

Our God Reigns

Revelation 1:4a-8

Introduction

The date is October 22, 1844. It is just before midnight.

- You and I are standing on a hillside in northeastern New York. We are surrounded by an enormous crowd of people. There are more than 100,000 men, women and children gathered around us.
- We listen carefully as the people around us share their stories – tales about how they have sold their homes, given up their jobs or abandoned their farms just so they could be here on this night.

Standing at the top of the hill, where everyone can see him, is a lone figure – a man named William Miller. He is the leader of this large group of people.

- He has spent more than 40 years of his life studying and teaching the Scriptures.
- Based on this study, he has concluded that tonight – October 22, 1844 – at midnight – Jesus is coming back.
- The second coming, the rapture – whatever you want to call it ... Tonight is the night!

Midnight came and went. As the minutes passed by, slowly, sadly, certainly reluctantly, the crowd began to drift away. Some, who have wagered their entire livelihoods on the truth of Miller's words, hesitated a little longer looking skywards expecting at any moment that they would see, in Jesus' own words ...

... the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. (Matthew 25:31)

But as we know, some 180 years later, it was not to be. Jesus did not return that night.

- Nor has He returned on any of the other 82 dates that have been predicted and documented in past history.
- If you are interested and want to start getting ready, the next predicted date is in October 2028, just under three years from now.
 - But you probably should know that the person who made this prediction did so in a term paper he wrote for his online ministry degree program.
 - He was doing the program online because at the time he was serving 30 years in prison for his conviction on 58 felony counts.
 - You may not want to trust that prediction either. But it is up to you.

Of course, it is easy for us to dismiss the Millerites of the 19th century as misguided and misled.

- And most of us look with a wry and patronizing smile at those who carry banners proclaiming that the end of the world is near.

But are we in danger of losing sight of the fact that our Savior will return one day?

Do we really believe that:

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. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

One devotional writer made this observation:

Many of us can trust God when we look at the past and remember the ways grace and peace have been supplied even in the most difficult of circumstances.

- The present is busy, but if forced, many of us might admit how seldom we pause in order to see God's hand at work sustaining our world and guiding our lives.
- Yet, uncertainty about the future is where many draw up short of breath and break into a cold sweat. The future, with its daunting possibilities and enormous uncertainties, contains a frightening number of unknowns. Both things under our control and things out of our control can frighten us when it comes to the future.

For too long the church has shrunk away from the future as if God held only the present and the past in his hands. This passage points us toward the future so that we can face it, not only realistically, but also with hope.

This is the final sermon in my series titled "I Am Convinced." Final, not because I have run out of things to say, but final because next week starts Advent and a whole new series. Next week we start to talk about how Jesus came the FIRST time. In a manger. In Bethlehem. To Mary and Joseph. With shepherds in the fields nearby.

But today is "Christ the King" Sunday, and today we talk about the end of the story. Not the Bethlehem beginning, but the day when God declares His final victory over sin, death and the devil and sends Jesus back to earth for the second time to take all who profess faith in Jesus back to heaven with Him.

Today we proclaim:

I am convinced that Jesus is coming back soon.

How soon? Well, I have to confess that I don't know. But I am in good company, because the Bible tells us that even Jesus doesn't know.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matthew 24:36)

But even if I cannot tell you the exact moment, it is still appropriate for me to teach the truth that Jesus will come again. To do that, I want to give you THREE WORDS.

WORD #1: TENSION

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, he talked about this tension in his life. He expressed in terms of living vs. dying, but it is the same tension. Here's what he said:

For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. (Philippians 1:21-24)

Part of me wants Jesus to come back now. The other part wants Him to wait.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we always live with this tension.

- On the one hand: What could be better than being in heaven with Jesus?
 - And so I pray: "Come Lord Jesus!"

- But on the other hand: If Jesus comes back now, there are some people I care deeply about who will headed in the opposite direction.
 - And so I pray: "Not yet, Lord, not yet."

As Paul says, we are "torn between the two desires."

Which leads me to word #2:

WORD #2: READY

Every once in a while someone will ask me if I believe in "death bed conversions." That is, do I think that if someone uses their dying breath to confess their sins and ask for God's forgiveness, that God will be gracious in that final moment and take them to heaven.

- My answer is "yes." And I point to the story of the two thieves on the cross as my proof.

Today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:43)

My concern is not the death bed person. My concern is for the person who lives their lives doing all the church-y things, talking the church-y talk. That is the person described in Matthew 7 like 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. Many

will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23)

There was a church campfire song that was popular back in the dark ages when I was a kid that expressed this same hope:

A man and wife asleep in bed
She hears a noise and turns her head
He's gone
I wish we'd all been ready
Two men walking up a hill
One disappears and one's left standing still
I wish we'd all been ready
There's no time to change your mind
The Son has come and you've been left behind
(*"I Wish We'd All Been Ready."* Lyrics used by permission CCLI license #6367165)

Very early in my ministry, my dad and I were both on the ministerial roster for our synod, so there were two Tom Brodbecks, distinguished by our middle initials (L & M). There were also two pastors named Mike Brown, also distinguished by their middle initials (L & R). An older pastor near me could never remember who I was, so he would always ask me "Now, which Mike Brown are you?" I would always answer "Michael R."

When Jesus comes back, I don't Him to say "Who are you? I don't know you." No, I want to be ready. Because I AM CONVINCED that one day He is coming back.

WORD #3: URGENT

If we are truly convinced that Jesus will one day return, then as His disciples, we have the responsibility to share this hope with others so that they may also look forward to His return.

There is a story about a young man who was interviewing for a job in a movie theater. Near the end of the interview the manager asked, "Suppose the theater caught on fire one night when you were working. What would you do?"

The young man responded, "Oh no need to worry. I could get out just fine."

Sometimes there is a sense of that when it comes to the return of Christ. "Hey, I'm good. What else matters?"

If you read my T-Mail this week, you saw a statistic that startled me, and so I shared it with you. At my niece's wedding last Sunday, I met a man who works in the Bible translation field, helping to put the word of God into the language of one of the

unreached people groups. He told me that there are 1700 languages that still do not have a Bible in their own language.

- Statistics from the end of 2020 estimate that nearly 5.3 billion people do not confess faith in Jesus Christ.

How many people do you know that would be in that number? They may be nice people ... but would Jesus say "I don't know you" to them?"

If we are CONVINCED that Jesus is coming again, there needs to be an urgency to reaching out to them with the Good News of Jesus Christ. You might know how to get out of the theater, but they don't.

APPLICATION

As you probably know last weekend I got to meet and hold my newest granddaughter. Her name is Quincey. Quinn for short. She is grandchild #7. Those seven grandchildren range in ages from 10 to three weeks.

I don't know if Jesus will come back in my lifetime. Or in Quinn's lifetime.

- I am disgusted with the mess this world is in right now, and the thought of it getting even progressively worse through Quinn's life...? Wow. I don't like to think about that.
- I don't know when. But I do know that He will. I AM CONVINCED of that truth.

And I know that the date is 2000 years closer than it was when the words of our Scriptures were written.

Are you ready?

Amen