

Behold I Am Coming Quickly: Patience & Persistence - Readings

A sermon by Rev. Matthew Genzlinger

Luke 11:1-10: And it came to pass, as the Lord was praying in a certain place, when He had ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And He said to them, When you pray, say: Our Father, who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is a debtor to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And He said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey has come to me, and I have not anything to set before him. And he from inside, answering, shall say, Make me not labor; the door is already shut, and my little children are with me in bed; I cannot stand up and give anything to you. I say to you, although he will not rise and give him loaves of bread because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will stand up and give him as many as he needs. And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

Apocalypse Revealed 4: “Revelation 1:1 ‘Things which must quickly take place.’ This symbolically means that they must surely come to pass to keep the church from perishing. ‘Which must quickly take place’ does not mean that the things predicted in the book of Revelation are going to happen immediately or quickly, but that they will happen surely...In the Divine view, and so in the spiritual sense, time does not exist, but instead of time, state. And because ‘quickly’ has to do with time, it symbolically means certainty and that something will happen before its time. For the book of Revelation was written in the first century, and seventeen centuries have now gone by, from which it is apparent that ‘quickly’ means, symbolically, what corresponds to it, which is certainty. Something quite similar is involved in these words of the Lord: Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened. (Matt 24:22)...We said that in the Divine view there is no time, but the presence of everything that has happened and will happen. Accordingly we are told in the Psalms, ‘A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday.’ (Psalm 90:4)”

Apocalypse Revealed 944: “Revelation 22:7 ‘Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’ This symbolically means that the Lord will surely come and give eternal life to people who keep and obey the doctrinal truths or precepts in this book, now laid open by the Lord.”

Apocalypse Revealed 949: “Revelation 22:12 ‘And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.’ This symbolically means that the Lord will surely come, and His presence is heaven and the felicity of eternal life for everyone in accordance with his faith in the Lord and his life in obedience to the Lord’s commandments.”

Apocalypse Revealed 960: “Revelation 22:20 ‘He who testifies to these things says, Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!’ This symbolizes the Lord...testifying to the gospel that He is coming as a bridegroom and husband in His Divine humanity which He assumed in the world and glorified, and that the church longs for Him as His bride and wife.”

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“He who testifies to these things says, Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20) This is one of three places in the very last chapter of the Lord’s Word, where the Lord tells us that He is coming quickly. Similarly, the book of Revelation begins with the words: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants what must quickly come to pass.” (Revelation 1:1)

The Heavenly Doctrines teach us a fascinating fact about the word “quickly.” In the Scriptures the Lord uses the word “quickly” not as a way of telling us that something will happen fast or immediately; but to let us know that something will happen certainly. Saying that something will happen “quickly” is the Lord’s way of saying that it will definitely happen. It may not happen today, or tomorrow, or this year; but it will happen in His time. He will certainly bless and give eternal life to those who keep His commandments. He will definitely lead and provide heavenly happiness to those who have faith in Him. There is no doubt that He will establish His New Church on earth with those who genuinely long for Him as a bride longs for her Husband.

Appreciating the simple fact that the Lord’s promises will certainly be accomplished, even if not quickly, can drastically change the things we choose to focus on. It can change our attitude and perspective on various challenges we face. It can also help us develop two important spiritual virtues. The first of which is patience.

We live in a culture that seems to impel the idea and the emotion that fast is good. If we are sick, we want a pill or a remedy that will ease our pain and fix us immediately. If a page on the internet takes more than three seconds to load we get frustrated and curse the screen in front of us. Even from other people we want our information fast. Attention spans are getting shorter. We don’t seem to have enough time to visit, to enjoy a meal, or even to worship together because life is so fast paced and everybody has somewhere else to be. Instant gratification and pleasure is another area where we see society as a whole pushing the notion that getting things fast or quickly is good.

On a more spiritual level we see this need for speed as well. The Heavenly Doctrines spend a lot of time disapproving of the popular idea that salvation can be instantaneous; or that our sins can be removed in a moments time. We also see a kind of spiritual need for speed, when it comes to our own worthy desire to see the good things that the Lord teaches us about in His Word, come to fruition. We can all at times get impatience when something good that the Lord has shown and promised us does not seem to be achieved fast enough or in the way that we had hoped for. In the book of Habakkuk we see this kind of impatience where we read, “How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?” (Habakkuk 1:2)

So why does it sometimes seem like the Lord is taking far too long to bring about good things in our lives? Well, one reason revolves around the wonderful teaching that when it comes to the Lord and His Divine Providence, the Lord has our eternal success and happiness in view.

The Lord certainly cares about our current struggles and states. But in His Infinite Wisdom and Love, the Lord is always taking the long view. His Foresight and Providence are always looking to provide us with eternal states of happiness and blessings. And because of this, there will be times when from our own finite perspective we may be frustrated that something good is not happening as quickly as we had hoped; and yet from the Lord's eternal perspective our apparent lack of goodness or success in the moment is really not that big of a deal. The Lord knows that at times we need to forego a relatively external kind of happiness and success in the moment, in order to achieve a more internal kind of happiness and success that will last forever. And isn't it wonderful that the Lord does this!? Isn't it wonderful that like a wise parent, despite our own tendency to complain to the Lord when things aren't happening fast enough for us or in the way we had hoped, the Lord very wisely still maintains His focus on the things that He knows will be conducive to our eternal wellbeing. In the book of Second Peter we are reminded: "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (2 Peter 3:8)

So we come back to this idea that when the Lord says He will do something "quickly," what He actually means is that He will do something certainly. Waiting for something good to happen that we genuinely do long for, can be very frustrating. But remembering that the Lord's goal is not to provide us with His goodness and blessings fast, but rather in a way that they can truly last, can help with these feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction when they do come. We should be patient, knowing that in His time, not ours, all things will be fulfilled. Everyone who has ever made the choice to be a true disciple of the Lord has had to embrace the valuable virtue of true patience. A few more passages from the Lord's Word about being patient. From Lamentations: "Jehovah is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that inquires after Him. It is good that a man should both travail and be still for the salvation of Jehovah." (Lamentations 3:25-27) From the Psalms: "I waited patiently for the Lord's help; then he listened to me and heard my cry." (Psalm 40:1) "Wait for Jehovah; hold firm and He shall encourage thy heart; wait I say, for Jehovah." (Psalm 27:14) From Isaiah: "And therefore shall Jehovah wait to be gracious unto you; and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have compassion upon you; for Jehovah is a God of judgment; happy are all they that wait for Him!" (Isaiah 30:18) And, of course, John while on the Island of Patmos said, "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in affliction, and in the kingdom and patient expectation of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 1:9)

It's fairly easy to see that patience is a virtue that comes when a person realizes that when the Lord uses the word "quickly" He is not saying that something will happen fast or immediately; but rather that it will happen certainly. Another virtue that this teaching can help us develop is the extremely important virtue of persistence.

When we think about a person being patience, sometimes we might image a person sitting back with a nice cup of tea or a beer, doing absolutely nothing. Like a person patiently waiting at a train station for the train to arrive. Or like a person patiently twiddling their thumbs as they wait for someone else to do something for them. Well interestingly, when it comes to our own spiritual growth and development, the Lord very much condemns this kind of lazy behavior. When the Lord tells us that He wants us to be patient, this does not mean that He wants us to sit back and do nothing. We may not often think of these two virtues as going together, but the Lord wants us to be patient AND persistent at the same time.

It is so intriguing that throughout the Scriptures we find these accounts where the Lord encourages what seems to be an almost annoying level of persistence when it comes to our need to approach and receive good things from the Lord. Earlier we read this fascinating parable that the Lord spoke to His disciples about a man who only gave his friend loaves of bread because his friend persistently knocked at his door, bothering him at midnight after he and his kids were in bed. Later in the same gospel, the Lord tells another parable about a woman who convinced a judge to avenger her of her adversary, only because she would leave the judge alone. (Luke 18:1-8) Often we see people being healed by the Lord only after they persistently follow the Lord around, begging Him for help. (Matthew 15:22-28, Mark 10:46-51) Or if you remember the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel, you might recall that as the dawn approached, Jacob refused to let the angel go, until the angel blessed him.” (Genesis 32:26)

Along with these more striking accounts of the Lord emboldening us to rather aggressively persist in our efforts to follow the Lord and receive His blessings, we find other passages where the Lord more gently encourages us never to give up, and to keep working towards our spiritual goals. In Galatians we read, “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9) In Hosea we read, “Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord.” (Hosea 6:3)

Now why is this kind of continual effort on our part so important to the Lord? Why does the Lord encourage us in all things to not only be patient but persistent as well? It’s simply because when it comes to making us eternally happy the Lord knows that we must choose the good things He is offering us for ourselves. The Lord knows that if He were to just yank us up into heaven or shower His blessings upon us in a moments time, without our cooperation, and without a persistent effort on our part, then eternal life, eternal happiness, and all of the things He wants to bless us with, really wouldn’t mean anything to us. Whether it’s finally being able to free yourself from some destructive habit, or experiencing a successful and loving marriage, or discovering meaning in your life by finding a way to be truly useful to those around you, the Lord’s message is that we must be persistent if we want to achieve these things. Of course, just after telling the parable about the man who persistently demanded three loaves of bread from his friend, the Lord said to His disciples, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened.” (Luke 11:10) Coming right after this parable, there is a sense in these words that we must be doing these things – ask, seek and knock – persistently. And that even if we are not always getting it exactly right, the key is that the Lord wants us to keep trying.

One last thought about being persistent, is that being persistent does not necessarily mean doing the same thing over and over again. Einstein is often credited with having defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. This is not the kind of persistency that the Lord is encouraging. What the Lord wants us to be persistent in, is our own pursuit of His goodness and truth. Sometimes this means holding firm and following through with your efforts even when it’s hard and you feel like giving up. But other times this means being willing to let go; being willing to adjust and change something that obviously is not working. Not necessarily with a sense of failure, but with a sense of excitement and intrigue as we look to find better ways that we can serve and follow the Lord. One good example of this can be seen in the fact that just this week the congregation that makes up the

New Church of Concord had an important meeting where we were persistent in our efforts to look for new and better ways that this church can serve and engage people. How can we better cooperate with the Lord so that His New Church on earth is that strong beacon of hope and light and love that He promises us it can be.

This week reflect on the difference between the Lord telling you that He will do something literally quickly or fast, verses the Lord telling you that He will do something certainly. It may not happen as quickly as our finite hearts and minds would like, but the Lord's kingdom will certainly come. He will certainly bless and give eternal life to those who keep His commandments. He will definitely lead and provide heavenly happiness to those who have faith in Him. There is no doubt that He will establish His New Church on earth with those who genuinely long for Him as a bride longs for her Husband. Understanding this important distinction between the Lord doing things quickly verses certainly, can help us all develop these two spiritual virtues that really do go hand in hand. The spiritual virtue of patience. And the spiritual virtue of persistence. Reading from the book of Isaiah: "To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing. So why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Is. 40:18-31) Amen.