

## MARANATHA: A MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

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**Introduction:** The Lord of the Church has promised his soon return for his people, meanwhile the Lord has assigned them to make disciples of all nations, before his return. The Lord's children as they labors confronted with persecution; they awaited and prayed for the coming of the Lord, *maranatha* that empowers them to withstand all hurdles. This article "*Maranatha: A Missiological reflections*" discusses on the meaning, context and usages of the word *maranatha* and attempts to highlight some implications for mission.

**Meaning of *maranatha*:** The word or phrase 'Maranatha' is used only once in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 16:22, which according to RSV reads "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" The word *Maranatha* is neither a Greek nor a Hebrew word or phrase, but it is an *Aramaic* phrase transliterated into Greek. The root words for *Maranatha* in Aramaic are *mar* meaning 'Lord' and *ata* meaning 'to come'.

In the later versions of the Greek New Testament, the word *maranatha* ('Our Lord, Come' or 'Come, Lord Jesus') is a single word, however the early manuscripts of the New Testament has this phrase written in two words: *Marana tha* or *maranatha*. Based on how these two words are spaced, the connotation tends to vary. For example, if it is taken as

'*marana tha*' it can be understand as a command, "Come, O Lord" or "O, Lord Come" or "Lord Come". On the other hand if the words are spaced as *maran 'atha* means "our Lord has come!"

**The context and usage of *maranatha*:** In the New Testament in Paul's usage, it is linked to a curse; "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed *Maran'atha* "Our Lord comes," or is "coming" I Cor 16:22, if the latter interpretation is adopted, the meaning of the phrase is, "Our Lord is coming, to judge. Even if it is, "O Lord, Come', it would mean that if anyone doesn't love the Lord, let curse be upon him. "O Lord, Come', and pass your judgment.

In the *Didache* it is linked with Eucharist: "Let grace come and this world pass away. Hosana to the God of David, if anyone is holy let him

come; if he is not, let him repent. *Maranatha*. Amen. (Didache 6:10). The outlook here is eschatological. The same type of outlook also appears in 1 Cor 11:23-26 a Eucharistic section which includes the injunction, “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death *until he comes*” 1 Cor 11:26. This would point to the meaning “Our Lord come!” Rev 22:20 indeed supplies such a sense; Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

The early Christians witnessed his death and resurrection, and had wondered what will be next? The Jerusalem temple was destroyed about 70 CE, and the Roman Empire had threatened Jew and Christian alike. The early church faced a lot of persecution; the life of Christian under the Roman rule was not easy. The Romans required everyone to worship Caesar as god, but the early Christians could not do so because of their faith in Christ, for which the Romans looked upon them as traitors and persecuted them and put them to death. It was during this time the New Testament was written, when the early Christians were looking for the return of Christ as promised to his followers. “*Maranatha!* Come Lord Jesus” was the prayer of the earliest Christian. A prayer mixed with fear of the unknown and hope of the unknown. It was an

advent prayer, expecting and waiting for Christ second coming. *Maranatha* was also used as a way of greeting among the believers during the time of persecution under the Romans. This greeting gave the early Christians hope and strength, as they reminded themselves that the “Lord is coming” to save the people and uplift all their sufferings.

**Implications for mission:** As we see in the above discussion, *Maranatha* is a power packed word for early Christians in the face of persecution hardships and difficulty as they believed, followed and waited for the return of Christ. It encouraged, strengthened, emboldened, comforted and sustained them. Today, we live in an uncertain world, a world filled with corruption, hatred, injustice, fears, persecutions and killing. A world in which the Christian mission is becoming more challenging and Christians finds themselves at greater risk in following Christ and practicing their faith. In a context like this we can draw meaningful insights and implications for mission from the word *maranatha*.

According to Ken Pell, *Maranatha* was a way of life. It was the frame work within which the church lived out its faith. *Maranatha* is our encouragement, motivation, hope and proclamation.

## *Maranatha*

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*Maranatha* is our encouragement to live a faithful life and remain faithful till the end. The knowledge of the fact about the return of Christ should encourage us to remain earnestly aware of who we are and what we are doing, keeping us free from trivia.

*Maranatha* is our motivation for mission. Preparing for the future, living in light of Jesus' return is something that people do by feeding the poor, working for justice, loving their neighbors and developing a virtuous and compassionate life in Jesus' name. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we are saying "Maranatha" Come, O Lord! ... And we are also saying "we will let your will be done in earth in and through us until you come to finish the task."

*Maranatha* is our hope. Just as *Maranatha* gave hope to the early Christians we also find hope in the coming of Christ. Redemption is incomplete until Jesus comes. To those who are discouraged today, *Maranatha!* To those who are worried today, *Maranatha!* To those who filled with anxiety over problems you are facing, *Maranatha!* To those who are weak and sick today, *Maranatha!* To those who are oppressed today, *Maranatha!* Our Lord is coming. It is

the proclamation of the Christian about Jesus' second coming. This is the proclamation of the salvation message of Jesus Christ for the world.

*Maranatha!* 'Our Lord comes' or 'Come Lord Jesus' is a prayer of believer who is prepared and remains alert waiting for the coming of the Lord by doing the things that the Lord had done (when he had come for the first time) such as practicing justice, forgiving others, doing compassionate works, uplifting the down trodden etc. It is also a prayer for the vindication of the faithful and the righteous who are waiting for the Lord's return.

**Conclusion:** The outlook of *Maranatha* in the Scripture is an eschatological one, in which the righteous believers will be finally saved, justified and exalted, with this hope for the future glory and salvation, the people of God works tirelessly for the mission of God here and now. May the sure promised of the Lord's coming; continue to strengthen his people in God's mission of liberation, justice, peace in short the Kingdom of God. As the Scriptures testify, sooner or later we do not know when? but "Come, Lord Jesus" *Maranatha!*