

NOVEMBER 27, 2022, SUNDAY DEVOTIONAL

CENTERING PRAYER FROM REVELATION 4:11

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."

SCRIPTURE FOCUS:

A. JESUS' PROMISE: REVELATION 22: 12

"See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

B. THE CHURCH'S PRAYER: REVELATION 22: 17

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."

And let everyone who hears say, "Come."

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

C: JOHN THE ELDER TESTIFIES TO THIS VISION: REVELATION 22: 21-11

20 The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

BLESSED THOUGHTS: "THE RETURN"

According to the Nicene Creed, our faith in Christ includes this promise.

...he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in his glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. ... We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Well, that's always been a part of our faith, from Bible days until now. But it's been almost 2,000 years since Jesus made that promise, and so far, he hasn't come back in the dramatic fashion Revelation promised. In fact, only about 40% of American Christians think he will return by 2050! I hate to be guilty of false advertising, so before I endorse this great teaching, I owe you a critic's reason for *not* believing it.

Orthodox Judaism believes that the Messiah will achieve all of these promises found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Build the Third Temple (Ezekiel 37:26–28).

Gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel (Isaiah 43:5–6).

Usher in an era of world peace. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall man learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4)

Spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one. As it says: "God will be King over all the world — on that day, God will be One and His Name will be One" (Zechariah 14:9).

Christians counter that, on his return, Jesus will do just that. But one Jewish School in Jerusalem wonders: "Why couldn't God accomplish these goals the first-time round?" So, yes, there is a reason for the wide-spread skepticism regarding "The Return."

But then along came the Anglican Bishop and Bible Scholar, N. T. Wright, and his amazing books on the Christian faith today. It was Bishop Wright who captured the essence of “The Return” by showing—from Scripture—that when Jesus comes back, he will bring all his faithful followers with him in a sort of mounted posse, and it will be our job to restore creation as it was always meant to be—here on earth. Remember that God has almost always chosen to work through human hands! Noah had to build his cargo vessel. Moses had to raise his rod for the waters to part. The great prophets had to use their voices to bring God’s message. And Jesus had to bring the fullness of God in his own human flesh and blood. Bishop Wright says that all of God’s promises will be kept, but they will be done by humble servants such as you and me—after we have been ourselves healed and restored and fully equipped in the Age to Come. Only then will that Age to Come, like the New Jerusalem, descend from heaven to earth!

I find this interpretation to be a wonderful revelation of Revelation! Just think. If Jesus had returned—as originally promised—shortly after his death and resurrection, he would have had only a few thousand helpers. But now, he will have millions and millions! Who will be able to stand against such an army? During World War 2, the United States had over five million people in its military. Jesus’ Peace Army will have many, many times that, and I, for one, am excited!

One more thing. The Greek word for “the Return” is “parousia,” and this word occurred as early as the 3rd century BC to describe the visit of a king or dignitary to a city – a visit arranged in order to show the visitor’s magnificence to the people. I believe we need to remember: The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is coming with all the blessings of God! And, for the first time in human history, this Return will be telecast from Jerusalem to every country and to every city and village on earth. It will be live streamed on the Internet and CNN will show it as Breaking News! Even if we’re still down here when it happens, you and I will be part of it.

I think it comes down to this. Yes, I know that many generations of believers have been disappointed that the Return did not happen in the First Century A.D., or in 1000 A.D. or in the violent uproars that followed the Reformation and the French and later Russian Revolution and World War I and World War II. But do you really believe that God is a liar? Or has your own personal experience—like mine—convinced you that the motto on American coins, “In God we trust,” is the truth?

Think about that the next time you say the Apostle’s Creed which stresses this key part of our faith:

Do you believe in God?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, **and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

PRAYER

If I believed that you would return at any moment,
there would not be one homeless person in a bus shelter,
nor one addict untreated,
nor one refugee unwelcomed,
nor one lonely person I wouldn't visit,
nor would I be afraid to die,
and I certainly wouldn't be afraid to live as you teach us to.
Maybe that's the problem about believing and praying for your soon return:
it would upset my comfortable life.
So, Lord, give me an extra dose of The Spirit to help me pray:
Even so, Lord, come! Amen

–Pastor Barry wrote this during the first snow fall of 2022