



## MARANATHA

This word, "Maranatha" is found just one time in the Bible. It is an untranslated Syrian word found in 1st Corinthians Chapter 16, verse 22, and it simply means "the Lord cometh." This is a word of greeting that early Christians spoke to one another whenever they met. If it was on the Lord's Day morning as they gathered around the Lord's table, they said, "Maranatha". When they told each other "goodbye," instead of saying "goodbye," they said, "Maranatha". It was a word of encouragement, a constant reminder of the fact that our Lord is coming back again. And now tonight we are two thousand years closer to the event than when that word was first spoken.

I'm thinking tonight of someone else who once promised to return. Many of us can remember when General Douglas McArthur spoke these words in the Philippine Islands. General McArthur never intended to leave the Philippines ; he loved it over there and the people loved him. But when World War II increased in its furor and the Japanese started to take the Philippine Islands, the President of the United States warned General McArthur that he must leave. We know that he was a very independent-thinking man and he did not want to obey the President of the U.S. Then the President of the U.S. also gave him the order to take the President of the Philippine Islands and get him out of the country safely, because they knew that certainly the Japanese would murder him if they came and caught him. And so at last, very reluctantly, McArthur obeyed the President of the U.S. , and he did remove the President of the Philippine Islands. Then on December 26th, 1941, although he hated to do it, McArthur left himself along with his wife and son. But when he left, he made this promise - in these simple words - "I will return."

During recent years, I've had the opportunity several times of being in the Philippine Islands and have had the unusual opportunity of meeting up with Americans who were imprisoned in the horrible prison camps of Santo Tomas and Los Banos. There were more than two thousand American prisoners in those two camps alone. I also had the opportunity of meeting up with several Filipino people who were in prison under the Japanese, and others who hid out in the hills all during the years that the Japanese occupied their country. Both Americans and Filipinos alike have told me that the words of McArthur were the words that kept them alive during the dark times of privation, trial and imprisonment they underwent from the time the Japanese occupied the islands clear up until 1945 when they were finally released.

They say that wherever the Filipino people met on the street or privately in their homes,

and often times in the prison camps the Americans would do the same thing - they would look at each other and they would say, "I will return." Sometimes they would whisper those words, and they would say, "He promised us - he said he was coming back." Those words of McArthur helped the people through those dark years of the war and finally on October 24, 1945, General Douglas McArthur did keep his promise; he came back and liberated the more than 2,000 American prisoners and he liberated the millions of people who occupy the more than 7,000 islands that comprise the island nation of the Philippines . He kept his promise, and consequently the people of the Philippines love him to this day, and the name "McArthur" is treated as a national hero in the Philippines just as though he was a citizen of the islands.

This evening we have a far greater general than McArthur, who has given us a promise. And what a blessed promise it is! Wherever we meet today, we ought to be saying to one another, "Maranatha." When we come together on the Lord's Day, we should say, "Maranatha." As we greet each other in the marketplace during the week, we ought to say "Maranatha," because it is a fact that Jesus Christ is coming back.

**In Acts Chapter 1, verses 9-11: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. "**

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the grandest doctrines in the Word of God. Some Bible scholars claim to have counted more than 1400 references in the Old Testament that pertain to the second coming of Jesus Christ. I cannot verify personally whether that is accurate but I do know that I have read many Bible scholars who say for sure that there are 300+ references in the New Testament scriptures to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and I am certain that those can be verified. If the Bible speaks more emphatically on one subject than another, it must certainly speak emphatically on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not know everything that we would like to know about about his second coming, but there are some things that are extremely clear and understandable about his coming again.

**I want to bring up 1st Thessalonians Chapter verses 13-18 because it is so clear: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. "**

Two things are crystal clear about the happenings of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **First** of all, dead Christians will be resurrected and caught up to meet the Lord in the air at his second coming. Now we do not know just exactly how this is going to take place, but we do know that it definitely will happen. That is an event to really look forward to - the resurrection of all of our dead Christian brothers and sisters from the grave.

Then the **second** great event that we are sure of is the lifting up, or the taking out of, or the translation as it is sometimes called, of living Christians. Personally I have always prayed, and I still continue to pray, that I will be alive when Jesus comes again. Wouldn't that be wonderful - not to have to experience physical death? And if we are alive when Jesus comes again, we will not die physically; we will be lifted up alive to meet with the dead resurrected Christians in the air and to be united with our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh what a day that will be!

**In Second Thessalonians, Chapter 1, verses 7-10: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." What a day that will be!**

**I. First of all I call your attention to the fact that the day of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be a day of revelation.**

Right now we are loving one whom we have never seen with our eyes. We are having fellowship with Him even though we have never touched Him with our hands. We are being led by Him even though we have never audibly heard His voice speaking to our ears. It is all by faith and that's why the Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please him. But what a day it will be when our faith becomes sight!

I know that all of you who have traveled in Oriental countries have learned that the parents make the marriage arrangements. Oftentimes as soon as a baby is born the parents decide that this baby, when he or she grows up, will be married to such and such a baby with another family that they know about. From the time of birth, then, the girl is betrothed to the boy and the boy is pledged to the girl. Sometimes the children will grow up and they will become adults before the parents ever pick out a bride for their son. And the girls of course - all they can do in Oriental countries is just wait for some parent to choose them to be the bride for their son. It's an unusual system, and the bride's parents must pay money to the bridegroom's parents whenever the bridegroom's parents select their daughter. In some Oriental countries, most people don't like girls; they would rather have boys because they can make money if they have boys, but they lose money if they have girls. Now there are so many strange features about this custom. I have often questioned people in India because that's where I've seen it work more than any other place. I know a young man, for example, who came to the United States and went to

Cincinnati Bible Seminary and while he was here in America his parents selected his bride. He had never seen the girl; he had never heard of the girl; he had no idea what she looked like, but when he graduated from Cincinnati Bible Seminary he returned to India with joy and eagerness to marry that young lady because he had such confidence that his parents would pick out the most beautiful Indian girl in the entire nation. He was not disappointed. He sent me a picture of his bride and she was beautiful. His parents had done a very good job.

I attended a wedding one time in India where a young couple got married and they had never seen each other until the day of the ceremony. I don't think that I ever shall get over that experience. It was really something. The bridegroom came in and he was so shy. He couldn't have been more than 18 or 19 years old, and he was so frightened, he was shaking and quivering. He did not have the courage to look at the girl he was marrying; he just kept trying to peek out of the corner of his eye and he really didn't have the courage to do that. The girl was only about 12 or 13 years old and she certainly didn't have the courage to look and see her bridegroom. They stood there before the minister and neither one would look at the other. It came time for them to repeat the vows and their voices were quivering so much they could hardly get the words out. I stayed for the reception and all during the reception they did not look at each other. Of course they did not kiss at the end of the ceremony because Indian people do not kiss in public. So all of this time, clear up to the end of the reception, they had still not looked at each other except to take a quick peek out of the corner of their eyes. Can you imagine the eager anticipation with which they looked forward to that time when they could be alone and actually meet one another and say "now who is this that I'm married to?" But of course because of their customs they have absolute confidence that their parents will do a good job of making these arrangements.

When I think about that situation that exists in Oriental countries, it makes me think of our present situation as we look forward to the coming of our bridegroom - the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the bride; we are the church. I don't know about you, but sometimes I get so excited just thinking about it. What will Jesus look like when He comes again? Don't you think about that sometimes? And isn't it exciting to think about? You know I believe I will probably be like that little Indian girl who came into her wedding ceremony so fearful and so shy that she couldn't even look up into the face of her bridegroom. What will it be like when we meet Jesus face to face. We love Him so much; we are so appreciative of what He has done to save us from our sins. Yet, when we face Him with all of his divinity and holiness and perfection, I believe personally that I will probably bow at his feet and just kiss his feet. And at first I think that I will be afraid to lift up my eyes and look at Him. I will have to hear those reassuring words spoken from His own lips that indeed my sins are forgiven before I have the courage to look into His face and see Him as He really is.

The second coming of Christ will be so much different from the first coming. When He came the first time He was a tiny baby. He was born in a quiet, unassuming manner and His tiny body was even laid in a manger where cows usually got their food. The silence of that Judean night was broken by the sounds of the crickets, I suppose, and the cows

gently lowing and perhaps the sheep as the shepherd cared for them. But a beautiful, bright star shone from heaven and pointed the way to Bethlehem's manger where the shepherds were eager to go and worship the Lamb of God. What a contrast with his second coming!

**Second Thessalonians 1:10, says, When he shall come (the second time) to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. There will be a great trumpet blast as he ascends on the clouds with all of the mighty angels. And the Bible also says that every eye shall see Him when He comes the second time. What a day of revelation that is going to be!**

**II. Secondly, I want to point out that it will be a day of reward to all Christians.**

**In Second Timothy 4:8, Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**

Now that's something that is almost beyond my imagination. You know, when I stand before Jesus there is only one thing that I can think of that I want to do and that is to thank Him a million times for dying on the cross to save me from my sins. If there is any crown there, I will want to place that crown on the head of Jesus and bow down and worship Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It's beyond my comprehension to think that Jesus is going to put on you and me a crown. We don't deserve any crown; we don't even deserve to go to heaven. We deserve to go to hell, and yet He is going to place upon our heads that crown of righteousness. Oh, what a day that will be, when we become heirs to everything that belongs to the Son. Isn't that something - to think that everything in heaven will become ours in that day when He comes back to take us there.

**III. And then in the third place, I want to point out that the resurrection day will be a reunion with all of our loved ones.** I am looking forward to seeing my Grandpa Higginbotham and my Grandma Higginbotham; and my Grandpa Thomas and my Grandma Thomas, and my aunts and uncles and so many precious Christian brothers and sisters who have died and gone on before. I know that many of you are looking forward to meeting your loved ones again. There's no doubt about it - we will meet them; the Bible makes that quite plain. In our text that we read in First Thessalonians 4, it said that the dead in Christ will rise first and meet him in the air and then we living Christians will be caught up with them. Yes we will be with them; it says very plainly that we shall meet them all in the air. What a happy time that will be when we experience that reunion with our previous loved ones.

**IV. In the fourth place, I want to point out that some people are never going to have to die.** I've already confessed to you that I have often prayed and will continue to pray that I might live to the second coming of Jesus Christ. If we are alive when He comes again: First Corinthians 15:51-52, tells us what will happen to us then: **Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead**



**shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

In a moment - in the twinkling of an eye - we shall be changed. Maranatha! The Lord is coming! Hallelujah! Won't it be wonderful? And the blind can see. Our bodies will be changed - from this corruptible body to one that is incorruptible. Won't it be wonderful when there won't be any crutches and there won't be any wheelchairs; there won't be any hospitals or any hospital beds. Nobody will need anything like that. You talk about divine healing - friends, this will be the day when it all happens - for eternity. We shall be given new bodies, glorious bodies, incorruptible bodies - just like Jesus. Oh, what a day that will be!

**V. In the fifth and final place, I want to point out that the resurrection day will be a day of judgment of the unsaved.** In Second Thessalonians 1:8, it says that He is coming in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh what a terrible day that will be for the unsaved! Those who have refused to believe on Jesus - those who have refused to repent of their sins - those who would not confess His name, those who absolutely refuse to obey him in Christian baptism, those who would not be a member of His church - oh, how terrible His coming will be for them. In flaming fire He will take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. When is this going to happen? Don't we wish that we knew? But nobody does know the date. Many people have speculated. Jesus said, "No man knows the day or the hour." He said not even the angels know. He said that only His Father knows. We only have the signs that will precede His coming that we can look to as an indication.

There are many signs that will precede His coming. **In Second Thessalonians 2:1-3: Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him. That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.**

Surely there will be a falling away first, before Jesus returns. Wow! If there ever was a time in the history of the world when people are experiencing a falling away it must be right now. To illustrate the falling away, I just clipped these articles from the newspaper yesterday. There is this article from Santa Fe, NM, telling about the worst uprising in our nation's prison system since Attica. Some of the prisoners are dead; some are missing - a very horrible event indeed. And then there's this article from yesterday's paper about the mass murderer, John Gacey in Chicago, IL, who is guilty of killing at least 33 young boys - one of the most ghastly stories certainly this century. Then what about this article - the Treasury Secretary of the United States, William Miller, has conceded that he should have done much more to uncover and stop illegal payments by Textron, Inc., when he headed the aerospace conglomerate. And what about this little side story about the former representative, Hayes from Ohio, who was ousted from the House of Representatives due to a sex scandal. Now according to yesterday's paper he is

rejoicing, getting his revenge because one of his enemies in the House who helped to oust him due to his sexual scandals has now gotten into trouble accepting a bribe of \$500,000 from FBI agents who posed as Arabs or representatives of some Arab country. Then what about this article - four state sting hits politicians, according to sources. And then there's this article about the former Representative who is now going on trial for the second time. He is 76 years old and in deteriorating health and mind and yet they're putting him on trial again because they have accused him again of taking \$55,000 in bribes from various individuals so that he might use his power as a politician to do favors for them. And we could go on and on, reading things like that from the newspaper and picking up items off TV reminding us about the falling away from the faith - from the Christian life - from the correct standards of conduct that has governed this United States of America as a Christian nation.

The most heartbreaking thing of all is the falling away from the church. I was reading this past week about a church in New York that decided to have some kind of sale - a money-raising event. The Ladies Aid in the church put up a booth at this church fair, if you can imagine - and had a big sign above the booth that said, "Miss Emily Lawson will sell her kisses for a dollar a piece." According to this news item the men lined up and they were selling those kisses like hotcakes. One man even spent \$50 in just a few minutes, collecting kisses from Miss Lawson. But then all at once someone shouted out and said, "Miss Emily needs a shave." A riot followed and they broke into the booth; somebody ripped off some of Miss Emily's clothes and it was discovered that Miss Emily was a man in disguise. And so what started out to be immoral turned out to be a fraud. All in the name of Christ - in the name of the church, if you can imagine. Well, friends, as scandalous as these things are, don't you agree with me that we are living in a day when there is a falling away? There's a falling away in our government; there's a falling away among our citizens, and there's a falling away in the church.

Yesterday is the first time that I had a chance to watch TV in a long time. I watched some of the church programs. Oh my! What a falling away there is, for sure. Can you imagine people offering to mail out a healing cloth. Yes, just send me your name and address and I'll send you back in the mail a healing cloth. You take that cloth and lay it over the part of your body that is diseased or causing you pain or something and you will immediately be healed, etc. Of my, when you think of the falling away - surely the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ must be approaching. Now we cannot set any dates, and we also recognize that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. So He might come back tonight; He might not come back for another hundred years; or it might be another thousand years. We don't know, but we know for sure that He is coming.

#### THE END OF THE WORLD?

In August 1938, our astronomers were horrified at what apparently meant the destruction of approximately one-half of the habitable globe when they observed a strange star that was charted near the earth's area and had that threatening sky-splitting marauder proceeded at the given place that the astronomers observed it, for just 24 hours, had it not by the mercy of God veered from its course at the last minute, the astronomers tell us that

the annihilation of millions of people if not the whole population of the globe would have certainly occurred. Only after the danger passed did the astronomers let us know what we had almost experienced. That really doesn't concern me very much because I know that some day it is going to happen; there's no doubt about it. Someday the promise of Jesus Christ will come true. The universe will go mad with confusion. The canopy of the sky will burst into flames. The mountains will melt and the oceans will boil dry, because Jesus Christ is going to come again. What a wonderful, happy day for Christians, because He will take us out of everything that is wrong and evil. But a sad day for those who are not Christians.

**PREPARE RIGHT NOW!**

Dear friends, this is an opportunity to prepare for His coming. This is the opportunity for you to come and accept Him as your Savior before it is too late and He becomes your judge. This is your opportunity to come on this invitation, to confess His name before men so that He might confess you before the Father in heaven. It is the opportunity for you to be buried with Him in baptism so that He might wash away your sins and forget them forever and present you then before His throne faultless in that day. Shall we stand together and sing the invitation, and will you come and accept Him as your Savior now?