

“Soon” (Revelation 22)(12.24.21)

Revelation 22 (NIV84)

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

⁶The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

⁷**“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”**

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had

been showing them to me.⁹ But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

¹⁰ Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. ¹¹ Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has 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 him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let

him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: "**Soon**"

INTRODUCTION:

A seven-year-old boy is looking forward to his eighth birthday. He has been asking for a bicycle. Mom and Dad have promised to get him a bike for his birthday. Finally, his birthday comes. There are no presents in the morning. He waits in his room

hoping that his father will be bringing a bicycle when he gets home from work. The boy plays 45 rpm records on his phonograph while he waits. He watches the records go round and round and he sings with the well known songs. The day is long, but the boy is confident. His father promised. Tick, tick, tick, the long awaited time will be here soon.

In this last chapter of our Bibles, the word "soon" is used in verses 6, 7, 12, and 20. In verse 10, we are told the time is near. Throughout the Book of Revelation, the nearness of the consummation of human history is trumpeted. Jesus Himself, promises, "I am coming soon," four times. Then all things will be made new.

In fact, SOON, is the very point of Revelation. When we take a class about effective writing, we are taught that we need a topic sentence. We need to state our premise right up front so that the reader knows what the major point is – why you are writing and what you want to convey.

Revelation 1:1 (NIV84) The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must soon take place**. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. Then two verses later we read – for the time is near.

BODY:

The tension is obvious. Is nineteen hundred years soon?

The preacher's reflexive response is to trot out St. Peter's words - 2 Peter 3:8 (NIV84) But 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...Are you tired of that example? I almost think that I am. It almost seems like a cop out.

But it is not. Peter was addressing our very concern. 2 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV84)

³First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Then a reason for the delay is given. 2 Peter 3:9-10 (NIV84)

⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish**, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements

will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

If Christians in the very early days of the Church wrestled with waiting, we can take some comfort in our wrestling too. Though many generations have thought Jesus' coming was imminent, each of them have been disappointed, so far.

While I was hesitant to begin studying this book of Revelation, to preach it on Sundays, and teach it on Tuesdays, I now believe Jesus' promise of soon, will be soon. That is soon in its most simplistic and literal meaning. Through these 12 weeks of studying, I know a lot more about Revelation. My reasoning for my reluctance has been confirmed; but, at the same time, the value of this time investment has been affirmed.

The challenge for our day and time is not only the passing of two thousand years. We are infatuated with time. Clocks are everywhere. They are on our computer screens; they are on our cable box or satellite TV box; they are in our cars; they are on our phones, which we always have with us; we wear them on our wrists; we wear them as jewelry. Our schedules are jam-packed and we seemed to be ruled by the clock. Not at Emmaus Church, but in many, heaven forbid that church

should run long and interfere with lunch plans or football games.

This week, I received an email from Chosen People Ministries that offered a chart on the seven Jewish Feasts. There is an overview of each feast and some scripture background. Then each feast is listed with its season; original significance for Israel; prophetic significance; biblical promise; and the last column is fulfillment. After a few glitches I was able to download the chart.

In the Coming Convergence documentary we watched in Tuesday Bible Study, we heard theologians positing that prophecies associated with the four spring feasts were fulfilled in Jesus' first coming. That is the season we are celebrating now, Christmas, Jesus' birth.

Then Russ found a video on youtube that we watched about dating the birth of Jesus. Dr. Heiser, using Revelation 12 and historical astronomy (not astrology, astronomy), calculated Jesus' birth as September 11, 3 BC. According to Heiser's research, this date for Jesus' birth also resolves other historical so-called discrepancies.

Near the close of this 10-minute video, Heiser also addresses biblical prophecy and mentions the Feast of Trumpets relating to Jesus' birth. Now, I was confused because in the Coming Convergence

documentary, they categorized the Feast of Trumpets prophecy as yet to be fulfilled. So, I was examining my Seven Jewish Feast Charts and trying to determine how this can all be true.

Unable to figure out my dilemma, I was wondering if there was someone I might be able to call that could help me. It came to me that Dr. Jeff Siegel might be the one to put the puzzle pieces together for me. Jeff came here to Emmaus on Easter of 2018 and shared with us how understanding the Jewish Festival of Passover gave us a deeper appreciation of Easter. He is a Messianic Jew, a follower of Jesus, who was working for Chosen People's Ministries.

I still had his cell phone number in my contacts, so I called him. He answered on the second ring and I re-introduced myself. He very graciously took the time to speak with me. Before I got to my questions, I asked him how he was doing.

Jeff was very eager to tell me about all that God was doing in his life and ministry and enthusiastically shared for at least 15 minutes. In 2018, he left Chosen People Ministries and started Burning Tree Ministries. They are doing evangelism and humanitarian aid across the world. Mostly, he is working in the Philippines, Israel, and Cuba.

Jeff told me that God is working in all those places and they are reaching many people for Christ. He said that revival is happening, that the Spirit of God is working. Jeff has seen miraculous healings and people slain in the Spirit. It's as if they are writing another chapter – Acts 29.

This news was a great encouragement to me. Jeff told me that America is not ready or ripe for revival. There may be pockets of possibility, but the major issue for America was that though there are many believers in Jesus, there are not many followers of Jesus. People are not being obedient. People are not sharing their faith. People are not evangelizing. We are not obeying Jesus' parting Great Commission to go and make disciples.

Then, Jeff invited me to go to Cuba with him. He said pastors need to see what God is doing. They need to have the passion and be filled with the Spirit. So, I had called Jeff to ask about Jesus' second coming and how the prophecies relating to the Seven Feasts of Israel might help discern how SOON that might be – and Dr. Jeff Siegel tells me all about evangelism, sharing the good news of Jesus throughout the world.

We discussed my questions and the prophecies. There were no conclusions, but Jeff agreed to watch the Dr. Heiser video and let me know if he

had any more insight. I had not gotten what I hoped for...or so I thought.

I was reading a book titled "And the Lamb Wins: Why the End of the World is Really Good News," by Simon Ponsoy. He reminded me of Matthew 24:14 (NIV84) where Jesus tells his disciples, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." And, in Acts 1:8 (NIV84) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Is that the SOON? When we have shared Jesus with the half of the world that has not heard Jesus' name? My friends, that's 3.5 billion people. Maybe we need to put ME in the middle of SOON: SO ME ONE. Me needs to tell someone. I need to tell someone. I need to tell every one. Every follower of Jesus needs to tell some one, soon; soon and very soon.

I came across this wonderful story of evangelism in a book called *A Million Ways to Die: The Only Way to Live* by Rick James. He was the publisher of CruPress, the publishing arm of Campus Crusade for Christ. The heading over this opening story is "Better Off Dead:"

“As the story goes, in 1972, a young Egyptian businessman lost his wristwatch, valued at roughly \$11,000 [today that is almost \$70,000]. That’s some wristwatch. It’s amazing that anyone who found it in the rough-and-tumble city of Cairo would have attempted to return it, and it’s shocking who did.

The city of Cairo has its own unique version of poverty called the Garbage City: a city in the sense that an ant farm is a city. The population of this slum lies somewhere between fifteen and thirty thousand people, though no one really knows for sure. Its name comes from the fact that it is both a garbage dump and home for the city’s garbage workers. Each morning at dawn some seven thousand garbage collectors on horse carts leave for Cairo, where they collect the many tons of garbage left behind by the city’s seventeen million waste-producing citizens. After their day’s work they return to the Garbage City, bringing the trash back to their homes, sorting out what’s useful, and living in and among what isn’t. In Muslim countries there are certain religious restrictions on sifting through refuse, so the inhabitants of the Garbage City are either nonreligious or of some kind of Christian heritage, typically Coptic. These are the poorest of the poor—outcasts among outcasts.

As you can imagine, it would be unthinkable to have such a valuable timepiece returned by a member of Garbage City. Yet when the wealthy businessman lost his watch, an old garbageman dressed in rags returned it, saying, "My Christ told me to be honest until death."

Because of this act of obedience-faith-death-insanity, the Egyptian businessman later told a reporter, "I didn't know Christ at the time, but I told [the garbageman] that I saw Christ in him. I told [him], 'Because of what you have done and your great example, I will worship the Christ you are worshiping.'"

The man, true to his word, studied the Bible and grew in his faith. Soon he and his wife began ministering to Egypt's physically and spiritually poor, leading thousands to Christ. In 1978, he was ordained by the Coptic Orthodox Church and is now known as Father Sama'an. Father Sama'an leads the largest church of believers in the entire Middle East; each week some ten thousand believers meet together in a large cave outside the Garbage City.

For this garbageman, returning the watch was not martyrdom, but it certainly was a kind of death. I'm sure everything in him wanted to keep that

watch—everything except his heart, which wanted to keep Christ.

In John 12:24 Jesus states that “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Beginning with his own death, what Jesus is describing here is the secret ingredient of kingdom growth. Death. Death is the fertilizer, the turf builder. The kingdom sprouts out of our daily choices to “die to ourselves.” You plant an \$11,000 Rolex in the dirt and out of it grows the largest church in the Middle East. Our willingness to die to ourselves and carry our crosses every day indicates the mechanism of personal transformation and evangelistic growth.

This is not mysticism, poetics, or philosophical abstraction. This is reality. It’s as daily and as tangible as doing the dishes for someone when you don’t feel like doing the dishes for someone. Every act of dying, done in faith, generates life in some way whether we see it, recognize it, or simply take it by faith. And how do we spot the many possible ways that life might emerge through our little deaths? We can find these opportunities in just about anything our flesh tries to resist.”

CONCLUSION:

In my closing, I will contrast for you the closing of the Old Testament with the closing of the New Testament.

Malachi 4:1-2, 5-6 (NIV84) *The Day of the Lord*

4 “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

⁵“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else **I will come and strike the land with a curse.**”

Then the scriptures are silent for 400 years.

Revelation 22:20–21 (NIV84)

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “**Yes, I am coming soon.**”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Then the scriptures are silent for 1900 years as the Apostle John wrote Revelation near the end of the first century.

The word for soon can also be translated quickly or suddenly, meaning without warning. But even from a very literal perspective, there is a tension between Jesus promising to come soon and the prayer: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The silence after the Old Testament is broken by the proclamation of the Messiah's first coming, his birth as baby Jesus. The silence after the New Testament will be broken by a trumpet blast: 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 (NIV84)

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷After 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.

¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Come soon, Lord Jesus, soon.

My brothers and sisters, who are you going to tell while you wait? {pause}

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.