

He is Coming Again!

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Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
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Pasadena, California 91109-7100
(800) 65-BIBLE
www.ttb.org

Scripture references are from the *King James Version Bible*.
(This message is also included in the hardback book, *Feasting on the Word*,
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In World War II when General Douglas MacArthur withdrew from the Philippines – after Pearl Harbor and before the surrender of Corregidor – he issued his now famous statement: “I will return.” For several years millions of people in the Orient hung onto these three words as the only ray of light in the darkness of tyranny and oppression. They were words of hope; they were words of promised deliverance for people around the world.

MacArthur did return. He returned with a vengeance. Not stopping at Manila, he went on to Tokyo to receive the surrender of the proud nation of Japan on the deck of the battleship *Missouri*. Although he was, after all, a frail human being, he kept his promise. He did return.

Before the Lord Jesus Christ left this earth to return to heaven, He said, “I will come again.” These words have been the hope and comfort of millions of believers for the past twenty centuries. He, as the glorified Christ, repeated these words to the apostle John on the lonely island of Patmos. Here He sharpened His promise and delivered it in a dramatic way, “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me” (Revelation 22:12). He did not mean that He was coming *soon* – that is not what He said. He said that His coming, with all that it entailed, would occupy a very brief time – “I come *quickly*.” The book of Revelation closes the Bible with His affirmation, “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.” This is the last promise that has come to us from heaven. “I come quickly.” And these words have been the comfort of His own for twenty centuries.

It is the thought of some that the Revelation is a book filled only with that which is frightful and sensational. There are symbols of wild beasts, monstrous creatures; there are convulsions of nature, thunders and lightnings and earthquakes; there are trumpets of judgment and bowls of wrath. But all of these are incidental. They are the freaks one sees in the sideshow. The main event is the return to this earth of Jesus Christ. Christ’s return is the central truth, the primary meaning of this book. The prevailing purpose of Revelation is to say just one thing: “I will come again.”

The book of the Revelation opens with the statement: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The word “revelation” comes from the Latin *revelatio*, an unveiling. The Greek word is *apokalupsis*, the removing of a veil. By transliteration *apokalupsis* is our word “apocalypse.” The Revelation is the apocalypse or the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

At Christ’s first coming He was not revealed – rather He was concealed. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” says John 1:14. The Word (Christ) was made flesh and took upon Himself the tabernacle or the tent of flesh. Just as God had manifested Himself back in the Old Testament through a tabernacle with all sorts of coverings and curtains that shut man out from Him, so the Lord Jesus came in a tabernacle of flesh. He was put in the concealing wraps of a human body. God was not revealed when Christ came the first time. It still can be said, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). Christ, when He came, declared God; He exegeted Him, let Him out in the open where, for the first time, one can see the heart of God. Yet we have not seen *God*. The first coming of Christ was not the revelation of Jesus Christ. The revelation of Jesus Christ takes place at His second coming. Actually the first and second comings of Christ are component parts of a whole.

At His first coming the great word was *grace*. He came that men might experience something of the grace of God. When He comes the second time, the preeminent word will be *glory*. Men will see for the first time the glory of God. When He came the first time He was veiled in human flesh; when He comes the second time the veil will be removed and every eye shall see Him. For the first time men will see God!

Since the first and second comings of Christ belong together, we shall place them together. First we shall consider the *contrasts* between the first and second comings of Christ, then a comparison of the two comings, and finally the completion – the second coming of Christ completing His first coming.

Contrast

Let us see the first and second comings of Christ in contrast. Listen to the writer to the Hebrews:

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)

When Christ came the first time it was to settle one question and one alone – the question of sin. He did not come to solve the problems of government nor to set before the world a philosophy of living. He came the first time to settle the sin question, to die for the sins of the world. When He comes the second time He will solve the governmental problems, the political and social dilemmas that harass our world. But up to this moment He deals only with the issue of sin in your heart and in mine. This is the preeminent contrast between the first and second comings of Christ.

It is interesting to note that the Scriptures make the contrast very sharp. He came the first time riding on a little donkey. He will come the second time riding a white charger. The first time He came to an out-of-the-way place, riding on a common beast of burden, in the womb of a woman! I challenge you to show how God could have humbled Himself more completely. The first time He came as Savior. The second time He will come as Sovereign. He will come in devastating majesty – listen to John describe it:

I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.
(Revelation 19:11)

Coming the first time in weakness, in meekness, in obscurity, He will come the next time in power to assert His will over all the earth; and before Him every knee shall bow!

When He came the first time the door of the inn was shut in His face, slamming so loudly that after about two thousand years it still can be heard. My friend, He is being shut out today. Even during the Christmas season which commemorates His birth, He is shut out. Oh, the cash registers ring so loudly that you may not hear the slamming of the door, but it is slamming, shutting Him outside. However, for His second coming we read of a door opened in heaven out of which He rides as *King of kings and Lord of lords*. The first time the door of the inn was closed; the second time the door of heaven will open. What a contrast!

His coming was shrouded in secret. Very few knew when He came the first time. When Jerusalem closed its shops that Christmas Eve it did not know what was taking place, and it cared less. Even Bethlehem did not know. Today the whole world knows when a head of state visits another country, but the whole world did not know that the Son of God came to Bethlehem, and it does not know it after all these years!

God had said that His birth, His life and His death should be characterized by lowliness. Isaiah put it this way:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. (Isaiah 11:1)

Why did Isaiah, who repeatedly mentioned the fact that Christ was the Branch of David, say in this instance that He was the Branch of *Jesse*? The reason is obvious when you look closely at Mary and Joseph. Jesse, the father of King David, was a peasant. When Jesus came, the royal line of David had been reduced again to peasantry, and Jesus comes as a Branch of Jesse, the peasant. Listen to Isaiah as God speaks of His life:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.
(Isaiah 42:1)

But before He comes in judgment:

He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. (Isaiah 42:2, 3)

Of His death He writes:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3)

These Scriptures were ignored by the scribes in Jesus' day – which is the reason they did not believe the wise men who said, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2). The scribes answered in effect, “The prophecy is that Christ will be born in Bethlehem, but anybody knows He is not down there now. The newspaper reporters are not there; the photographers are not there. No deliverer has arisen in Bethlehem. We know He has not come” (see Matthew 2). They were wrong because they had ignored the Scriptures that spoke of His lowliness.

*They all were looking for a King
To slay their foes and lift them high:
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.
– George Macdonald*

Yet let us not be too harsh with them for being dubious and not going with the wise men to worship Him. You see, they had other Scriptures that led them to believe that He was coming as a king in great power and glory.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. (Isaiah 63:1)

He is coming in glory here! Daniel also saw a glorious coming:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13, 14)

Hear Malachi:

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. (Malachi 3:1, 2)

Such Scriptures could be multiplied again and again in the Old Testament. And when you come to the conclusion of the New Testament where John looks forward to His coming again, we read:

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. (Revelation 1:7)

That is His second coming.

What a contrast between the first and second comings of Christ!

Comparison

Now notice with me a comparison of the first and second comings of Christ. The second coming of Christ is in two phases, it is a drama of two acts. The first is what we please to call the "Rapture." Christ Himself was the first to speak of it. You will find no reference to it until you come to the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel, where He tells of taking people off this earth up to a place which He is going to prepare. To His own He said:

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2, 3)

This is the first phase of His second coming. But Christ spoke also of His coming to establish His kingdom upon this earth in power and glory. When He was brought before the high priest at His trial, He was put on oath, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Listen to His reply:

And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. (Mark 14:62)

Thus we see that Christ Himself spoke of both phases of His coming again.

The first phase of the second coming of Christ is to believers “that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior.” There is nothing between us and that – no Great Tribulation, no other event that must take place. He could come today, but we do not say that He will, for we do not know. But we today are not looking for the Antichrist; we are looking for Christ Himself!

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. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)

After our “gathering together unto Him,” the second phase of the second coming of Christ will come upon the earth. It will begin with a time of great trouble. The world is moving into it at this moment. Just as a boat moves into a tornado or a typhoon at sea, our world is moving into this time of trouble. Christ said that it will be a short interval which will be blocked off by catastrophes “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Nothing like it has taken place before, and nothing like it will ever take place afterward. It is His judgment, the Great Tribulation, described for us in terrible detail in the book of the Revelation. It will be climaxed by His personal return, His catastrophic and cataclysmic coming in glory to establish His kingdom by putting down all unrighteousness. Christ Himself shall sit upon the throne of David and shall rule on this physical earth.

Our critics today cynically and dubiously say, “Well, you really believe in a second and third coming of Christ.” Oh, no. Let us make a comparison. When He came the first time there was a birth, which we commemorate at the Christmas season. It was the prophet Micah who wrote:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5:2)

This concerned the birth of Christ. But I also read of Him in Psalm 22:1, 16-18:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ... The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell [count] all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

Clearly these verses speak of His death. Both of these events, His birth and His death, are included in His first coming – yet they are thirty-three years apart. Even so, His coming in the air to take believers, both living and dead, out of this earth and His coming to the earth as King is all called His second coming, although these two events are separated by at least seven years. When the comparison is made with that which has already taken place, it is easily seen.

Completion

Finally let us consider the first and second comings of Christ as to the completion. The second coming of Christ is the completion of His first coming. He must come again to complete the work of His first coming. “But,” you may say, “He said on the cross, ‘It is finished.’” Yes, the work of redemption was finished. He had wrought out for you and me a way of salvation. As Paul very definitely says, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). He put down the foundation for your salvation and mine. But the towers have not yet been put on. He has not yet completed His work of salvation. He won only a partial victory when He came the first time. It was a truncated triumph. Although He won the battle, He did not receive the booty. He gained the victory, but He did not receive the kingdom.

Actually salvation is in three tenses. I can say that I *have been* saved, I can also say I *am being* saved, and I can say I *shall be* saved. All three are true. I *have been* saved – “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life” (John 5:24). I have right here and now eternal life. The moment we trust Christ, receiving God’s gift of eternal life, we are as much saved as we will be a billion years from today – complete in Him, saved in Him. Also I *am being* saved – there needs to be a work within. Paul could say to the Philippian Christians, “... Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). We ought to be patient with one another. There are a few people who are very critical of this preacher. Be a little more patient with me – God is not through with me. Someday I *shall be* saved; someday I shall be like Him.

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. (1 John 3:2)

He began the work about two thousand years ago when He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh (yet without sin) in order that in time He might present you and me in His own likeness. That is going to be a wonderful day, the day when you and I will be like Jesus! Let us be patient with one another. Though we are now the sons of God, it does not yet appear what we shall be. Paul writes to the Roman Christians:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.... And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:18, 19, 23)

A great day is coming!

And we have a redeemed body coming up in the future. It will be a body that will not have pain or disease or weakness, nor will it be subject to all the limitations of this life. We hear some say that healing is in the atonement. So is a new body! But we do not have it yet. The package He gives is labeled “Do not open until Christmas.” The error of the folk who are involved in these healing movements is that they are trying to open their packages before Christmas. The redemption of the body is in the future. One of these days we shall receive a new body. What a gift that will be!

That is not all we will get. Look again at the eighth chapter of Romans:

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (Romans 8:20-22)

The human family is trying to be happy. Yet there are many broken hearts; the hospitals are crowded; the cemeteries are being filled; even nature itself is groaning. You go down to the seaside and you can hear the sob of the waves; you go to the mountains and you can hear the low sigh of the wind in the treetops. Creation is groaning, waiting for the glorious day when Christ shall return and lift the curse. Then the package will explode into a new heaven and a new earth!

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.... And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:1, 3, 4)

What a glorious day that will be!

Someone may be thinking, *I would like to have a stake in this which is coming. I would like to have part in that day of the future.* You may. The vital thing is to be properly related to Jesus Christ. Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship – a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. This can be yours.

How do you get a gift? I am wearing a watch that was given to me twenty years ago. It was handed to me in a little box with the words, “This is a gift.” For twenty years I have never paid one penny for this watch. For twenty years it has been *my* watch because by simple faith I held out my hand and took it as a gift. God is holding out to this lost world a gift – eternal life in Christ Jesus. You may have it by receiving Christ in simple faith.

Christ came almost two thousand years ago to be your Savior.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. (John 1:11, 12)

He came yesterday as the world's Savior. He will come tomorrow as the world's Sovereign.
Almost two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus Christ said,

I will come again. (John 14:3)

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.