

Dustin Blumer

Sermon 519 - Revelation 19:4-8, 21:1-18

Return of the King

It was during a thunderstorm in Beaver Dam, WI. I was standing in the garage looking out seeing the gray/green clouds. Watching the rain and having the thunder rattle my core - and it was then I got this sense. I'm going to be alive when God returns. I'm going to be able to see the last day. I've talked to others who also believe they are going to be alive to see the last day. There is evidence that the writers of the New Testament all thought they would be alive to see Jesus' return. This thought stuck with me so that when I went to the Sistine Chapel years ago I was struck by the picture they put behind the altar. It was Michaelangelo's last judgment. Here's what was in that artist's mind. Thankfully he did put clothes on them. It's a picture that if you've been to my office is hanging behind my chair. And the reason?

You live differently if you believe the God's return is imminent. For example if you knew Jesus was going to return tomorrow does that change what your plans are for today? For some yes. I got to tell others of Jesus. I have to get my house in order and take the faith seriously. I have to do less of what the world offers and more of what the Lord desires. For others maybe you've been living this way, knowing God could return so it doesn't really change your marching orders. And what I've found is that even if the Lord doesn't return tomorrow, or in my lifetime - there is no other way I want to live. If I fail to remember this it changes perspective on all I think, do, and say.

It's kind of like chores or homework. If mom tells you you have a week to get the chore done like clean your closet. How many of you might procrastinate and not get to it. If you've been in a class that the whole grade consists of a project due at the end. How many of you procrastinate and pull a few all nighters the week before. Whereas if you know tomorrow is when it needs to be done. You have no other choice than to prioritize. So it is in our walk with the Lord, because he could return tomorrow. The wisdom gleaned is that we should not put off what we know we should do for our faithlife today and the marching orders of our God. Everything else will fade away, but that activity in light of this is all that matters.

Welcome again to Amazing Love, even if you've never considered or do not know much about the end times. We took a look in the first week about the truth we are at the edge of Heaven. We discussed the signs of the end and see them going on all around us. One of the reasons we are doing this series is because I think we spend way too much of our focus on this world, and so little of our time and focus on the world to come.

Now there have been many pivotal days in life. Personally, you might look at the day of your birth pretty pivotal, or the day you were baptized. You might look to the day you said, "I do." Or the day the doctor said, "It's a boy. or It's a girl." Spiritually speaking there have been pivotal days. The day everything leapt into being at the God's command. The day Jesus was sent from heaven to earth. The day of Jesus' death and resurrection. But the last pivotal day we have been waiting for is this one we get to talk about. The day of the Lord's return. *There is no more pivotal day remaining than his return.* What was will not remain. A new era will be ushered in.

The question is what will that day look like? Is it what Michaelangelo pictured? Here is one picture from 1 Thessalonians, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (4:17-18) So we have the picture of Jesus on the clouds, we have the trumpet call to look forward to. And those who are still alive meeting with Jesus on that day, but dead have been raised first.

What a great picture. But I also want to give another picture of this return from the book of Revelation. Back by popular demand is this book that also gives us great pictures of that day and what the King will do upon his return. So let’s look now at Revelation 19 and 21. There it is. Turn to your neighbor and say, “he is making all things new.”

Growing up there were books called the Magic Eye. I don’t know if any of you remember these pictures? The goal was that you were to stare at them, and if you stared at them long enough an image would pop out. Does anyone remember these and better yet were you able to see the 3D image come to life. I tried and tried and tried, until finally the stars aligned for me. I recognized I needed to cross my eyes a little, make it blurry and then clear it up and that is how the image finally popped out to me.

We live in a world where right now Jesus is reigning above all things. The Scripture confirms this. “He raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” (Eph 1:20-21) The problem is right now his reign at times feels like staring at the magic eye and waiting to find it. We stare and squint, and if we look hard enough sometimes we see it. We pray and serve, and every now and then his hand pops up reminding us he is above all things for our sakes. I consider the Gospel activity going on in Communist China and above the rulers and rules of the world - the King of Kings is having his way.

I love the lesson for today because it pictures a time when you will no longer have to squint, stare, and wonder where the reign is. Identifiably all will see him, all will know him. Every knee shall bow whether by choice or by force for the return of the king. v.6, “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.” What I find is that *The reign and authority of the King will be unmissable*. Which is why you never have to worry if he has already come, or if we have to search out and find him. Like a spotlight shining in your eyes you will not miss it.

But the question that is pervading through every end times thought is this. Are you ready for that reign? To which you may ask, “How can I be ready?” This is also in the lesson v.7-8, “For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)” First of all this is where I get the concept that our God is a party God. One picture of eternity is an eternal wedding banquet and feast. But what does it say about us. The church is to be like a bride who made herself ready.

Do any brides remember their wedding day and the preparations to walk down the aisle? You buy a dress correct. Do you know on average brides spend around \$1600 on that dress according to the Knot. I remember being on the other end of one brides preparation. My bride had a beautiful dress. She went with her mother to Minneapolis, and it hit her, spoke to her. I still remember how she wore her hair down with curls because she knew I would like that. She was ready for her wedding day - as I assume you also were or will be.

So in our lesson there is a reference to bright white linens. And if this was the only passage about salvation we have we might think we save ourselves through good works. But are we saved by our good works? It's a good thing we interpret Scripture as a whole and take confusing passages in light of clear ones. Like how Abraham got ready. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Ro 4:3) Through faith Abraham was credited with righteousness. Because Abraham wasn't righteous in and of himself. He was a sinner who slept with someone who wasn't his wife.

And what about us. Do any of us have the righteousness God requires? Can we buy them through our actions. "There is no one righteous, not even one." (Ro 10:3) And we see this all the time. In what we say, think, and do. So how will we be made ready? The same way that Abraham did, the same way all the believers did. Through faith. "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." How do you get ready for the reign? Faith is the answer. *Faith grants us the white linens of Christ's righteous acts.*

This was so clear to me when preaching my very first sermon. It was of the wedding banquet. The King was throwing a feast and he wanted all to come. Many refused saying they were too busy, but some did come. But when the King came down to the wedding he saw someone not wearing the proper dress. And he threw him out of the banquet. What does this represent. In that age it was customary to give the wedding attire as a gift. So if someone wasn't dressed properly they rejected the gift the host gave. They didn't have faith in the righteous one, but clung to their own righteousness which was like wearing stained filled clothes to a pristine wedding. And he was thrown out of the wedding feast.

So perhaps a better question than how do we get ready is what is the state of your faith life? Just curious on a scale of 1-10, 10 being strong where would you be? What is the state of your prayer life, and devotional life? What is the state of your worship life? Where are you at in serving the Lord and offering yourself as a living sacrifice? Based on your years of following the Lord have you moved closer to him? Are you as mature spiritual as you should be based on your opportunities to grow? One of the greatest warnings we have in Scripture about not being ready is this, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Mt 7:21) The reality is that each of us has room to grow closer - no matter where you're at this is true.

And how do we grow in faith. It's not by trying harder and doing more. It's by dwelling deeper in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. It's finding in him an answer for all of our unrighteousness. Another picture of Jesus in Revelation is this, "His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God." (19:12-13) That robe dipped in blood reminds me of the blood he shed for us on the cross. The blood that makes us clean of all our unrighteousness. There is the King of glory I know wearing many

crowns - so grand that his name is kept to himself - that's how cool my Savior is. This is the Savior calling you again to look to him for mercy and grace, forgiveness and peace. He is yours.

And something marvelous happens when we find ourselves in Christ. Reminds me of apple trees. My wife recently updated her Facebook status from our time at County Line. How do the branches of the apple tree produce apples? They simply stay connected and they will produce. That's what God says we're like, "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." *Stay connected to Jesus and you will stay ready.* In fact if you are in him it will be natural for you to produce the good works that are talked about - they will happen naturally.

But why will this reign be so great and why don't you want to miss it. I came across an article published this year called "The epidemic of loneliness." It look at American's and found that in a group of 20,000 about 47% wrestle with loneliness or feeling left out. 13% said they felt like no one knew them well. This is not just true in the States but in other countries. In the UK 41% the Tv or a pet is their major companion and they created a government position to deal with rampant loneliness. Loneliness affects us poorly - some say it is just as bad as smoking or obesity and can limit life up to 15 years. (Study in 2010 by BYU). I don't know the last time you experienced being unknown, left out, or alone.

Which is why I love the King's reign, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (21:3) It's talking about God coming into our community. Better than any workplace, better than any small town, better than any family dynamic. What we learn is *The King's reign is characterized by community with God.* It reminds me of Adam's community with God in the Garden of Eden. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day." (Gen. 3:8) Like it's cool to hang out with your best friend, but how cool will it be to hang out with God. Hey, God want to grab a cup of coffee to start the day? Hey God could you tell me a story about something you did that I have no clue about? Hey God what's your favorite food? Can you imagine?

But what if the community we long for could be ours today? What if this didn't have to be a someday, but a today type of deal. Now it will not be exactly the same as that day. But consider again one of the pictures of Jesus, "He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God." How do I have community with God? How can I now drive out the loneliness in my life. *Immerse yourself in the Word.* Now many of us know what it is to be immersed in something. You've immersed yourself in a homework assignment, a project at work, a sports activity that lasted hours to the point it controlled your emotions, binged a TV show. But honestly when is the last time you truly immersed yourself in the knowledge of God. Opened the Bible and spent hours, cranked Christian music in car moments, podcasted a sermon every day of the week, made it your goal not to miss a Sunday. Whatever the Spirit prompts for this kind of immersion follow it, and test yourself after the day, after an hour in the Word, and see if you are not changed.

I was reminded of another community during our trip to the Ukraine. One of the most powerful experiences we had was to eat with the churches after worship on Sunday. Here are pictures of what that looked like. We all sat at a long table. Everyone was there. And I didn't

speak the language, I didn't know what I was eating, but sharing food and table I didn't feel alone. It's the type of gathering that I bet if someone was missing they would know about it. The type of gathering where no one was on a phone, distracted, or looking at their watches. There were people present with one another.

You know this is what we offer as well. Feeling lonely. *Enjoy the community of church.* Imagine the member who shows up for every communion, every worship, and sticks around for every meal. Imagine a member serving regularly with others, and getting ready for events. Imagine a member plugged into the latest discipleship option, Men's Group, Women's Group, Starting Point, Bible Class, Growth Group. It's why I loved the village of Ivanka. Because in that village you had two main attractions - a school and a church. And most everyone knew and had gathered at both. We have decidedly more - but if you want a church can play a much more prominent role.

And it's not just that you'll have the better sense of community and be experiencing this picture of heaven more. What's really phenomenal - is you'll be doing everything God wants you to be doing if he returned tomorrow. You'll be connected to your Savior in faith, and assured of his righteousness. You'll be strengthened in your faith as you hear the Word and receive the Sacraments. And you will have outlets to be doing branches producing much fruit. Let it be so. For the King is coming and he's coming soon. Amen.