

Come, Lord Jesus - Part A

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[0 : 00] If you keep open the Bibles at that page, page 1008, and let's pray for God to teach us and encourage us and excite us from this passage in Revelation tonight.

God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the sure promise of the return of the Lord Jesus. We thank you for the reality of a perfect heaven that you have secured for us through him. And we pray tonight that you'll give us great excitement as we look forward to that day of the Lord's return and the realization of that promise of heaven.

Clarify our mind with your truth and take out of it anything that we think or believe that is untrue. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Periodically they have surveys for the most livable city in the world. Melbourne's usually rated fairly high in such a list, usually in the top half a dozen or so, behind places like Vancouver or Oslo or Zurich or Geneva.

They tend to be right near the top. Of course the glamorous cities tend not to be quite so high.

Paris, London, New York, they're up near there, but they're not usually in the most livable cities.

[1 : 24] They're usually a bit too congested or polluted or crowded. Of course the most livable city ironically is not the place where most people choose to live. Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Cairo, they're the places in the world that have the most inhabitants, places like that and Jakarta and so on.

But they're pretty awful cities to live, pretty chaotic on the roads and so on. And my guess is that right down the bottom, Rangoon would be down there, Yangon as they call it, or probably even lower than that would be Baghdad, I guess.

The sorts of things would be safety, good pollution, or that is absence of pollution, healthy place, beautiful place, cost of living being reasonable, place with good transport, health, good access, stable government.

They're the sorts of factors that would make a city rank highly in the most livable cities in the world.

What we've seen the last two weeks and again tonight in Revelation 21 and 22 is a description of the most livable city.

Literally so. It's the city that is characterized by life, as we'll see tonight in particular. It's the New Jerusalem.

[2 : 41] It is beautiful. We've seen that already in chapter 21, that it's like a bride, that it's made by God, that it's radiant and full of expensive jewels and so on.

So it's a beautiful city. We find over the last two weeks that it's God's dwelling place. He lives there.

In many of the cities of the world, you go and you see some great palace or temple.

Often particular cities are characterized by famous buildings. In some sense, the New Jerusalem is not. There's actually no temple, although God dwells there.

There's a sense in which the whole city is the temple or the holy place of almighty God. And we've seen that in symbolic ways in the last two weeks. The city is cubic in dimension.

It's surrounded by the precious stones that indicate the privilege of the great high priest. There's no temple. The city itself is a temple. We see that it's a multicultural city.

[3 : 37] So all the nations will enter and bring their gifts and so on. That's something that's been a theme earlier on in the book of Revelation. Around the throne of God, there are those of every tribe and tongue and language.

One of the great and positive features, I think, of Melbourne is its multicultural richness. And many of the great cities of the world are like that these days. And the New Jerusalem would be the same. But unlike any city on earth, we've also seen that the New Jerusalem is a city without pain, without suffering and without evil. It's astonishing to think what life in a city would be like where that is the case.

A complete absence of evil, an absence of sickness, suffering or death. Tobin brothers would be out of business. If you're a policeman, you'd be looking for another job. Because no one would break any law or commit any crime.

The same if you were a doctor or a nurse or in the medical field. Our lives would have perfect health. So if you're a chiropractor or physiotherapist or a brain surgeon, well, you'll be kicking up your heels in the New Jerusalem.

[4 : 47] But the same too if you were a locksmith. We don't need locks on our doors in heaven. Because it's perfect. And the people who live there are perfect.

There's perfect honesty and truth. We don't need to lock up our valuables. Think how different life would be if we didn't have to worry about security. We wouldn't worry about banks, at least banks from the sense of keeping our money safe.

We may want to invest it in some way, but we wouldn't have to worry about locks, locks on our cars, etc. We wouldn't have to worry about signatures and credit card frauds and all that sort of stuff as well.

Another feature of the New Jerusalem that we've seen is an open entry. The gates of it are open. Again, no locks because there'll be no enemies to attack it. Doesn't mean that everybody and anybody is there though.

Because we've also seen that the idolaters, the murderers, the cowards, the fornicators and so on, they're out of the city and they're kept out even though the gates are open for anyone to come into. The other thing that we've seen and we see again tonight is that the cost of living in this city is free.

[5 : 59] Not because it's worthless. The great cities in the world that are very cheap to live in. I remember being in Amman in Jordan fighting over the price of a stamp once, realising that the stamp was costing about two cents.

And the taxi ride to get to the post office to buy the stamp had cost me five cents. This is not cheap because it's not particularly worth, full of worth. It's free because it's all paid for.

And we'll see that again tonight. How different that is from the great cities of our world that are so expensive to live in and travel in like London and Paris and New York and so on. But as I hinted at, the key feature of this New Jerusalem, this heavenly city, is its feature of life.

Oh yes, I mean we live in Melbourne and there's life. But this is life as it is meant to be. This is life in its fullness. This is the city that's characterised by the water of life and the tree of life as we begin to see at the beginning of chapter 22.

The angel who's God's messenger, who's relaying all of this information and showing it to John the Apostle late in the first century, showed him the river of the water of life.

[7 : 21] Not any river. The river of the water of life evokes memory of the very beginning of the Bible. The garden of Eden.

The water of life that flowed through Eden in Genesis chapter 2, for example. And we get little glimpses of that in a vision of the temple in Ezekiel, the last chapters of Ezekiel.

The same in the prophet Zechariah. And here we find, in a sense, we've come full circle from a garden to a city, but it's the same river, the river of the water of life.

We've seen hints of Jesus being the life-giver, pouring out life-giving water, for example, in John's Gospel in chapters 4 and 7. Here we find it symbolically, but really fulfilled and realized in this heavenly picture of the New Jerusalem.

The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. So at the center of this city, is one throne for God and the Lamb, that is Father and Son of the Trinitarian God, and it flows from their throne.

[8 : 32] Whether we want to limit the symbolism to the spirit of life, the Holy Spirit, which is an association Jesus makes in John 7, or whether we want more broadly, perhaps better, to see it as the life-giver, God, or the life-giving God, giving us life, flowing from his throne, in the center of the city.

It flows through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life. Now, the tree of life was there in the Garden of Eden as well.

And indeed, we find many reminiscences in Revelation 21 and 22 of the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the Bible. The tree of life is there in Genesis 2.

It's prohibited to humanity after their sin in Genesis 3. And thereafter, through all the Bible, humanity is kept away from the tree of life.

That's why Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden in Genesis 3, and the gate of it was guarded by cherubim. But now we find a city where the gates are flung open wide without guards against them, and anybody is welcome to come in and find there the tree of life.

[9 : 44] Paradise is being regained. But it's an odd thing about this tree of life. The word for tree, the Greek word is xoulon, which is not the normal word you'd use for tree.

It's actually a word that's more readily used for dead wood. Twenty times it occurs in the New Testament. It's used of the clubs that the soldiers were carrying when Jesus was arrested five times.

That's words used. And it's used of stocks as well. But ten times it refers to a tree, five of which are here in Revelation. But it also is the same word that's used in a famous verse in 1 Peter 2.

And let me read that to illustrate the point that I'm making. In 1 Peter 2, he refers to the fact that Jesus died on the tree.

1 Peter 2 verse 24. Well-known words. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

[10 : 49] Now Jesus may well have been crucified on a living tree. We tend to think of a wooden dead wood cross in effect, but quite possibly it was a tree and the cross beam would be nailed to it.

That's the dead wood going on the living wood. But the significance is this. The tree of life points to the cross of Christ.

The tree of life points to the death of Jesus. It's a bit ironical, but it's this strange word that's more usually dead wood.

And so the tree of life is about the death of Christ. What gives us eternal life is the death of Jesus on the cross.

And the words used in a few other places referring to the cross as well. Here now is life, river of life, tree of life, eternal life, realized finally, but it comes through death, the death of Jesus.

[12 : 00] All through the book of Revelation, all through the epistles, all through the acts of the apostles, and all through the gospels, and anticipated all through the Old Testament, is that life comes through the atoning death of the Savior.

The only reason that anyone has access to the tree of life, the only reason anyone has access to the new Jerusalem, the only reason anyone can have a sure and certain promise of the resurrection to eternal life, is because of the death of Jesus.

That's why it's free. Later on, it's described as a gift earlier in chapter 21, without cost. But it's not because it's worthless. It's because the high cost of heaven has been paid for by Jesus on the cross.

That's why verse 3 says that there won't be any curse anymore. Nothing accursed will be found there. The curse picks up the idea of Genesis 3, where the serpent is cursed and the ground is cursed after the sin of Adam and Eve.

The curses are gone because Jesus hung on the cross accursed, carrying our sins. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

[13 : 19] We think of worshippers singing a few songs, but worship is about giving your life in service to God. It will be stating praise of God, but it will be serving God.

That will be our labor in heaven. They will see his face. That's a remarkable statement, which we probably underestimate.

Seeing God's face is a privilege denied humanity by and large since the Garden of Eden. All through the Bible story, God has drawn closer to humanity, symbolically, with clouds of fire in the Old Testament by hearing his voice but not seeing him, coming closer symbolically, dwelling in a tabernacle and then in the temple of the Old Testament, coming closer when Jesus incarnate human, divine human being on earth, coming closer in the gift of God's spirit to dwell in us, but finally and only in heaven will we see God face to face and his name will be on their foreheads.

That is, we belong to him. not the number of 666, the number of the devil from Revelation 13 that signifies belonging elsewhere, but we will belong to him and there will be no more night symbolizing darkness and evil and chaos and so on because of course so often symbolically in the scriptures God is light, Jesus is the light of the world and so on.

They need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light. Think how remarkable that will be that we won't need the sun or the moon or the stars.

[15 : 13] What an astonishing life this really will be and they will reign forever and ever. It will never ever tarnish.

Unlike the Garden of Eden where perfection was marred and spoiled by human sin not so the New Jerusalem. That will be eternally perfect.

The angel said to John these words are trustworthy and true. They're not made up. It's not fiction. It's not myth. It's not legend. It's not wishful thinking.

That is the angel is underscoring the certainty of these things. For the Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

And here now a new dimension is being added in this prophecy or vision to John. It is coming soon. It's not way off distance so far away that it has no impact on us.

[16:16] John was given this vision late in the first century. Most scholars think that it came through the persecutions in the 90s AD in the time of Domitian the Roman Emperor others that it may be earlier than that in the time of Nero another persecutor of Christians in the 60s AD.

Either way in one sense it doesn't matter. John was on an island in the Aegean Sea very pleasant Patmos in between Greece and Turkey there in exile. The vision was given for the benefit of persecuted Christians.

It was given to encourage them to endure and persevere life on earth fixed with their sights on this heavenly vision of God's vindication justice and glory.

So John is being encouraged here that these are real words. This is a real vision. This is reality being described. Heaven is not a made up idea or a made up fiction. It is in fact a greater reality than this earth.

See I'm coming soon. That is Jesus speaking coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

[17:29] One of the traps that we can fall into with the book of Revelation is thinking that it's a sort of coded information kit for us and that somehow it's a bit like bits and pieces of information that will enable us to build a model of heaven.

but not really. Blessed are those not who know the words of this prophecy. Blessed are those who keep the words of this prophecy.

That is the whole point of the book of Revelation and including the whole point of this vision of heaven at the end of the book is that we obey in faith God's commands.

That is it's there for us to strengthen us in faithful obedience and endurance. I am coming soon.

There is an urgency and immediacy to this prophecy. Indeed the word come or the verb to come comes seven times in this final chapter.

[18:33] I John and the one who heard and saw these things and when I heard and saw them I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel. We might be aghast rightly at that action but I guess the vision is so astonishing that John is sort of overcome and doesn't think.

He almost commits an act of idolatry in worshipping an angel a servant or messenger of God.

That's why the angel says you must not do that I'm a fellow servant with you and literally your brothers your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Comrades got a bit too sort of communistic militaristic sort of feel about it. That's not part of the word. That is I the angel I'm just like one of you.

I'm just like you. So don't worship me. I'm a fellow servant and with those who keep the words of this book. That is who's a servant of God? Those who keep the words of this book.

Those who are faithful and obedient. Worship God. And he said then don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. Well to the prophet Daniel who had similarly exotic visions in the Old Testament something we preached on a couple of years ago here Daniel was told to seal up the prophecy that is to guard it and keep it because it had a longer term future perspective about it.

[19:54] But John is told don't seal up this prophecy and the reason is given to him for the time is near. That is this prophecy is applicable now it's to have a current impact.

It's not just about the time to come the whole point of any bit of the Bible is how to live now. So whenever the Bible talks about the future it's doing so for the purpose of living now.

And I think that's emphasized in this verse 10 in contrast to Daniel chapter 12. The book of Revelation is for now. And then verse 11 is a little bit odd let the evildoer still do evil.

Not condoning the evil but they're down an evildoing path and they'll keep doing it and so to the filthy. That is in the sense of morally filthy. But on the other hand let the righteous still do right and the holy still be holy.

It's not giving permission so much as it's an acknowledgement of the end of time. And people have set their lives in a particular train or path.

[21 : 00] Sometimes too of course remember that the function of God's word and the function of prophecy in the scripture is actually to harden the apostate. We see that in the prophet Isaiah for example in Isaiah 6 something that Jesus quotes as well in Mark 4.

So as they hear the words of scripture or they hear the words of prophecy or of God they'll actually be hardened down their path of apostasy or evil doing or filth.

Again see I'm coming soon. My reward is with me to repay according to everyone's work. There is an urgency here an urgency about being prepared to meet the returning Lord Jesus Christ.

He's coming soon. Now of course we could be dismissive of this say 2000 years later nearly here we are he hasn't come. How can we believe this what soon?

I mean if I say to you I'll do it soon you might grumble if I haven't done it by next Sunday whatever it is. Jesus says I'm coming soon. Jesus is coming soon.

[22 : 10] In fact he's coming sooner by 2000 years than when he said these words to John. I don't think we ought to be dismissive for a couple of reasons. One is that in the scale of eternity the time between Jesus resurrection let's say and return is indeed small.

if you were to plot it on a graph that accurately reflected the eternity of time you would not see a gap between the resurrection and the return of Jesus.

So with an eternal perspective yes it's soon. For us we think 2000 years is a long time but in God's eyes that's not so. The other reason of course is that to say see I'm coming soon heightens the urgency.

So if I tell you to one of my Old Testament classes in Bible college I'm going to give you an exam soon they're supposed to start studying. When I tell them your exam's in November well 31st of October they might think about studying.

In fact I've often threatened to my classes I'm going to give you assignments and exams and stuff but unlike all your other classes I'm not going to tell you the date. And so some day you'll turn up to class and I'll give you an exam.

[23 : 24] Now I've never been allowed to do that so my students will breathe a sigh of relief but the point is the coming of Jesus is meant to impact us every day. It's meant to be literally it is soon and we're meant to think of it as Jesus coming soon so that we don't keep putting off repentance so we don't keep living apostate life thinking oh at the end of life or next year in a few years time when I'm old I'll worry about God then.

Jesus could come tonight. There is no reason for him not to don't sort of twist things in the scriptures to think oh this hasn't happened or that hasn't happened.

Jesus could come at any time. That is there is an urgency about being ready for him. Heaven is on its way. See I'm coming soon.

I'm the alpha and the omega the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet A to Z we might say.

That is I was there at the beginning and we've already seen how often this chapter goes back to the beginning of the Garden of Eden and I'm the end.

That is I'm wrapping up history. I hold it all together and this is Jesus speaking. I'm the first the last the beginning and the end. It's all under my sovereign control.

[24 : 40] So what I say will happen because I'm in control. And then comes a very encouraging verse in particular.

Blessed are those who wash their robes. When we go out to somewhere special we have to get our clothes clean ironed shirts buttoned up ties on whatever it is.

Blessed are those who wash their robes. But blessed are those who wash their robes meaning what? Washing robes is about being forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

In the book of Revelation that's what you wash your robes in. The blood of Jesus. The death of Jesus. It's all about being forgiven. That is these verses are an urgency to repent of our sins.

To have them forgiven. Not to attain a perfect status. Not to get better and better climbing a moral ladder. but rather that we are forgiven our sins through the death of Jesus.

[25 : 48] So those are the ones who will have the right to the tree of life. Seven times in the book of Revelation there is a statement blessed are those.

And this is the seventh. Seven is the perfect number. And there are many things in the book of Revelation that show a sort of high degree of symbolism and structure. That's just another.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that is in Jesus' death, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

Those who kept out are the fornicators, the evildoers. Those who go in are not the goody-goodies, but the forgiven by the death of Jesus.

Outside are the dogs, a derogatory term we find in both Old and New Testaments elsewhere. And the sorcerers, the fornicators, murderers, idolaters, everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

[26 : 52] Notice how the evildoers are those not only who say false things or do false things, they actually love falsehood. The rest are those who are forgiven. It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches.

I'm the root, that is the beginning, the descendant, that is the end, of David, the great promised king of the Old Testament, the one to whom was given the promise of an eternal dynasty.

Jesus both prefigured him and is a descendant of him, fulfilling some prophecies in Isaiah, for example. I'm the bright morning star.

Again, a prophecy of Numbers, chapter 24, fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus. It's lots of Old Testament language in Revelation that helps us understand the symbolism. So then, the spirit and the bride, presumably the church, say come, let everyone who hears say come, and let everyone who's thirsty come.

I think what's going on there is this is the final time to invite others to come and have their robes washed, that is to come to Christ, to become believers in Jesus before he comes because he's coming soon.

[28 : 05] So come, come to be a citizen of this heaven. Come and have your robes washed in the blood of Jesus. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

What wonderful words they are. No one will be in heaven by their own right or merit or work, but only by the blood of Jesus shed for them.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book.

I don't think the trivial sense is to sort of remove the odd verse of this book, as in or add a little verse or word here and there, but it's adding or subtracting that changes the message.

that is, how do you enter the city? Is it simply through Jesus? Yes. Or as many would say, they add or subtract by saying, well, it's Jesus plus this, plus membership of this church or this book of Mormon or something else that we add to this book.

[29 : 19] Significant, in fact, that the whole Bible ends with this statement. as though maybe this statement of Jesus is not just the book of Revelation, don't add or subtract to it, but indeed perhaps to the whole message of the gospel contained in the scriptures.

The one who testifies to these things, that is Jesus himself, says, surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come Lord Jesus is John's reply.

That's meant to be our reply. We're being invited here to agree and pray for Jesus to come soon. I wonder how often that's part of our prayers.

I wonder how often that's part of our longing as Christians. Let me say, the older I get, and I don't think it's just age either, the more I pray, come Lord Jesus soon.

We might say, well, we don't actually want Jesus to come quite yet because there's all these people out here who are not yet believers. Well, get on and invite them to come because that's what we're being told here.

[30 : 23] We're being asked to invite others come and taste of the water of life and do it urgently because Jesus is coming soon and we're praying that he comes because these words were given in the midst of persecution and there's a sense of relief looking forward to the return of Jesus at the end of time.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints because in the end that's sufficient for the day. As Paul in fact said to the Corinthian church, God's grace is sufficient for me and that's why so often his letters and here the whole Bible ends with a statement, the grace of God or the Lord Jesus in this case be with you because in the end that's all we need to endure through persecution, to remain in faith looking for the final time.

Remember that this book of Revelation was in fact written to seven churches in what is now western Turkey. Ephesus, Smyrna which is now a large city, Ismir and a number of others around about them all in the western part of Turkey.

They're all mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 and the whole book is from John, a vision given to John, to those churches facing persecution but beyond those churches to anybody else who reads this book.

There are a number of themes that are found in those first three chapters that come out again in these last two. Angels, the name of John himself doesn't appear anywhere else other than the first and the last bit of the book.

[32 : 01] The things that are soon to happen, the emphasis on Alpha and Omega in chapter 1 as well as here, the coming soon in chapter 1 as well as here.

The book is deliberately enveloped by these things. To those seven churches each one was exhorted to overcome and a promise that if you overcome then something would be given to you. In chapters 2 and 3 each of those seven things we find in this chapter, chapter 22. To the church of Ephesus, overcome and you will eat the tree of life.

Here it is. To Smyrna, you will not be hurt by the second death. That was in chapter 21. Pergamum, you will be given a new name and a white stone. Also in this chapter, the name on the forehead. To Thyatira, the morning star, we've seen that tonight. To Sardis, if you overcome you will be dressed in white with the book of life and that's actually in chapter 20. To Philadelphia, you will be a pillar in the new Jerusalem.

[33 : 06] That's mentioned in both 21 and 22. And Laodicea will sit on the throne, chapter 22 as well. So this whole purpose of vision is a motivation to overcome.

And we overcome how? By trusting in the death of the overcomer, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Friends, this vision of heaven is not a theological handbook.

book. It's not an instruction book for building a model of it. It doesn't give us the dimensions in a sense that will be real. It's full of symbolism.

It's hard to quite imagine. But its purpose is that we endure in faith in a world that is faithless. Its purpose is to create in us a deeper longing for the return of Jesus and the arrival of the new Jerusalem.

its purpose is to remind us that God's sufficient grace or God's grace is sufficient for our lives each day.

[34 : 15] When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, his grace all sufficient shall be your supply. The flame shall not hurt you, it's only design your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

heaven. This book finishes with this picture of heaven that is ours by God's grace.

It's not our work or our merit, it's the work of Jesus who opened the gates for us by dying and rising and is coming again to usher us in.

Savior, since of Zion's city, I through grace a member am. Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in your name.

Fading are the world's best pleasures, all its boasted pomp and show. Solid joys and lasting treasures, none but Zion's children know.

[35 : 22] We ought to be praying with John. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.