

“Living as Maranatha People”—Matthew 24:43-44

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Living as Maranatha People”, is Matthew 24:43-44 → Jesus says: *But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.” This prayer, referred to many times as the “common table prayer,” is familiar to many people as it was used before meals in their homes. In fact, it could even be more familiar to many Christians than the Lord’s Prayer!

What exactly are we asking in this prayer? Since it is usually placed within the context of sharing a meal it would be natural to think of “these gifts” as the food about to be eaten. The practice of praying before mealtime may come from 1 Timothy 4 where it refers to receiving food *that God created . . . with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth* (i.e. Christians) *for it is made holy by the word of God **and prayer***. (cf. 1 Timothy 4:3-4)

It is interesting how the prayer is asking Jesus to be a present guest in the midst of those sharing that meal. The prayer actually gives the meal a reverent atmosphere when one reflects on what it means for Jesus to be our guest. Are the words, conversations and actions shared around that meal respectful of His presence? Or does He watch us yell at each other in anger, spout off self-righteous, contemptuous judgments of others and even crush the spirits of those around us with verbal, emotional and even physical abuse?

This mealtime was considered so “sacred” at one time that no one was allowed to leave the table without “returning thanks” at the end of the meal with the words: *O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever.* (cf. Psalm 136:1 KJV) One house I visited even reinforce the meaning of this “table grace” by a plaque hanging above their dining room table which read: “Christ is the Head of this house; the unseen Guest at every meal; the silent Listener to every conversation.”

The prayer uses a phrase taken from the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 Paul includes *Our Lord, come!* in his final greetings. The word is “maranatha,” used only here in the Scripture. However, his use of this word goes much further than simply sharing a meal. It has to do with Jesus’ coming with His saving work for sinners and it’s importance for His coming on the Last Day.

Our text records some of Jesus’ teaching to His disciples in response to

their inquiry about His 2nd Coming in Matthew 24:3 → *Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?* It's the same question asked by many of His disciples over the past 1900+ years! Our text is a continuation of Jesus' teaching answering the "when" part of the question: *But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.* (cf. Matthew 24:36)

Over and over the Scriptures reinforce Jesus' command in verse 44 of our text: *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.* It comes after numerous examples of the suddenness and unexpectedness of God's acting in the lives of people. His teaching is meant to move us to watchfulness so that day does not catch us off guard in unbelief and unrepentance. This is the point of His example of *the master of the house* and *the thief*. If he knew *in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.* (cf. verse 44) However, since thieves arrive unannounced we must be watchful, living as "maranatha people."

Maranatha people? How does one live as a maranatha person? The word "maranatha" is actually a Greek transliteration of two Aramaic words which can be translated three ways:

- ① It could be used as a prayer: "Our Lord, come." This is actually the

prayer of all creation and especially Christians as spoken about in Romans 8:19-23 → *The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* It expresses the desire to take part in the bodily resurrection on the Last Day at the restoration of all things and live eternally with Jesus! It is reflected in the response to Jesus' words in Revelation 22:21 → *"Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

- ② Maranatha could also be used as a statement of faith: "Our Lord is come." In this statement we confess the incarnation—that God has come in the flesh in the Person & Work of Jesus. It is reflected in the familiar hymn of the Incarnation—Christmas season—"Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King." (#387 LSB) This is the faith to which Jesus calls each of us in order to be ready to meet Him on the Last Day. It is reflected in a life of humility by repenting of your sins and

trusting in His blood bought forgiveness on the cross. It is also expressed in how you act as His servants while waiting for His return. (cf. Philippians 4:4-6; James 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:7; Romans 13:11-12; 2 Peter 3:11-13) It is impossible to pray as a maranatha person—to pray “Come, Lord Jesus!”—without confessing as a maranatha person with the words, “Our Lord is come.”

- ③ The other translation of maranatha is “Our Lord comes.” It could be an expression used by Christ’s people referring to His coming to us daily and regularly with His grace, forgiveness of sins and Holy Spirit’s power for witness to His Person & Work. In giving His Church the command to *make disciples of all nations by baptizing* in the name of the Triune God and *teaching* obedience to Him, He gives the promise, *I am with you always, to the end of the age!* (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) Jesus comes among His people as they gather together in His name according to His promise in Matthew 18:20 → *For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.* He is present amongst His gathered believers as they partake of His Supper together. This too is a confession of His incarnation in light of His coming again on the Last Day. The anticipation and longing expressed in this early Christian prayer is reflected in 1 Corinthians 11:26 → *For as often as you eat this*

*bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death **until He comes.***

So . . . whenever you pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed," it is more than simply a "table grace." It is a prayer which has to do with who you are in Christ Jesus because of His atoning work for the forgiveness of your sins. It has to do with who you are in Christ as a maranatha person! Living as a maranatha person is "staying awake" by clinging in faith to Jesus' life, death and resurrection for you! Living as maranatha people is being ready for Jesus' 2nd Coming based upon faith in His incarnational coming, sustained by His coming with His presence in your daily life through His Word and sacraments! Amen.

*May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely,
and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

He Who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

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