

## ***Prayer for Christ's Return***

Revelation 21:7-22

Summer Sermon Series on Prayer

Kenwood Baptist Church

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**TEXT:** Revelation 21:7-22

This morning we come to the conclusion of our summer series on prayer. We have looked throughout this rainy, cloudy summer at what lies beyond the clouds, and that is the Lord



Himself. We have looked each week at a way that God's people come to him in prayer. I hope your prayer life has been strengthened and broadened. I know that my own has. We have looked at: the prayer of adoration, "Be exalted, oh God"; the prayer for Christ-likeness, to be transformed into the image of Christ; the prayer of outcry against injustice; the prayer to receive Jesus Christ as Savior; the prayer for the feet of Gospel workers;

the unique high priestly intercessory prayer of Jesus; we saw Daniel on his knees, the prayer of daily devotion; we heard Jeremiah summon us to pray for the city in which we live; we heard the prayer of blessing, of parents upon the children; the prayer for healing and forgiveness; and last Sunday, we heard Nehemiah's instructions about how to pray that five second prayer on the job: "Give your servant success and grant me favor in the sight of this person."

This morning, we turn our attention to the very last prayer of the Bible, the prayer for Christ's return. It's a prayer that is expressed in a single word, *come*. When we look at the prayer for Christ's return, this prayer is an orienting, future-fixed point that should motivate and inspire our daily living in this world. Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology*, perceptively asked this question:

"Do Christians in fact eagerly long for Christ's return? The more Christians are caught up in enjoying the good things of this life, and the more they neglect genuine Christian fellowship and their personal relationship with Christ, the less they will long for his return.

"On the other hand, many Christians who are experiencing suffering or persecution, or who are more elderly and infirm, and those whose daily walk with Christ is vital and deep, will

have a more intense longing for his return.

“To some extent, then, the degree to which we actually long for Christ’s return is a measure of the spiritual condition of our own lives at the moment.”

So do just a quick, internal check. Take your own spiritual temperature. Do you long for the return of Christ? Grudem would invite us to think that if it does not register as a hot desire of our hearts, then maybe our spiritual vitality is not as strong as it should be.

We turn to this prayer for Christ's return, and the final scene of the entire Scriptures in Revelation 22. I want us to consider this morning, firstly, the reality of Christ's return; secondly the results of His return; and then thirdly, our response to His return. I especially have in view our present response in light of His future return. Let's look at this together. Three different times in the last portion of the Scripture, Jesus Christ speaks very clearly and says: “Behold, I'm coming. I'm coming soon.” The first of these is in Revelation 22:7, just a couple verses prior to our Scripture passage. The reality of Christ's return is affirmed to us in this passage. In Revelation, Jesus says, “I am coming.” Revelation 1:7 says:

*“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen.”*

In Revelation 1:8, the Lord says:

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

The reality of Christ's return is a certainty. It is a real event. It is real unlike the fantasy worlds that are made and in which we invest so much of our time. The reality of Christ's return is a fixed point, a certain reality. Jesus says in Acts 1:8:

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

After He said this to His disciples, we read in Acts 1:9:

*“... as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.”*

I imagine this cluster of disciples with their jaws down, wondering: “He just said be My witnesses to the uttermost limits of the earth,’ and He just left. What's happening now?”

Then, we read in Acts 1:10-11:

*“And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.’”*

As they are standing looking into heaven, it is as if the angel needs to remind them and us that Jesus really meant: "Be My witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth, and I will be back." You can know for certain; it's a reality; it's a personal presence; it's the same Jesus whom you saw depart. He will return. Christ's coming is not an idea; it's not wish fulfillment; it's a reality of His personal return. Jesus says that His return is not only a reality, it's not only His personal presence, but Jesus says that His return will be glorious. Fasten your theological seatbelts as we look at this one additional adjective. His return is not only certain, real, and personal, but it's glorious. Jesus says in Matthew 16:27:

*"For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done."*

The Son of Man is going to come with His angels, millions of angels attending Him, and He will come with the glory of His Father. His first coming was in humility, when the King of the universe was laid in a stone feeding trough, in a manger. His return, though, will be as He truly is, with the glory, as He says in John 17, that He possessed before the foundation of the world. Can you imagine! Let that fill your mind and heart, that Christ will return personally, with millions of angels, in the glory that causes everyone in Scripture who encounters this glory to fall on their face in worship. Jesus says He will return with this glory,

The early Christian formulation of this in the Nicene Creed, from the fourth century. I love this. It begins:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and **He shall come again, with glory**, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end."

This is probably one of the most awesome relative clauses in history. That is a paragraph-long relative clause that adds about the Lord Jesus that He will come again with glory. Just the thought of that! Doesn't that warm your heart? Wayne Grudem would say it should.

Jesus says the second time in Revelation 22:12:

*"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."*

Not only will Christ's return be personal and glorious, but with it will come the reward that is Christ's alone to give. Notice the divinity of Christ in this statement. In the Scriptures, the reward is something that is given by God alone. Isaiah 40:8-10 says:

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and His arm rules for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him."*

Isaiah 62:11 says:

*"Behold, your salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him."*

Jesus is the Son of God. He speaks in Matthew 16:27:

*"For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done."*

Christ will return in glory, and He will bring His reward with Him, an accurate reckoning. Revelation 22:13 continues when Jesus says:

*"I am  
the Alpha and the Omega,  
the First and the Last,  
the Beginning and the End."*

In Greek, the *Alpha and the Omega* means that *I am the A and the Z*. For the non-Greek speakers He says, "Let Me say this another way: *I am the First and the Last*." For those more process oriented, He says: "Let Me make this really clear. *I am the Beginning and I am the End*." Jesus says: "I stand at the absolute start of this, and I stand at the absolute ending. There is nothing that falls outside the scope of *"In the beginning God,"* and, *"I am coming soon, and I will repay according to what each person has done."* There's nothing outside the scope of Christ's authority and sovereignty. He comes with His reward, and this reward is a blessing to those who have trusted in Him, the redeemed, and it is a reckoning or recompense of judgment upon evil in the world. Jesus continues and speaks these great blessings. He says in Revelation 22:14:

*"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."*

In the imagery of Revelation, this is a washing of your garments in the blood of Christ which makes us white as snow. Jesus says they are blessed, and He list two blessings here. The first blessing is that they have the right to the tree of life. The tree of life is another of these

beginning and ending symbols in the Bible. Remember in the opening chapters of the Bible, that humanity was denied access to the tree of life. Cherubim with flaming swords were guarding access, and now, at the end of the Bible, humanity is given access through the blood of Christ to eat of the tree of life and live forever. To have access to the tree of life means that we have eternal life with Jesus; to have our robes washed means we have received forgiveness in His name; and through His death we have eternal fellowship with Him. This is the second blessing, and it is described as our being able to go through the gates into the city, the city of God, that eternal, everlasting city of which there are 12 gates, gates with no doors, and the redeemed stream into the city. Inside the city is an innumerable company of the redeemed. But, most importantly, inside the city is the Lord God Himself, and we have fellowship with Him forever. These are the blessings that Christ promises as His great reward.

His coming, though, also involves judgment. In Revelation 22:15, He says:

*"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."*

Dogs are metaphorical here and in Scripture. These are not the Golden Retrievers or the Seeing Eye Dogs that fill our hearts with joy, and that cause some kids to say, "Mommy, will my dog be there?" Those are not the New Testament dogs. The New Testament dogs are the image of that sort of dirty, scary, street dog roaming in dark alleyways. No dogs in antiquity have their shots; are all dangerous. Evil is banished outside the City of God. Notice the list of categories of people outside the City of God: those practicing magic arts or sorcery, the immoral, murderers, and idolaters. The description of those outside the City, according to Jesus, is that it's everyone who loves and practices what is false. That's the big heading. When Christ comes, and He gives His reward, He also comes with a recompense, and it's a judgment on evil and a judgment on that which is false. That is a great single image for what's wrong: everything that's false. When Christ returns and judges evil, that means that all that will remain is true. Truth stands and endures in the end, and it remains after His righteous judgment. Jesus' return is real; it is personal; it is glorious. His return comes with the certain results of blessing and reward and of judgment upon everything false.

What should be our response to His certain coming? Our response is this prayer, a longing for His coming. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus speaks to us as people. He says:

*"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."*

The morning star is the star that you see shining brightly in the morning sky. When you see that star, you know that night is over and passing away. To see Jesus as Firstborn of the new creation, we fix our eyes on Him. We see the darkness is passing. His return is certain, and

God's people respond with this imperative, this one-word prayer: *Come!* Revelation 22:17 says:

*"The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!"*

Hasten the day of Your glorious return.

In Revelation 22:20, Jesus promises for the third time:

*"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'"*

And God's people respond in Revelation 22:20b:

*"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."*

This the one word final prayer of the Bible, *"Come!"* The phrase *Come, Lord Jesus* is actually one word in the original. It's one of the Aramaic words that has made it into the Christian vocabulary. It's the word *Mar-an-atha*. In Aramaic, *Mar* means *Lord*, and when you add the *-an* ending, it makes it *our Lord*. The verbal form *-atha* means *to come*. That one word, *Mar-an-atha*, is the Aramaic way of saying *Our Lord, come*. If you want to pray the English version of this prayer, you can just pray *Come*. If you want to include the entire phrase *'Our Lord, come,'* I offer you the Aramaic version, *Maranatha*. It is one of these precious words of Christian faith, a word like *hallelujah*, a word like *amen*, a word like *Messiah*, the word *Maranatha: Our Lord, come!*

The apostle Paul uses this in 1 Corinthians 16:22. With characteristic bluntness from Paul, he says:

*"If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha."*

He starts with *"If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be cursed."* Then he adds, *"Our Lord, come."* We see Paul is shaped by the certain return of Christ.

The final prayer of Scripture, has very practical implications for us, and I want to conclude with three of them. I want to bring out three applications or implications for us from this prayer, the prayer for Christ's return.

The first application is: **The prayer for Christ's return strengthens our confidence in God's completed work.** Nothing is outside the scope of His sovereignty and plans. *"Come, Lord Jesus, here and now."* Jesus says He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Rev. 22:13); He is the author and the perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2); He is the one who began a good work in us who will be faithful to complete it (Phil. 1:6); He is the one who causes all things to work together for our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28); He is the one who upholds the universe with His Word of power (Col. 1:17 or Heb. 1:3). When you pray, *Lord Jesus, come*, you put your stake in the ground on the other end of the process and it makes you

strong in the midst of that, because all of us live in between His first coming in humility and His death on the cross, and His future coming in glory. That's our life experience. If we happen to be part of that generation that is living at the moment of His glorious return, it just means that a shorter portion of our lives will be lived in the experience of waiting for His return. If you don't pray regularly, *Come, Lord Jesus*, then your life is being lived on an open-ended, uncertain process with no secure ending, no guarantee, no focus point of where this is all going. The prayer *Come, Lord Jesus*, draws our lives inside the bookends of the Alpha and the Omega. I can't imagine living this life without that stake in the ground.

The second application is: **The prayer for Christ's return motivates our service to Christ in this world.** Some of you may be fearful that if you start praying for Christ to return, you might get spiritually lazy. I'm not worried about that. If you pray for Christ's return, what actually happens to you is the opposite; you long for His return, and you know that your work will be reviewed by Him. It makes you desire to serve Him with all your heart in this world. Again, Paul says we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in this body, good or evil.

I want to tell you about a man who was gripped by the return of Jesus Christ, and how the personal and glorious return of Christ fueled his public service and church ministry in this world. His name was Anthony Ashley Cooper, and he was born in 1801. He was known as Lord Shaftesbury, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. He had an unhappy childhood. He was neglected by his parents, and his only solace as a young man was their housekeeper Annamarie Miles who taught him stories from the Bible, taught him to pray, and led him as a young man to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Some of you might be the housekeeper in someone's life system. At age 16, Lord Shaftesbury saw a group of drunken men drop a poor man's coffin in the street, cursing and laughing as they did so. He was sickened and distraught by this. He later recalled this incident and called it "the origin of my public career." Over the next 60 years, Lord Shaftesbury labored to improve the worst conditions of the Industrial Revolution. These are just a few of his accomplishments: in 1842, he led the passing of a Coal Mines Act which prohibited underground work by women and girls and reduced the hours of daily employment by boys; in 1845, he successfully secured a bill that allowed for the humane treatment of the mentally ill, the first in history; in 1851, he led the passing of the Common Lodging Act, which addressed unsanitary and overcrowded conditions of lower income housing, and even permitted local authorities to inspect them. Lord Shaftesbury consistently crossed the boundaries of class and social status. He busied himself on behalf of chimney sweeps, flower girls, orphans, prostitutes, prisoners, handicapped, and crippled children. What motivated him? He told his authorized biographer Edwin Hodder that it was his firm conviction of the personal and glorious return of



Christ that motivated him to make a real difference in this world. These are his own words:

“I cannot tell you how it was that this subject first took hold upon me; it has been, as far as I can remember, a subject to which I have always held tenaciously. Belief in it has been a moving principle in my life; for I see everything going on in the world subordinate to this one great event. I do not think that in the last forty years I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord’s return.”

His favorite Scripture was Revelation 22:20:

“‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

His lifelong journal, to which he committed his private thoughts, was sprinkled with this quotation of Scripture written in the margins. He had the phrase, *Come, Lord Jesus*, inscribed in Greek on the envelopes he used every day. A few years before his death, he requested that Revelation 22:20 be inscribed on his tombstone. Upon his deathbed, he was heard to keep muttering, “Come, Lord Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus.”

Maybe your place of service is in the broader society; maybe your place of service is within the body of Christ; but for everyone, the reality of Christ’s personal and glorious return should fuel and drive us to serve Him with our lives. I don’t want to stand before Christ and have Christ say to me: “Why did you waste the time that I gave you in this life?” I would hate for any of us to hear that. I would hate to hand to Jesus Christ a journal that had a reckoning of the time I spent on trivialities, meaningless things, things that had no eternal significance. I would hate to present that to Jesus Christ and see Him look at me weeping and say: “You wasted it. You wasted the one life I gave you.” I do not want to hear that. I want to come toward Him like Spurgeon who said:

“It is our privilege to exhaust ourselves in the Master’s service.”

I want to come with nothing left, nothing ungiven that was given to me, and I desire the same for you. I’d like us to be less concerned about burning out and more concerned about burning up. If we are burning up for Christ, then He will renew our strength, and He will supply fresh manna. I overheard Pastor Lou walking through the hallways saying, “We need a second grade teacher,” and I thought, “Who is being called to that?” I think of opportunities to serve here. I think of opportunities to serve Christ in society. Don’t waste your life. In this simple prayer, whether you take the one word English version *Come*, or you thought you wanted it all, so you take the Aramaic *Maranatha, Our Lord, come*. It will motivate and drive you to make right decisions on where you’re spending your time. We all, myself included, need ways to remind ourselves what’s important, what matters.

Third application is: This prayer warms our love for Jesus Christ. It just does. Going back to Grudem, whom we quoted at the beginning: “To some extent, then, the degree to which we actually long for Christ’s return is a measure of the spiritual condition of our own lives at the moment.” When we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” it warms our love for seeing Him.

I remember when I made the largest purchase I had ever made in my life. It was the engagement ring for Christine. I had never spent that much on anything. I was worried about losing it, so I added it to my insurance policy. I was preparing to give her a *hold the weekend* speech, but she cut me off and said, “You know, I need to have a little bit of time to think. I need to be away from you.” I think she sensed where I was headed with my *hold the weekend* speech. I’m thinking she might take a long weekend away, but she said, “I’m going to go to Israel for four months.” I thought, “WHAT!” and during that four-month period, I can tell you, I longed to see her. I had the ring, though of course she hadn’t said yes; she hadn’t even let me ask the question. But I had the ring, and I was trusting God, but the reality of her return actually motivated me in the interim. It didn’t make me less zealous in my pursuit. I wrote; I called; I prayed; I even learned modern Greek. I did everything I could think of to do in the interval to use my time wisely. I didn’t want there to be any chance that she would return say, “I’m busy, I don’t have a free weekend any time soon.”

*Come, Lord Jesus* is the last prayer Bible. It’s a short prayer, but it should be one of our vital prayers: *Come, Lord Jesus*. Will you embrace praying this more regularly with me? Come, Lord Jesus, and may the promise and certain reality of Your coming motivate my service to You in the world; may the reality of Your coming strengthen my faith that the ending is real and clear. Come, Lord Jesus. May it warm my heart to give all I have for You and Your cause and invest my life in things that have eternal significance. Would you pray with me?

*Maranatha*, we pray. Our Lord, come. Come, Lord Jesus and fill our hearts with the vision of Your coming. Lord, we ask You to come now and complete the work that You have begun in us. We ask, Lord Jesus, that the anticipation of Your coming would motivate and empower our service. Lord, help us to be less concerned about burning out and more concerned about burning up for You, to give our all to the service of the King. You are worth every moment and every effort. Father, we pray that You would stir our hearts with this one word, frequent prayer to come, that our hearts would be warmed with love for You, that our service would not be a duty but a delight, not an obligation, but a joy. We pray that You would come, Lord Jesus, in our midst. Teach us to pray, Lord. We thank You for this series and the ways You have taught us and drawn us closer to You. We love You, Lord. We love You. We pray together, *Come, Lord Jesus*. Amen.