

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMING EVENT

John 14:3; I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Christ is the theme of the whole Bible. The theme of the Old Testament is Christ is coming. The theme of the Gospels is that Christ has come. The theme of the Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation is that Christ is coming again.

From the time that God spoke the world into existence, it has been the stage of many wonderful events. Perhaps the greatest event in history was when Christ Jesus came as the Babe to Bethlehem. Another great event was the completion of His redemptive work on the cross. The world's greatest future event is the second coming of Christ. His return is one of the grandest and most inspiring themes in the Bible, and yet it has suffered terribly from ignorance, prejudice, indifference and perversion. Although the study of this subject is greatly neglected, it is tremendously important, exceedingly interesting and very helpful.

I. The Certainty Of This Event.

1. Purposed in the mind of God.
2. Prompted by the love of God.
3. Prophesied by the prophets of God.
They used the choicest words and noblest phrases and clauses when they sought to portray the second coming of Christ.
4. Promised by the Son of God.
"I will come again." John 14:3. Note the Person—"I"; the Power—"I will"; the Promise—"I will come"; the Prospect—"I will come again"; the People—"And receive you"; the Place—"That where I am"; the Purpose—"Ye may be also." "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works." Matthew 16:27.
5. Proclaimed by the Spirit of God.
 - (1) Through messengers from heaven.
"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'" Acts 1:10-11.

They left the mount of ascension filled with joyous hope and glorious anticipation.
 - (2) Through the apostles.
Paul:
"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." I Thessalonians 4:16.
"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Hebrews 9:28.

Peter:
"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." I Peter 5:4.

James:
"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." James 5:7.

John:

"And now, little children, abide in Him; that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." I John 2:28. "Behold! He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him." Revelation 1:7.

(3) Through the Lord's Supper.

With reference to it, Paul said: "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." I Corinthians 11:26. The Supper is not only a commemoration of the past and a proclamation of the present, but also an anticipation of the future--"till he come."

It is hard to understand how anyone can read the Bible and not believe in the return of Christ. Over three hundred passages of scripture refer to His second coming. Since the truth of His return occupies such a prominent place in the Word of God, it should occupy a corresponding position in our thought and study. To neglect this subject is to ignore a great portion of God's Word. The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is a prominent, positive, precious, purifying and powerful one.

II. The Consequences Of This Event.

1. The resurrection of the dead in Christ.

"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." I Thessalonians 4:16. "The dead in Christ"--oh, what an expression! If Christ should not come, there would never be a resurrection of "the dead in Christ." The resurrection of the bodies of "the dead in Christ" in every part of the habitable globe, whether in the cemeteries or beneath the waves of the seas, will take place when Christ comes again. The bodies of our loved ones who were Christians, whether father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, brother, sister or friend, will arise out of those cemeteries where we lovingly placed them.

A seventeen year old Roman Catholic girl accepted Christ as her Saviour and was saved. Later she contracted tuberculosis and while she was on her deathbed her parents, friends and priest tried to get her to come back into the fold of their church. She said, "No, salvation does not come through penance or ritual, but through personal faith in Jesus Christ." As a last resort the priest said, "My child, if you do not come back, you cannot be buried with us. You cannot be buried in holy ground." She answered, "Bury me where you will; but when Jesus comes, He will find every particle of dust that belongs to Him." It is not so important where a body is buried, for when the Lord Jesus comes He will find every particle of dust that belongs to Him. If Christ did not return, the body would never come out of the grave, and death would be triumphant throughout all the countless ages of eternity. There is not one fragment of scripture to warrant you to expect the resurrection of any Christian apart from the world's greatest future event--the second coming of Christ.

2. The rapture of the living Christians.

"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." I Thessalonians 4:17.

From the beginning the scythe of death has cut an unhindered swath. It has not spared either rank or sex or age. Prince and peasant, high and low, young and old, have fallen before it like ripened grain before the blade of the reaper. We have seen them go. Now many of us are beginning to look at gray hairs coming swiftly and wrinkles multiplying rapidly. Many realize they cannot do as much as they formerly did, and still others know that death cannot be far away. Death is certain for all, if Christ tarries.

But, the Christians who are on earth when Christ comes again will never die. They will be going about their daily vocations when He comes, and suddenly they will be changed, transfigured and glorified. "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 all be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." I Corinthians 15:51-53.

Thousands of church members know nothing of this great truth of the rapture of the saints, of that time when Christ shall come and the generation of Christians who are living then shall not pass through the experience of physical death, but shall be changed into the likeness of our risen Saviour, shall be caught up, shall be swept away to meet Him and be with Him forever. The Scriptures of the Old Testament give us two illustrations of God's power to do this. One is that of Enoch of whom it was said, "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." In Hebrews 11:5 we read, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death." The other illustration is that of the prophet Elijah, described in II Kings 2:11: "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." So those of God's children who are living when Christ returns shall be swept away in the twinkling of an eye to meet the Lord in the air.

Our likeness to Christ will be revealed when He comes again. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." I John 3:2.

3. The reunion of the Christians.

"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." I Thessalonians 4:16-17. This will surpass any family reunion which was ever held. It will be the greatest meeting ever held. There has never been a meeting to compare with it. It will be a reunion that will never end. What a glorious hope this is for all believers who mourn the loss of their loved ones!

4. The rewarding of the Christians.

Believers in Christ are saved without works of any kind, but they are saved in order that they may do good works. They are saved to serve. Paul said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 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." II Timothy 4:7-8. What day? That day when Christ returns, because He said, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me." Revelation 22:12. If Christ did not come again, Christians would not receive their rewards.

If Christ does not return, martyrs have died in vain, so far as received rewards is concerned. William Borden, whose biography is entitled "Borden of Yale '09," inherited a vast amount of money at twenty-one. He was a graduate of Yale and had life before him. He chose a path leading in the opposite direction from the one many would have chosen. He set his face toward China, going out under the China Inland Mission. On his way he stayed in Egypt to nurse a missionary who was ill. The missionary recovered, but Borden contracted the disease and passed into the presence of God, leaving his wealth to faith missions and soul-winning institutions. Many said, "Oh, what a sacrifice!" They should have said, "Oh, what a privilege!" What a reward he will receive from Christ when He returns. Christ will reward every Christian for the faithful service which he renders from the time of his salvation until he goes to be with the Lord. "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works."

Christ is coming again. He is coming personally—"The Lord Himself shall descend." He

is coming bodily--"In like manner as ye have seen Him go." He is coming visibly--"Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him." He is coming suddenly--"As a thief in the night." Naturally, a thief is not expected when he comes. He is coming gloriously--"The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels."

As to the time of His return, it is future; otherwise, no one knows. The precise time of His return cannot be known. "Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels that are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." He does not want us to know the exact time, but it is His desire that we shall be ready at any time. The fact of His return is certain, and that is sufficient for our comfort. The time is uncertain, and that is sufficient for our dedication.

III. The Challenge Of This Event.

1. It is an incentive to preparedness.
"Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matthew 24:44.
2. It urges spiritual alertness.
"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Titus 2:13.
3. It is conducive to purity of life.
"And every man that hath this hope purifieth himself." I John 3:3.
4. It produces patience in trial.
"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." James 5:7.
5. It inspires sacrificial service.
6. It is a great comfort to those in sorrow.
The resurrection of all the dead in Christ will take place when Christ returns. We can comfort one another with this fact. A little boy stood with his mother and looked into the grave of his father and said, "Don't cry mother, there'll be no graves when the Lord Jesus comes." Christians never have to say "goodbye" for the last time.

In view of the certain return of our Redeemer, all of us who are Christians should wait in patience, walk in purity of life, weep in hopefulness, witness in faithfulness, work in diligence, and watch in readiness. The unsaved should repent of their sins, receive the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour, and rejoice that He is coming to take His own.