

BE PREPARED FOR THE LORD'S RETURN

22⁶[The angel] said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place. ⁷'Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'" ⁸I, John, am he who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw [them], I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹But he said to me, "Do not do so; I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." ¹⁰Then he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹He that is unrighteous, let him continue to practice unrighteousness, he that is defiled, let him continue to defile himself; but he that is righteous, let him continue to practice righteousness, and he that is holy, let him continue to become holy. ¹²'Behold, I am coming soon! [I am bringing] my rewards with me, and I will repay each man what he deserves for his work. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.' ¹⁴Blessed are they who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to eat from the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. ¹⁶I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star.'" ¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come! Whoever is willing, let him take the water of life freely. ¹⁸I bear witness to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. ¹⁹If any man removes [any] words from the book of this prophecy—God will take away [from him] his share in the tree of life and [remove him] from the holy city.

²⁰He who bears witness about these things says, "Yes, indeed, I am coming soon!" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen. (Rev. 22:6-21)

Introduction

Suppose you went to the mall and happened to encounter one of those opinion poll surveys. The subject of this particular poll was the Second Coming of Christ. Those conducting the poll asked you to respond to the following questions:

Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth? If so, how does this belief affect your life in a practical way?

When you think of Christ's return, what is your reaction?

- Joy
- Fear
- Anticipation
- Apprehension

- Some combination of the above

How often do you think about Christ's return?

- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often

Do you think that Christ will return in your lifetime?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If Christ were to return today, would you be ready to stand before Him?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If you knew that Christ would return tomorrow, what changes would you make in your life today?

With this "opinion poll" in mind, let us now turn our attention to this closing passage of the Book of Revelation, a passage in which the Lord Jesus three times repeats the words, "*I am coming soon,*" (or, "*I am coming swiftly.*") Our Lord is concerned that we take seriously the message of the Book of Revelation, and especially the fact that He shall return in glory and with great power. Let us therefore heed His warning and His appeal that we be prepared for our Lord's return.

I. Be Prepared for the Lord's Return, ...Because He is Coming "Quickly/Swiftly"

Verse 6 speaks of "*the things that must soon take place,*" (or, "*the things that must take place swiftly.*") The Greek phrase (ἐν τάχει) may be translated, "in a short time," or, "in a swift manner" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Arndt & Gingrich, pp. 814-815.) If we say that something will happen "soon," we are speaking about **when** an event will happen. But if we say that something will happen "swiftly," we are speaking about **how** an event will happen. The New Testament seems to be using this term (ἐν τάχει) in the sense of "swiftly/quickly;" telling us **how** these events will take place rather than **when** they will happen. Consider the passages listed below:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew

nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man ... ⁴²Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have allowed [the thief] to break into his house. ⁴⁴So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him ... ⁴⁸But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, "My master is staying away a long time," ⁴⁹and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour of which he is not aware. (Matt. 24:37-39,42-44,48-50)

Beware, watch and pray, for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴[It is like when] a man travels to another country, leaving his house and giving authority to his servants, assigning to each one his work, and also instructing the doorkeeper to stay alert. ³⁵You stay alert, therefore; because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether [he will come] in the evening, or at midnight, or at when the rooster crows at daybreak, or in the morning. ³⁶[Stay alert,] so that when he suddenly comes he will not find you sleeping. ³⁷Now what I say to you, I am saying to everyone, Stay alert. (Mk. 13:33-37)

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵It will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. (Lk. 21:34-36)

... the day of the LORD will come like a thief. (2 Pet. 3:10a)

In each of these passages the emphasis is upon the suddenness and unexpectedness of the Lord's return. In light of these other New Testament passages, the Greek phrase, *ἐν τάχει*, as it occurs here, may be better translated, "swiftly," rather than "soon." If such is the case, then the meaning of this passage is that the Book of Revelation is revealing events that will take place swiftly in their appointed time, rather than soon in the chronological sense of the term.

In verse 7 Jesus declares, "*Behold, I am coming soon,*" (or again, "*I am coming swiftly.*") The Greek of Revelation 22:7 (*ἐρχομαι ταχὺ*) may be rendered, "I am coming soon," (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 815;) or, "I am coming swiftly," (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 814;) or, "I am coming without delay" (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 814.) Again, the New Testament seems to be using this term (*ἐρχομαι τάχῃ*) in the sense of "quickly," "swiftly," and "unexpectedly." But the Old Testament seems to

also support the sense of, “without delay;” i.e.; the Lord’s coming is certain, inevitable—He is determined to keep His appointment and will allow nothing to deter Him. In this regard, consider Habakkuk 2:3, *“the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it lingers, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”* The LORD has an appointed time for the fulfillment of His great works, and He is diligently bringing history to that appointed time, not allowing anything to prevent the occurrence of those great events in their appointed time.

In verse 10 there occurs the phrase, *“the time is near”* (ο καιρος γαρ εγγυς εστιν.) The Greek term, ο καιρος, refers to “the occasion,” or the event itself, as opposed to “the hour,” or the date the event takes place. By way of example, in the sentence, “The party was a great time,” the Greek word used would be καιρος—the word for “time” used to indicate an occasion or event. If we were to inquire, “When [at what time, on what date] did the party take place, when did this event occur?” we would use the Greek word χρονος—this is the word used when referring to date and chronological time. The Greek term, εγγυς, may be rendered “close,” “near by,” or, “on the verge of happening.” That is to say, a particular event is ready to happen, all is prepared for it to occur. By way of example: The Chinese Communist soldiers were assembled at the outskirts of the city of Beijing at the time of the Tiananmen Square student demonstrations. The soldiers were poised, prepared, ready to strike—the event of their attacking was ready to happen whenever the government officials issued the order. At this point it is significant to consider what we read in 1 Peter 1:5 concerning the coming of the day of salvation: Peter speaks of *“the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time.”* Here is a salvation that is complete and fully prepared; nevertheless, although that great salvation is fully prepared and ready to be revealed, it shall not actually be revealed until the appointed hour set by God.

Note the contrast between Daniel 12:4,9 and Revelation 22:10,

But you, Daniel, preserve the words and seal the book, safeguarding it until the time of the end. Many will diligently study it, and the understanding of these things will increase ... ⁹But he said, Go your way, Daniel; for the words are preserved and sealed until the time of the end. (Dan. 12:4,9)

Then he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.” (Rev, 22:10)

Why the difference in the instructions given to Daniel and John respectively? The reason: Since the time of Daniel, the Messiah has come and accomplished the work of redemption at the cross of Calvary, He Himself has now declared, *“It is finished!”* (It is accomplished!) (Jn. 19:30.)

The first reason why we must be prepared for the Lord's return is the fact that He will come swiftly. The Lord Jesus is poised and ready to come, and that coming when it does take place shall be swift, sudden, even unexpected—it will catch the world off guard, but we must take to heart His warning and be prepared to greet Him.

II. Be Prepared for the Lord's Return, ...Because He shall Come in His Majesty

Whereas on the occasion of His first coming the Lord Jesus appeared in humility as the babe born in the manger, at His second coming He will appear in His full divine identity.

He will return as *"the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets"* (vs. 6.) Note, the phrase, *"the spirits of the prophets,"* may be a reference to the Holy Spirit as He employed the prophets to speak the Word of God. Upon His return in glory, the Lord Jesus will be revealed as the God who has spoken from heaven:

These are the commandments Jehovah proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me. ²³When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. ²⁴And you said, "Jehovah our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. ²⁵But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of Jehovah our God any longer, ²⁶for what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? ²⁷Go near and listen to all that Jehovah our God says. Then tell us whatever Jehovah our God tells you. We will listen and obey." (Deut. 5:22-27)

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus will return as the great Judge who will *"repay each man what he deserves for his work"* (vs. 12.) God the Father has given to Christ *"the authority to execute judgment"* as the Lord Jesus Himself testified during the days of his earthly ministry (Jn. 5:27.) The Apostle Paul likewise declared before the Athenians, *"[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead"* (Acts 17:31.) Referring to the Lord Jesus, the Apostle Peter declares, *"he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead"* (Acts 10:42.)

The Lord Jesus will carry out this divine judgment on the day of His return, as He testifies:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him,

and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." ... ⁴¹Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:31-34, 41)

The Lord Jesus will return as *"the Alpha and the Omega ... the Beginning and the End"* (vs. 13.) Here in Revelation 22:13 the self-description of Jehovah, as He revealed Himself to the prophet Isaiah, is applied to Christ Jesus: *"This is what Jehovah declares—[the one who is] the King of Israel and his Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; there is no [other] God besides me"* (Isa. 44:6.) Christ will return in His full divine identity as JEHOVAH, the true and sovereign God: the One who is the Source and Sum of all existence; the One of whom the Apostle Paul wrote: *"from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen"* (Rom. 11:36.) As was foretold through Isaiah, on the day of His appearing, *"The arrogance of man shall be brought low, and the pride of man shall be humbled; and Jehovah alone shall be exalted on that day—¹⁸and the idols will totally disappear"* (Isa. 2:17-18.)

Finally, it is revealed that the Lord Jesus will return as *"the bright Morning Star"* (vs. 16.) Just as the morning star dispels the night and ushers in a new day, the Lord Jesus at His return will cause the brightness of God's truth and glory to shine upon the whole renewed creation.

Here is a second reason why we must be prepared for the Lord's return; namely, the fact that He will come in all His majesty as the Lord God the Almighty.

III. Be Prepared for the Lord's Return, ...By Practicing the Spiritual Life

We are to prepare ourselves for the Lord's return by keeping *"the words of the prophecy of this book"* (vs. 7.) That is to say, we are to receive the message of promise and warning that is presented in the Book of Revelation; we are to take the message to heart; and we are to allow it to impact and transform our whole perspective on life. We are to heed the instructions the Lord Jesus gave when, during His earthly ministry, He foretold the day of His coming in glory:

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵It will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. (Lk. 21:34-36)

We are to prepare ourselves for our Lord's return by "washing our robes" (vs. 14-15.) "Washing," as it occurs here in the present continuous Greek tense, is a reference to developing the Christian life, what the Bible calls "sanctification." We must, by the grace imparted by Christ, heed the exhortation given in 2 Corinthians 7:1, *"let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* Again, by the grace imparted by Christ, we as Christians must not allow our lives to be dominated by the former works of the sinful nature, as they are described by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:19-21,

Now the works of the sinful nature are well known, [such as]: sexual immorality, moral impurity, debauchery, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hatreds, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other such things. I warn you [again], just as I [previously] warned you, that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

In the light of Revelation 22:14-15, we must give due consideration to the seriousness of yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit as He carries out the process of sanctification:

Blessed are they who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to eat from the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Rev. 22:14-15)

We are not only to prepare ourselves for the Lord's return, we are also exhorted to pray for the coming of that Great Day (vs. 22:17a, 20.) In verse 17a we read, *"the [Holy] Spirit and the bride* [representing the church of Christ] *say, 'Come!'"* The Holy Spirit inspires the Christian to desire and to pray for the Savior's return. Another indication of a Spirit-filled life is prayer for the Savior's return, just as a bride desires the day of her wedding. In Philippians 3:20 the Apostle Paul informs us that our attitude should be that of eagerly awaiting the Savior: *"our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Note: The certainty of Christ's return: *"Yes, indeed, I am coming soon!"*—or, *"I am coming without delay!"* (vs. 20a.)—becomes the motivation and stimulus for prayer: *"Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!"* (vs. 20b.) By way of illustration: When your favorite soccer player comes toward the empty goal with the ball under his control and a sure goal is about to be scored, you as a fan react by vigorously cheering him on, not with idle complacency. The certainty of the anticipated goal arouses you to excited exhortation, urging him on; in the same way, the certainty of our Lord's return should move us to earnest prayer for the great day.

Furthermore, one must prepare himself for the Lord's return by taking *"the water of life freely"* (vs. 17.) Using the imagery of drinking the life-giving water, the Word of God invites men and urges them to receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior and sovereign Lord. The Lord Jesus Himself extended the invitation to place one's faith in Him by the use of very similar imagery: *"Now on the last day, the great [day] of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink'"* (Jn. 7:37.) The Apostle John solemnly informs us: *"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life"* (1 Jn. 5:12.) Again, John solemnly testifies in his gospel: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; but whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, on the contrary, the wrath of God remains upon him"* (Jn. 3:36.)

The purpose of salvation is the Christ-like life, but the way of salvation is faith in Christ: trusting His sacrifice offered to God upon the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins; trusting in His perfect righteousness for acceptance with God; and trusting His grace for the ability to live the Christ-like life to the glory of God. The way we prepare for the Lord's return is by entrusting ourselves to Him to be our Savior and Lord, and then, by means of His all-sufficient grace, practicing the spiritual life of being His disciple.

Conclusion

In light of this final passage of the Book of Revelation, how would you answer the following questions?

Do you personally believe that Christ will return? What practical affect will this belief now have upon your everyday life?

If Christ were to return today, are you ready to meet Him?

If you knew that Christ would return tomorrow, what changes would you make in your life today?

Let us take careful note of the fact that these are our Lord's closing words, not only in the Book of Revelation, but in the entire Bible: *"Yes, indeed, I am coming without delay!"*