

When the work he had come to earth to do was finished and he returned in triumph to heaven, Jesus left his followers with three great promises. One, a promise meant for his original disciples, was quickly fulfilled, when Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on the apostles in a spectacular manner on Pentecost. A second promise, the promise that he would be spiritually and invisibly present with his believers until the close of the age, is continually being fulfilled as the ascended Savior comes to his followers, including each of us, with his spiritual blessings in Word and sacrament, and as he walks beside believers as the Good Shepherd as they journey through life. A third and final promise, however, has yet to be fulfilled. That promise is the promise that Jesus will return one day in glory to judge the world and take his believers home to be with him in heaven. From Pentecost until today the Christian church has been and continues to be a waiting church. As believers live their lives in what is often a hostile and always an earth-bound environment, Jesus wants them to remember his last, great promise; and he wants them to live in expectation of his return. On this Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost, a Sunday that calls to mind the eager waiting of those first disciples for Jesus to fulfill his promise to send the Spirit, our Scripture lessons encourage us in our waiting for the Lord's return. Our text reminds us that, as each generation of believers waits, THE CHURCH CRIES, "COME." I. Come, Lord Jesus II. Come to Jesus

Our text is part of the epilogue, or conclusion to the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. Revelation is a book of prophetic pictures which the Lord gave to the church through his faithful disciple John. Revelation's pictures are often strange and certainly difficult, but the book's overall lesson is clear. As the church waits for Jesus to fulfill his promise to return, individual believers and the church will face challenges and persecutions, difficulties and dangers. The devil will use powerful forces from outside the church, and even from within, to try and destroy the church and rob believers of their faith. But Jesus is and will forever remain King of kings and Lord of lords. He will protect his believers and defend his church. And at his return he will completely destroy all of his enemies and share his victory with believers.

As he brings this extraordinary book to its close, the ascended Lord repeats once more his last great promise, "Behold, I am coming soon." At a time that he, together with the Father and the Spirit, have determined, Jesus will return in glory as judge of all people. That Jesus has the authority to judge is evident from the expressions by which he identifies himself. In the very first chapter of Revelation Jesus introduces himself as the Alpha and Omega. Now, as he brings the book to its close, he repeats that identifying title. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. Omega is the last. Jesus is God, the second person of the eternal Trinity. All things are known to him. Human history begins and ends with him. To him both the work of saving and the work of judging the world have been entrusted.

A few verses later in our text Jesus declares himself to be the "Root and Offspring of David." Jesus is the Root of David, David's Creator and Lord. Jesus is also the offspring of David, David's physical son. In accord with the divine

salvation plan Jesus assumed into his divine nature a true human nature like our own. Born a descendant of David, he was fully qualified, as the God/man to be the perfect substitute for and Savior of the human race.

Finally, the ascended Savior describes himself as the bright morning star. As the morning star in the east proclaims the dawning of a new day, Jesus' coming to human hearts in the gospel brings the blessed assurance of an eternal day. The good news of Jesus and the salvation he brings drives the darkness of unbelief, hopelessness and despair out of human hearts and replaces it with the healing rays of forgiveness and joy, peace and life.

The risen and ascended Savior promises that he will come again. Yes, he is coming soon. Each day that passes brings the world one day closer to his return. When Jesus returns, he will summon every human being to stand before his judgment seat. And the eternal destiny of each one will be determined by his or her relationship to Jesus. "Blessed are those who have washed their robes," the judge declares in our text. Earlier in this book, the saints in heaven are described as "Those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." By God's grace believers who embrace Jesus and his forgiving love by Spirit-given faith daily wash away the sins that stain their hearts and lives in the shed blood of Jesus. The blackness of sin, covered with the red blood of Jesus, results in the pure, white festal robes with which believers will stand justified before God in the judgment. Jesus' blood and righteousness, credited to sinners as a free gift and received by faith, give them the right to eat of the tree of life and to enter the gates of the eternal city of heaven. A perfect life in eternal glory will be theirs. No wonder believers daily pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Not everyone, however, will enter the gates of the eternal city. Outside are the dogs, our text declares. Generally, when the Bible uses the term dogs, it doesn't refer to people's pets, but to the wild, scavenger animals that roamed the streets in the ancient world. Those dogs were feared and hated. St. Paul uses the term to refer to unbelievers. Our text uses the term "dogs" to describe all who refuse the forgiveness that Jesus offers and stubbornly cling to false teaching and to sinful lives. It's not their sins that exclude people from eternal life. All, including believers are and remain sinners. In evident and not-so-evident ways, all, including believers, transgress every commandment every day. But it's refusing to acknowledge and repent of those sins and stubbornly continuing to cling to them, even boasting about living in them that forfeits the salvation Jesus offers. To reject God's truth is to accept Satan's lies. And those who live by and disseminate Satan's lies will share Satan's fate.

And so, the cry of the church throughout the New Testament age is, "Come, Lord Jesus." "The Spirit and the bride," our text puts it, "Say come." Prompted by the Holy Spirit, the church, which the Scriptures often portray as the bride of Christ, prays, "Come." Come continually, Lord Jesus, in Word and sacrament with the assurance that you wash us with your blood and provide us with those white robes that cover our sins. Come and carry out your master plan for human history and your gracious plan for your believers and for the church. And come at last, as you have promised, to fulfill your final promise and take your believers home to glory.

As he taught his disciples about his second coming, Jesus gave a number of signs that would occur continually throughout the New Testament age. These signs are to remind believers that this world and this age will one day come to an end. It seems to me that those signs are occurring with ever greater frequency and intensity, constant reminders that Jesus' return is coming ever closer and that believers should be constantly prepared for his return. All around us we see upheavals in nature: floods and earthquakes and fires. Violence stalks our streets and not even children are safe. Tyrants rage unjust wars. A pandemic has taken the lives of millions throughout the world. Ungodly and wicked lifestyles are glorified; and the church struggles to survive in a materialistic world. We need to see all of these things for what they are: signs that this world is not our permanent home – and the world itself is not permanent. We need to see ourselves as in the world but not of the world. And we need to constantly tend to our relationship with our Savior by growing in faith and knowledge of him through faithful use of his word and sacrament. Then our lives will not be earth-bound, but heaven-focused. And our daily prayer, together with faithful believers everywhere, will be a heartfelt, "Come, Lord Jesus."

But even as believers live lives that indicate that their greatest concerns are not for earthly things but for spiritual things; even though they are a waiting people looking forward to a heavenly inheritance, believers must also remember that the ascended Savior has given them work to do in the world. Even as they daily cry, "Come, Lord Jesus," believers need to call out to those around them in the world, "Come, to Jesus." At Pentecost Jesus sent his Spirit on those first disciples, bestowing on them special gifts to plant his church in the world. Through those same apostles he gave the church the New Testament Scriptures. To his New Testament church Jesus has now entrusted the gospel in word and sacrament, the tools they need to carry out the great commission he has given his church, a commission that will remain in force until he returns, "Go and make disciples." Until the end of time the church, including each of us, is called to share the love of Jesus with weary and burdened sinners who would be eternally lost without it.

During his earthly ministry Jesus invited sinners to come to him and find peace and rest for their souls. Until he comes again, he wants all who hear and believe that invitation to pass it on to others. From the time of the apostles the invitation "Come to Jesus" has been passed down from generation to generation, nation to nation, until it has come to us. Now it is our task to pass it on. Each day the world stands is a day of grace, a day for believers, by word and deed, to share the love of Jesus with those around them, so the Spirit through their witness, can bring more souls to know and believe on Jesus as the Savior. The fact that Jesus' return comes closer by the day makes the task even more urgent.

"Let the one who is thirsty come," our text concludes, "And take the water of life as a free gift." Jesus died for all. And until he comes again, the ascended Savior wants his church to cry out loudly and everywhere, "Come to Jesus," so that more and more immortal souls from every tribe and nation and language can join in responding to Jesus' promise, "Behold, I am coming soon," with the great cry of faith, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Amen.