

I Am the Bright Morning Star

by Tom Macartney

Tom Macartney's sermon emphasizes the significance of Christ as the bright morning star, calling believers to watchfulness and hope in anticipation of His return.

Scripture: Malachi 4:2, Romans 13:12, 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 22:16

Topics: "Second Coming", "Eternal Reign"

Description

Tom Macartney preaches on the significance of the title 'The Morning Star' as the last title taken by the glorified Lord Jesus, emphasizing His imminent return in glory. The morning star symbolizes His coming reign and the need for believers to be watchful, prayerful, and actively longing for His return. The sermon delves into the epilogue of the book of Revelation, highlighting the final messages from the risen Lord and the emphasis on His second coming in glory.

Transcript

This remarkable Title is the last in the Bible taken by the glorified Lord Jesus, and therefore must have some special significance. In thinking about it we shall concentrate on the central issue to be found in three verses and their contexts (Rev.22:1; 2:28; 2 Pet. 1:19). Here we shall find both encouragement and challenge for this title has to do with His coming again in glory.

The morning star

What is this morning star, sometimes called the day star? It is the brilliant star which shines before the sun rises, and is seen most clearly in lands such as those in the Middle East and under clear conditions, which is why we know so little about it. It heralds a new day, and so, in its spiritual application, heralds His day when He will return to reign. It has been said that in the desert the morning star is so brilliant that it appears as though the sun were about to rise. Also is it said that He (Jesus) is the bright star which leads up to the dawn of everlasting day, and again, 'The sun when it rises summons man to his busy toil, but the morning star shines for those only who sleep not as do others, for those who watch as children of light and of the day.'

It is noteworthy that the O.T. ends with Christ as, "The Sun of righteousness rising with healing in His beams" (Mal. 4:2). And the N.T. closes with this wonderful title, "I am the bright morning star." So both Testaments close with the clearest emphasis on His coming again in glory, an emphasis largely missing among us today. But note, the morning star is seen before the sun rises and therefore only by the

watchful, who are up before dawn, so to speak, longing, praying and working for His coming.

The epilogue to the book Revelation: Rev. 22:6-21

The closing verses of this Book are a kind of epilogue, containing some final, brief messages from the risen Lord, and various promises and warnings. In the immediately preceding verses (21:1 - 22:5), we are given a kind of glimpse into eternity, with God and the Lamb reigning in the holy city over a redeemed universe, but our verse is found in the epilogue. "I am the bright morning star" is the last "I am" of scripture. We recall the revelation of God's Name to Moses as the great "I am" in Exodus 3, and the titles taken by the Lord Jesus in John's gospel, such as 'I am the light of the world,' (John 8:12) and, 'I am the resurrection and the life' (John 11:25).

We also recall Rev. 1:17, 18, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living One." And now in Revelation 22 we have in verse 13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end," and finally in verse 16, "I Jesus ... am the root and offspring of David, and the bright morning star." So here in these final verses of the Bible the Lord Jesus presents Himself to us as, "The Lord God, the almighty, who is, and who was, and who is to come" (22:13; 1:8), "The Son of Man, crowned with glory and honour", David's greater Son (Heb. 2:9), and last of all as the Victor over the darkness which has engulfed the world, "The bright morning star," ushering in the new day when God will make all things new (Rev. 21:5).

This last "I am" is clearly and closely linked with His last words, "I come quickly," or, "I am coming soon", His Coming again. Many scriptures underline both the swiftness and the nearness of His coming and urge us to watchfulness in the light of it (e.g. Matthew 24 and 2 Peter 3). These words are repeated three times in these final few verses (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20), so we should live daily on the basis that He is coming suddenly and soon. While we must beware of becoming obsessed with the details and timing of His coming, the fact of it should govern our lives, especially as many scriptures indicate that we are living in the last chapter of history, even though we do not know the length of that chapter. Note the dark background to our verse and its implications for the state of the world to which He will return. The background to Revelation is one of persecution, crisis and darkness for the Christians living then: John himself is an exile on Patmos. While many of the details of the book are difficult to understand, the overall impression given is surely of horrendous events on earth before His return. So the morning star is seen against a very dark sky. It is necessary to stress this because, in the general religious confusion which pervades the world today, we are being constantly told that the church is here to bring in the Kingdom of God, whereas the N.T. shows that this awaits the return of Christ (an event seldom mentioned). While our presence here, as salt and light (restraining corruption and dispelling darkness), should affect those around us, we are not here to 'Christianize' the world, but to be His witnesses in it. The Kingdom can only be entered by individuals, by new birth. Others believe the world is to be transformed by the preaching of the gospel and revival before His coming, but surely the world is slipping into ever greater darkness as many scriptures foresee (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 2). No, it is at the end of a very dark night that the Sun of righteousness will rise for those who fear His name, that the morning star will be seen by the watchful, and He will come!

Note also: The Lord Jesus is here speaking to the churches, to local churches, not to the church at large. We recall that the seven letters were addressed to local churches, and the whole book sent to these. It is instructive that while we are always hearing about what the worldwide, ecumenical church should do, the Lord speaks to local churches where He is honoured and listened to, and to individuals in them.

Note further, the fact that the words 'prophet' and 'prophecy' occur six times in Revelation 22 (verses 6, 7, 9, 10, 18, 19), for in dark times there is a special need for genuine prophetic ministry, that is a ministry of the Word relevant to such times. Tragically, the enemy has introduced much confusion and misunderstanding over this matter of prophecy in the church today and much harm has been done. Into this we cannot digress. We are here thinking simply of that unfolding and applying of the scriptures to our situation today, rather than the expounding of the scriptures, important as that is. To illustrate the difference: When someone explains the book of Haggai in relation to the remnant who returned from Babylon, this is teaching. But a prophetic ministry would also show its relevance to the church today. A key verse for the understanding of the word prophecy is Rev. 19:10, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The testimony of Jesus includes the witness that He bore in His person, words and works and the witness borne to Him by the Holy Spirit, the scriptures and His church. He, in all the meaning of His two comings, is the heart of all true prophecy, the test of which is its Christ-centredness. Such ministry changes the seeking heart. It is a dynamic communication of spiritual light and life. What a need there is today for such Spirit-anointed ministry, one that brings us to our knees and produces in us a quest for reality, a quest for God.

2 Peter 1:16-21

To enlarge upon our theme, we now turn to Peter's second Letter, a little letter of great importance, and to 1:19 in particular. In Ch. 1:1-11, Peter urges the importance of Christians fully entering into their salvation in life and experience. In verses 12-15 he writes of his determination to remind them continually of this, in the light of his approaching departure to be with Christ. Then follows, in verses 16-21, the passage with the reference to the morning star (or day star). In these verses Peter seeks to establish in three ways the solid ground on which Christians stand in this world of shifting sands.

(1) First we have the apostles' witness (verses 16-18). Peter reminds us of the overwhelming experience he (with James and John) had on the mount of the transfiguration ("We were eyewitnesses of His majesty"). They had a kind of preview and foretaste of His coming in glory. They had heard the Father's witness from heaven concerning His Son. They had seen the O.T. prophecies fulfilled, so to speak, before their eyes.

(2) Then there is the prophetic word, or message of the prophets (verses 19-21). (Note again the mention of prophecy, the warning in 2 Pet. 2:1 about false prophets and teachers, and the link between the witness of the apostles and prophets in Ch. 3:2).

"And we have the prophetic word made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts."

The prophetic word confirms and is confirmed by the apostles' witness. Their experience on the mount was just what the prophets had foretold, and not some dubious, subjective experience; it also confirmed what the prophets had written. Note the priority of the word. Our experience must be rooted in the word. True spiritual experience always conforms to the scriptures, but the word must be entered into by us to be of any value to us.

(3) Personal experience is the third ground of assurance. Note how the scriptures are described as a lamp shining in a dark (gloomy, dirty and squalid) place, (what a description of this world in which we live), and the urgent advice to pay attention to them. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). Note the word, "Until ... until the day dawns." What day is this? Surely, primarily, the great day of

His coming, toward which we are ever moving, but we may add that it includes the Christian's continual growth in the knowledge of the Lord, as pictured in Prov. 4:18: "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day." But note especially, "And (until) the morning star rises in your hearts." The morning star rises before dawn, so Peter is saying, "Until the day dawns, and before that, the morning star rises in your hearts." What does this mean?

The gift of the morning star: Rev. 2:28

In the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3), the Lord makes special promises to those in each church who are true to Him and victorious through Him. The promise to these in the letter to Thyatira is: "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations ... I will also give him the morning star" (Rev. 2:26-28). This last promise surely means that they will 'see' Him in their hearts as the morning star, and thus enjoy Him and His victory, before He comes, and links in with our verse in Peter.

So the significance and message of the morning star is this. In the darkest darkness, the darkest days into which the world is now moving, the darkness will be illuminated by the morning star for those Christians who are longing and watching for the dawn of His coming; "Who love and long for His appearing," as Paul puts it in 2 Tim. 4:8. The victors of Rev. 2:28 are spiritually awake before the day of His coming and so are given this added joy and thrill of anticipation in their hearts. These will not be overwhelmed by the darkness all around them. They are not just vaguely waiting for His coming, but longing, praying and working for it (and so hastening it; 2 Pet. 3:12), and therefore see Him as the morning star in the darkness before dawn. This is a spiritual privilege and blessing, this gift of seeing the morning star, which all Christians may (and should) enjoy, but evidently will only be enjoyed by some. It is also an indicator by which we may test our true spiritual condition. Are we among those who are up before dawn, longing for the day of His appearing, and so, rejoicing in the sight of Him as the bright morning star?

"The night is nearly over and the day is almost here. So let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light." (Rom. 13:12)

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