of God. *Men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (II Peter 1:21).

The same God who spoke through the prophets sent his angels as divine messengers from time to time. This revelation about the future given to the apostle John came through angels of the Lord. John was in the spirit on the Lord's Day when he saw and heard these things. An angel appeared to him to show and to explain to him what must shortly take place.

The line of communication is made clear in 1:1 – from God to Jesus, to an angel, to John and finally to the saints, to us. God was in control of each step of this communication. There were no plates hidden in the hope they would be found! No step was left for man to insert his own opinion. John wrote what he saw and heard, not what he thought would or should happen in the future.

Beware of anyone who claims to have had a brief visit to heaven and back, even if their book is in a Christian bookshop. The apostle Paul was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words (II Corinthians 12:4) but he did not utter these things. So beware those who want to tell you every detail of what they saw while clinically dead. What we have in the word of God is what God has revealed to us.

Behold

Behold I am coming quickly (22:7). These words are spoken by Jesus – or at least conveyed by the angel as his words. The newspaper boy used to call out on the street corners 'read all about it'. Nowadays the two-dollar shop man calls out 'get your bargains here today, today only, for the next few hours only'. As the sale comes to an end, people rush to see how much money they can save. This world is coming to an end but who is rushing to save their souls.

Jesus has an urgent message for the world, a message about himself. *Behold I am coming quickly*. The message that God sent through angels to John for his people was about things that must take place shortly (22:6). This is a reiteration of the opening words of this book (1:1). The message is an urgent message which needs repeating. It is repeated three times in this very chapter. How often do you hear this message today – 'Jesus is coming quickly'?

The word translated 'shortly/soon' is actually the same as that translated 'quickly' (*tachus*). The translation 'soon' has led some to ask 'what does 'soon' mean if John wrote 'soon' almost 2000 years ago?' Will it be another 2000 years? Others say 'of course not, look at the signs'. Still others say 'but things are going on the same as they always have'. But remember that with the Lord a thousand years is like a day.

The essence of the message is that Jesus can come at any time. There are no more redemptive events to be fulfilled before the second coming of Jesus. Jesus can come at any time. When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the metallic man he said the stone which smashed the image referred to what will come to pass after this (Daniel 2:45). It was a vision of Jesus smashing the kingdoms of this world. This would come to pass but only after the cross through which Jesus gained victory over the devil (Hebrews 2:14). After the cross and

the resurrection there is nothing more for Jesus to accomplish before his return. He is in heaven ready to return. This is what he meant in saying *Behold I am coming quickly*

Coming quickly also means Jesus will come suddenly. And when he comes, he will come quickly. He will come like a thief in the night, at a time when least expected (16:15). He will come on the clouds of heaven and every eye will see him (1:7, Matthew 24:23-27). He will not come in secret.

Some in the early church started saying that the resurrection was already past (II Timothy 2:18). They may have been saying that Jesus has come and they have been bodily raised from the dead. Such teaching still arises today. Men deceive themselves and others saying that Jesus has already come. Beware of all such claims. No one will miss the coming of Jesus in all his power and great glory.

Beware also of those who say this or that must happen before Jesus returns. Jesus did tell of signs that would precede his coming but look carefully at these things and you will find they can be understood as being fulfilled already. Wars, famine, and earthquakes will increase but they are seen already. Those who interpret Revelation literally are looking to the restoration of Israel on earth. But Jesus said I am coming quickly, like a thief in the night.

Years ago some thought the Lord might end the world with an atomic bomb. Certainly that would be sudden and dramatic. Nowadays people are saying global warming threatens to burn us up, unless we stop it happening. I will not be surprised if some Christians start saying that this is how God will judge the world – a slow burning up over some years. Some Christians are ever ready to compromise with so-called science as we have seen with the theory of evolution. But remember what Jesus said *Behold I am coming quickly*.

Blessed

The words of this book are words of prophecy. They are true and faithful words coming from the mouth of God. Granted, they are words which we find a challenge to understand. Some never read these words even though the opening verse declares *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy*. This is the only book of the Bible with such a promise. But reading and hearing is one thing – keeping these words is another (22:7).

‘The prophecies of Revelation are not written to satisfy intellectual curiosity about the future’. Some spend a lot of time delving into every detail of these prophetic visions, but do they obey the message of this revelation? Why did God reveal what is written in this book? John sent this prophecy as a letter to churches in Asia not just to inform them about the events of the end time but to direct and encourage these churches to remain ‘steadfast and loyal to Christ in the face of demonic opposition and persecution’.

This message about the future, about what will shortly take place, is accompanied by a blessing to those who hear and heed it. Do not give in to the pressure of evil or be duped by the world’s empty promises. The blessing of the Lord and the Lamb awaits those who keep the prophetic words of this book. Jesus is coming to judge the wicked. He is also coming with salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ and persevere to the end.

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