

## *Maranatha!*

There is an interesting word Paul uses to conclude his letter to the Corinthians: *Maranatha*. This word is a bit hard to translate into English because it really carries two different meanings. The word can either be translated as a present request: “O Lord, Come!” or has a future event: “Our Lord is coming!” Both are possible given its unique grammatical form. But rather than choosing between the two, perhaps Paul had both interpretations in mind as he encouraged the Corinthian Christians. To the Church of Corinth: “Our Lord has already come!” To the Church of Corinth: “Our Lord will come again!” The prayer of Paul then is a prayer of comfort for the present and hope for the future. *Maranatha* is both a certain reality and prayerful expectation.

With the word *Maranatha* in our minds, we are better able to encounter our Gospel reading. For Christ’s words are not meant to be a dreadful prediction as much as they are to be a hopeful conclusion. For Our Lord has indeed come already in the person and work of Christ. While on this earth, Christ told us everything we need to know concerning this world of ours. He instructed us on what to expect while expecting Him to come again. He laid out for us a picture of the End. As this End draws near, we hear in our text how the very earth itself will begin to betray us. The natural elements of the earth will turn against us. In the End, the earth will begin to rebel under the pangs of sin. No longer able to endure man’s curse, it will throw off its mortal bondage. We hear how the earth will be shaken to its foundations. The very scaffolding holding the universe in place will begin to warp and buckle and come undone under the cursed weight. The very building blocks of the universe will begin to collide, and in their friction they will cause mass disorder—earthquakes, a whole assortment of unpredictable weather patterns, pestilence, disease, mass famine and starvation. What was brought forth according to the Lord’s beauty has now become ugly and disfigured by sin. And very soon the world will not be able to bear its own reflection.

This is the world we inhabit. It is unpredictable. But its unpredictability is to be expected. Christ promised such things a long time ago. He promised long ago that darkness and tribulation were coming. Why do we live as if we didn't already know these things? Why are we ever surprised by where sin leads? Are not all these things we now experience a sign of the End Times—the pandemic, political tensions, social unrest, violence, sedition, rebellions. The world in this state cannot endure forever. Our Lord has come and He has told us as much. We should not act otherwise. All we can really do is wait. We can't stop the inevitable, but we can wait in a state of watchfulness. We are called upon to keep vigil as the earth perishes, and we along with it.

We are living in these End Times. But we live in them much like Noah and his family lived during the time right before the flood of the earth. We know the deluge is coming. We can see the end of history in sight. We don't know when exactly, but we know it is coming. We confess *Maranatha*: The Lord will come! And when that final hour arrives, we know what will happen. Christ will come again to bring an end to this present reality. He will call all of creation to give an account before Him. Afterwards, He will destroy this present earth. The elements will melt. The world came forth from nothing and to nothing it will return. In a way, we are modern day Noahs, you and I. We look to the heavens and see the clouds of darkness gathering on the horizon. We see the storm approaching. But this should not scare us. It should serve only to quicken our step and create an urgency within us. For like Noah we too are given things to do while we wait. We have our own ark to build ahead of the fatal storm. Noah had his boat, and we have ours. This is our boat, right here. We are sitting in the nave, a word meaning boat. The Church has always seen itself as both an ark, as well as a safe harbor from the storm. The Lord Himself gave us this boat as He gave His very body for the life of the world. And we board this ark through the narrow door

of the crucified Christ. We enter through His pierced and riven side where blood and water cleanse us. And once inside this holy vessel, we have nothing to fear.

We will continue to build our ark all the while calling out desperately to those we meet to come, to enter, and to find shelter. The world is slowly perishing around us, and will continue to do so until the bitter end. But in here, we are safe. In here, God makes all things new. He gives us hope of a better tomorrow. The storm will end. And so we watch as Christ has instructed us to do. But we watch with hope. And when the storm finally breaks upon us, we will keep a weather eye out for the dry land He has promised us. Even now we hope for the Paradise just on the other side of the storm. A fertile land teeming with new life and created anew just for us. This is our hope for the resurrection and the life of the world to come where the new heavens and the new earth will unfold before us in all their splendor and glory. And then we can disembark and start again. We will step out onto a virgin earth untouched by sin. And with our own eyes, we will see what God had in mind all along. This is our hope, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is what we wait for, long for, and desire with all our heart. This is why the Church will always prevail because mankind cannot live without hope. And apart from Christ there is no hope to be found. The world is quickly changing. We are indeed weary from our labors. But in hope we continue to wait, and in faith we continue to pray: *Maranatha*. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Mills