

MARANATHA
(I Corinthians 16:21-24.)
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1. Introduction: Seeing and being reminded of the theme **Maranatha** everyday in the notice board makes me attempt to write on the topic MARANATHA. Its meaning, importance and relevancy will be seen basing on Paul's usage to the Corinthians.

2. Meaning of Maranatha: The word Maranatha appeared in the New Testament only once, i.e. Paul's greetings at the end of I Corinthians 16. Paul directs the community to greet one another with a holy kiss and then he said, "Let anyone who do not love the Lord be accursed, Maranatha." This very Aramaic word "Maranatha" refers three meanings basing on its pronunciation.

It can be pronounced as "Marana-tha" which means "Our Lord, come" or "Maran-atha" which means "Our Lord has come". The first one "Marana-tha" is a prayer for Christ's second coming or inviting Christ to come. The second one "Maran-atha", "Our Lord has come" points the birth of Christ in the world or it can also mean "the acclamation of Christ coming in the Eucharistic celebration". However, recent scholars are in favour of the first, the imperative "Maranatha" which means "Our Lord, come."

There are other ways of saying about the coming of Jesus in the New Testament. Some of them are:

i) Parousia, which is used technically as the return of Jesus Christ. The

ascended Jesus Christ, will return again one day.

ii) Revelation/apokalypsis, it is the unveiling or revealing of some heavenly truth. The revelation will be an unveiling of glory to believers and an unveiling of judgement to unbelievers.

iii) Another term used is "the day/ the day of the Lord". It connotes the cataclysmic events or chaos which will happen in the return of Jesus Christ. The coming of the light in a dark and sinful world.

And, this Maranatha is one way of saying that the Lord will come again, with much hope and expectation among the believers of Christ.

3. From the Bible: I Corinthians 16:13-24 mainly deals with the greetings and final words of the message. This is Paul's salutation to the people of Corinth or the church in Corinth. All of his letters were usually written down by *Amanuenses* or "the scribes". It means Paul was not the one who wrote each and every word or sentences, rather it was Sosthenes, which he mentioned in the first chapter of I Corinth. We can see this in the other letters of Paul as well.

But the significant point here is that, the salutation and concluding part were always written by Paul with his own hand. He did not simply leave it to the scribes to finish the letter.

In the concluding part, Paul used two unusual translated words: Anathema and Maranatha. They belong to the Aramaic-Syrian of Palestine. The Jews used curse invocations as the opposite of blessings. Paul also expressed himself by saying that 'if anyone does not love the Lord, let him be cursed, damned, eternal damnation will happen to that person'. This is Anathema, it is a prophetic warning.

Then it is followed by Maranatha. The hope that they had during those days, greeting one another saying "Maranatha"- "Our Lord come/ Our Lord is coming".

There seems to be contradiction in the text. The first one is- warning against the people who do not love Jesus, he/she will be damned. The second is that "Christ is coming", the comforting words. Warning words is followed by comforting words. So the sentence seems to be contradicting.

However, this shows that the gospel is not only about heaven, not only about wonders and beauty, not only about sweet things of Christian life or not just about the atoning work of Jesus Christ. But, the gospel also contains damnation, punishment and curse for persons who do not want to love Jesus Christ and submit himself/herself.

4. Maranatha among the Jews: The 1st century Christians or the early church faced many persecutions. The life of Christians under Roman rule was not at all easy. The Romans required everyone to declare that Caesar was god. The early Christians knew that there is only one God and one Lord-Jesus Christ. So, knowing all this, they cannot accept Caesar as "God". So, the Romans looked at them as traitor, and they persecuted them and killed many lives.

The Romans intention was to draw the Christians completely away or let them abandon their faith.

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But, living under those situations actually strengthened the church, it enriched their morale. It is in this context that, “Maranatha” played significant key role as it helped them go through hard times. They greet each other by saying that “Jesus is coming again’ and they expect it to happen soon.

Maranatha was more than a wishful thinking, more than a prayer, more than escapism. It was a way of life, a framework within which the church could live out its faith.

Among the members of the church: The church in Corinth was facing several issues. They were not of one mind, they could not share the same ideas, they were of different teachings, and they claim to be superior to others. Some of the problems that the church was facing were- the misbehavior of people who claimed to be a Christian/ follower of Christ, the ignorance of many evil practices in the society, the misunderstandings of God’s ministry, differences between wife and husband, position of women, idolatry, how to observe Lord’s Supper, they argued with the gift of the Holy Spirit. One of the main problems is that there was groupism/ separation of members of church into groups due to the teachings they received.

In the midst of these, Paul warned them that there will be punishment for those who do not love Christ and followed by the information of the “Coming of Jesus Christ”. Paul’s usage of “Maranatha” could be an informative warning or encouragement to the believers in Corinth.

5. Maranatha today: Unlike the believers in the earlier centuries, we might not be persecuted because of our faith. But, “Maranatha” could still be relevant in the contemporary world.

5.1. Maranatha for the hopeless: Hope is an essential abstract that holds a person’s faith. On the contrary, hopelessness can be the enemy of faith. Today, there are Christians who doubt God, who questioned about God. Due to hopelessness, many Christians doubt about the second coming of Christ. In this context, “Maranatha” can play a significant role to bring hope for the hopeless.

5.2. Maranatha in individual’s life: Christian life is more of an individual’s life. Christian life cannot always be communitarian life, church or fellowship life. It must be seen in individual’s life, when we are alone. In such a situation, Maranatha – *Our Lord, come* has to be significant. Invitation and Welcoming of Christ to

our individual's life must be a driving force for Christian life. Matthew also wrote out the prayer that Jesus told his followers. In it, there is a line "...Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth..." If God's reign comes to each and everyone's life, if "Maranatha" is welcomed by each Christian individual, the life of heaven, peace and harmony, love and care will be experienced by all.

5.3. Maranatha for encouragement:

There are people who believed in Christ and are suffering because of their faith and belief. Specially, missionaries, people working in Mission fields, they need encouragement to stand firm in their faith when they almost give up and wanted to move back when troubles come. In such case, "Marantha" can be a comforting and encouragement, as it had been in the early Christians.

There are also persons of physically ill, mentally severe, economically insecure, and family and friendship issues that trouble them. All these issues can be challenged by this word, **Maranatha**. Jesus our Lord, can be welcomed in every situation, be it biggest or the smallest one. Jesus is the answer for every problem in life. Welcome him, trust him, tell him, then he will help us. So, Maranatha is

important to encourage, to strengthen and is also supportive.

5.4. Maranatha as warning: Even though we are speaking in a positive sense, it is also good to see some negative sides. As Maranatha indicates the coming of Lord, it further points judgment which will happen from the Lord. As seen in I Cor 16:22, "those who do not love the Lord is accursed" which means the judgment of damnation will fall on the one who do no love the Lord. The 'Coming of the Lord', warn the believers to be careful and faithful in their lives.

Conclusion: Now, seeing and hearing the meaning and implications of Maranatha today, we can know that it is our duty and responsibility as a theologically trained people to live a life where Christ is seen in our lives. We must always invite Christ to be the main model in our lives. In order to help others, to comfort, to encourage, to strengthen, to warn people so that their faith in Christ will not be vanished and shaken, the "Maranatha- Our Lord, come," invitation of Christ's presence is always effective and meaningful.

