

Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 8, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Revelation 22:12-17, 20

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14) "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." 17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. ... **20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus prayed that we might see his glory. In our sermon text we join John in praying that the Lord Jesus would come to reveal his glory to us. Although most people would either dread or deny the coming of a day of judgment, we eagerly await that day. In fact it is our prayer that it would indeed come soon.

We are living in the difficult days John has described in this book of Revelation. Daily we are confronted with temptations and challenges to our faith. The lies and deceit of Satan are commonly accepted as truth in our society. It seems as if our lives are filled with one crisis after another – each of them a consequence of sin. It's no wonder that we are eager to join John in praying: Come, Lord Jesus.

It's important for us to realize that the Lord Jesus really is watching over us and providing for us every step of the way to our home in heaven. When we realize this, we will pray: **COME LORD JESUS**. This is a prayer that he would **1) come each day to preserve our faith** as well as a prayer, **2) that he would come on the last day to take us home.**

Both our own experiences and the words of this text help us to understand our need for Jesus to come to us daily to strengthen our faith. In our text, the Lord Jesus reminds us: **"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.**

It is commonly believed that there are many roads that lead to heaven. It is also commonly believed that no one will really be excluded from heaven. These are among the many lies and falsehoods of Satan that are practiced and accepted today. We need to be on our guard so that we do not become entangled in those lies and deceived by them. We need to be ready to not only to resist those lies but also to refute them for the benefit of our souls and for the benefit of the souls of others. The words of the Lord Jesus in our text contradict those lies and remind us of the fact that there is only one path to heaven and that sadly there will be many who are excluded from heaven by their own unbelief and rejection of Jesus as their Savior.

The one path to heaven is through faith in Jesus – who washed our sins away with his own blood. It is not what we have done, but what Jesus has done for us that gives us eternal access to the tree of life and the holy city. This key teaching from the Scriptures must be kept in mind as we consider the verses of this text so that we don't end up concluding that our salvation is based in any way on our works. Paul summarizes this teaching nicely for us in Ephesians 2 where we read: **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich**

in mercy, 5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. ... 8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-10)

These words will help us to understand our text more clearly. In the opening verse of this text, Jesus spoke of his return on the Day of Judgment and said: **I will give to each person according to what they have done.** Then a little later Jesus said that **those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood** will be excluded from heaven. Jesus used similar thoughts in his parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25.

Why does Jesus call attention to what an individual does if entry to heaven isn't based on works? The answer to that question will be obvious to us when we remember that we have been given a new life in Christ to do good works. Jesus reminds us: **You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.4) Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6) If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ... 8) This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.** (John 15:3-6, 8)

Since faith without deeds is dead (James 2:26), Jesus can use works as evidence of the faith that is our hearts. Since faith shows itself with works, we realize that because of our connection to Christ it will be impossible for us to go through life passively. Our lives as Christians will be lives of action – doing the will of God and rejecting the will of the Devil and our own sinful flesh. The Devil is a master deceiver. He knows the truth and twists it to serve his purposes. Why is that we see so many passive Christians? Why is that we at times take our faith for granted? Why is it that at times we take our faith quite casually – just going along with the rest of society and not making any waves? It's because Satan's logic has deluded us. Satan reasons that if our salvation is by grace and not by works that then there's no reason for us to be concerned about our actions or our inactivity. The words of our Lord Jesus say otherwise.

We need the Lord to come to us daily to strengthen our faith and to enable us to give evidence of that faith in our lives. We need the Lord to come to us daily to strengthen our faith to enable us to resist the barking dogs who are calling out to us to join them in their **practice of magic arts, their sexually immoral, their murders, idolatry and their love for following false teachings.**

In love, the Lord Jesus warns that such wild roaming dogs, as he calls them, will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. The attitude of the world with its easy conscience about sin affects us too. Often we don't even get upset about sin anymore. We're even willing to hang on to our sins rather than struggle against them. The words of our Savior in this text show us the damning ugliness of sin. As we consider Jesus words of warning, we realize that we too are guilty of these sins. Those who practice the magic arts try to usurp God's control over creation and try to compel the Almighty God to do their will. Haven't we often fallen into the trap of thinking that we are the ones who are ultimately responsible for how healthy we are or how wealthy we are? At times, haven't we tried to manipulate things so that we get just what we want? Haven't we fallen into the trap of thinking that we are in control of our own destiny in place of praying, Lord your will be done? That's using the "magic" arts of our skill and cunning instead of placing our lives in the Lord's hands with the confidence that **God who did not spare his own son will together with him graciously give us all things.** (Romans 8:32)

The sexually immoral and murders include those who have lust and hatred in their hearts. Haven't we lusted and hated? The idolaters are those who do not always give God the supreme place in their lives. Haven't

we put ourselves and our desires before God and his desires often? And haven't we shown our love for the false lies of the Devil with our many other sins?

Since we are guilty of these sins, we see the need for Jesus to come to us each day to strengthen our faith – to wash away our sins and to provide us with the robes of his righteousness – lest we reject his forgiveness, die in our sins, and be locked outside the gates of heaven because of our unbelief.

When we pray, **Lord, Come each day to preserve my faith**, what are we really asking the Lord to do for us? We are really asking the Lord to bless our use of his Word and Sacrament. It is through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament that God creates, strengthens, and preserves faith. Would anyone of us pray, **Lord give me my daily bread**, and then refuse to eat? Of course not! Why is it then, that we express our desire for a stronger faith, – but fail to use the word and sacraments? If it is truly our prayer that we desire the Lord Jesus to come each day to preserve our faith amid the difficult days in which we live – then we have every reason make daily use of the Scriptures, reading them, calling them to mind, digging into them and studying them.

But, can't we get enough by listening to the sermon on Sunday? I ran across an interesting statistic some time back. **Did you know, if you attend church services every Sunday, and your pastor highlights three verses from the Bible in each of his messages, it would take 600 years for you to make your way through the Bible.** *And that assumes that the a verse or scripture reading is never repeated!* **Reading and studying on your own is critical to your Christian walk and personal relationship with God and to receiving the gifts He holds just for you.**

The Lord Jesus will answer your prayer, **Come to preserve my faith**, as you use his Word and receive the Sacrament. After warning about the danger of sin and unbelief, The Lord Jesus makes this promise in our text.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." 17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

Those who thirst are those who have learned to see their sins and their need for forgiveness. They begin to feel that thirst as they hear and believe that all sinners will be excluded from heaven and cast into the fires of condemnation unless their robes are washed in the blood of Jesus. The Holy Spirit who calls us to faith and strengthens our faith with the Gospel has also equipped us with the Gospel to reach out to others. That is why the Spirit and the Bride (the Christian church) share this gospel invitation: Come and drink. Satisfy your thirst with the Gospel. Enjoy the refreshing waters of life that come from Christ. Those who have heard and believed will in turn call forth to others.

With these verses, our Savior outlines our task in this life. Motivated and strengthened by our daily use of the Word we will share the word with others as an expression of our faith. Surrounded by the difficulties of this life we will also pray, Lord Come on the last day to take me home, with the confidence that the gates of heaven will be open to us because Jesus lived and died for us.

Once again, let us consider our Savior's promises in this text: **"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14) "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ... 20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

There should be no doubt that the Lord Jesus will come to take us to our heavenly home. Jesus promised that he is coming soon! That promise sustains us as we struggle to hold on to our faith through these difficult days of life in a wicked world. Because there are those who question Jesus promise of a quick return Peter reminds us, **do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.** (2 Peter 3:8) Jesus will return in victory and bring glory to his church. When he comes, he will bring his rewards of grace with him. Those rewards include all of the blessings he has prepared for his church. He has mentioned some of them the book of Revelation including the tree of life, the crown of life, a new name, authority over nations, names written in the book of life and the right to sit with him on his throne.

All who through faith see Jesus not just as Judge but as their Savior will have nothing to fear on that day. The Lord will graciously give his rewards of grace to all believers. He will not count their sins against them. They will be credited with his righteousness. The Lord will see only those things that his power has accomplished in and through them. Therefore, we can be confident of our place in heaven **for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.** (Philippians 2:13)

The one who promises these rewards to us identifies himself as the Alpha and the Omega. The Alpha and the Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus speaks of himself in this way to remind us that he is the eternal changeless God. This name assures us that he will keep his promises.

The holy life Jesus lived and the innocent blood which he shed for the forgiveness of our sins assures us of our place in his kingdom. **14) "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ... 20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."**

When John heard these promises of Jesus he responded by saying, **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.** In faith, we also say, "Amen. Come daily, Lord Jesus to preserve my faith and come on the last day to take me home." Amen.