

WHY WE SHOULD BE LOOKING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN:

#3 REGENERATED EARTH (1)

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For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, instructing us to renounce godlessness and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we look with earnest longing for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2: 11-13, my translation).

We have already noted that **Titus 2: 11-13** teaches there are two comings of Jesus Christ:

First coming: Verse 11 ... For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all ... this covers all the teachings and works of Jesus from his birth to his crucifixion and resurrection. **Second coming:** Verse 12 ... We are looking for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ ... the Second Coming and the literal personal appearance of the exalted Lord Jesus at his *Parousia*.

PREVIOUSLY:- I gave my first two reasons for why we should be looking for the Second Coming, the return of Jesus Christ ...

1. I WANT JESUS TO GET WHAT HE DESERVES ... Universal honour and victory in God's Kingdom over the earth. Universal adoration from his redeemed family.

2. I WANT THE DEVIL TO GET WHAT HE DESERVES ... Universal disgust, abhorrence with eternal justice and punishment — utter defeat. I want to see the Devil bow the knee before our King and confess he is the Lord Messiah to the glory of God before he is tossed into the flames of perdition in Gehenna! Won't that be something when the ultimate rebel and the enemy of our souls gets the boot!

Now we move onto the next reason as to why we should be looking for the Second Coming of Jesus.

3. I WANT TO SEE THE PHYSICAL WORLD GET WHAT IT DESERVES.

We all instinctively feel there is something not quite right with what is popularly called "nature" or (and I'm not a fan of this description) "mother Earth". As Christians we understand this is because, in the beginning, when Adam & Eve listened to the Devil's lie, everything in the cosmos went awry. Nature became skewed. Disorder and death invaded the pristine world. The ground was cursed. Things like thorns, and thistles sprang up. Difficulty in women's reproduction and futile work for men --- **the sweat of the brow** --- are all indications of this *unnatural* state of affairs. What God had declared **very good** was now defaced, very corrupt, subject to decay and death.

¹ These are the notes of the third message I preached in the Mardon Road Church of Christ in Hamilton, New Zealand, in February/March 2023.

The apostle Paul puts it this way, **For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the One who subjected it ... (Romans 8: 20)**. But the Christian Gospel is that God has not abandoned our world to this sorry state. God has not left nature to its disappointment and futility and slavery to corruption. God has made certain definite promises to restore our physical world --- i.e., nature --- to its originally created goodness and perfection. And this restoration is going to occur when Jesus comes back to bring in the Kingdom of God, the rule of righteousness to planet earth. The Garden of Eden is going to be restored:-

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God ... the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8: 19, 21). (²)

Our Lord Jesus himself promised this will happen when he comes back. He said, **Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory ... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children of fields for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life (Matt. 19: 28-29)**.

So, on the word of Jesus himself there will be a **renewal**, a **regeneration**, another genesis, or "an again-genesis" (*palingenesia*) for this physical world. And it will happen **when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory**, and when the people of God themselves have been set free from the corruption Adam introduced. Yes, I want Jesus to come back to govern a renewed planet earth with a new society of citizens!

JESUS' MIRACLES ARE SIGNS OF THE NEW AGE RENEWAL

I am looking for Jesus to come back because —

I want to see this physical world,

I want to see the plants, the grass and the trees, the flowers and the bees, the birds and the butterflies, all regenerated, all set free from their **bondage to decay (Rom. 8: 21!**

I want to see nature, all the animals, and birds, and all creatures great and small, set free from this endless bondage to decay.

I want to see the rivers and oceans and streams cleansed of all their plastic pollution, crystal clear again.

I want to see all human disease and deformity of body and mind forever healed, just like Jesus' mighty physical miracles the first time foreshadowed.

As the apostle Peter wrote, **"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13)**.

² The observant reader will note the phrase, **waits with eager longing** is exactly the same phrase used of Christians who **wait with eager longing** for the return of Christ as found in **Titus 2: 13** --- believing Christians and the physical creation are looking for the Second Coming with eagerness!

OBJECTION:- BUT ISN'T GOD GOING TO BURN UP THIS WORLD?

When he speaks about the Second Coming of Christ and how we are to be looking for and hastening its approach, **Peter** says we must not be ignorant of the fact that God has reserved the present heavens and earth for fire. **Peter** writes,

But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and **the earth and everything that is done on it will be burned up**. Since **all these things are to be dissolved in this way** [i.e. when Christ comes back] what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and **the elements will melt with fire** (2 Peter 3: 10-11)?

Doesn't this sound as though God has destined this present earth to **pass away, to be dissolved with fire** when the Day of the LORD arrives? Elements being **set ablaze and dissolved** and **melting with fervent heat**, the earth and everything done on it burning up to our ears sounds like it's all going to pass into oblivion. Doesn't this sound like God is going to totally destroy this planet, like this old one is being discarded completely?

Many of the churches' great hymns and choruses say as much. **Charles Wesley's** hymn has it that the earth will dissolve and melt away like snow.

ANOTHER ACCEPTABLE INTERPRETATION

Not so fast! The original Greek text has an alternative possibility. The word at the end of **verse 10** for "**burned up**" may with equal validity be translated "**discovered**" or "**found out**". (³) This puts a whole new perspective on it. For what **Peter** is really saying --- and I think this fits the context and is very reasonable --- is that the day Jesus Christ ushers in the Kingdom of God everything of this present Evil Age that is not of God will be shown up for what it is, and those unworthy elements not compatible with God's good nature, will not enter His new world. They will be exposed to destruction.

Which is to say, on the other hand, those good elements that fit God's heart and plans for the future will survive and will continue, but as through His cleansing fire.

SAVED AS BY FIRE

It's what we read about elsewhere in the NT. Compare, for example, **I Corinthians 3** which teaches that we must be taking care to build into the future Kingdom-Age only the qualities that will last;

Each builder must choose with care how to build on the foundation which is laid --- Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw --- the work of each builder **will become visible**, for the Day **will disclose it**, because it **will be revealed** with fire, and **the fire will test** what sort

³ *Euretheesetai* ... from *eurisko* which means to discover, to detect, to find, to recognise.

of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire (vs. 10-15).

This passage agrees with Peter's description of the coming Day of fire when everything in creation also not meeting God's inspection will be burned up and destroyed. Only that which survives the fires of God's holy character at the revelation of Jesus Christ will continue into the New Age. The new heavens and the new earth we look for will be refined --- purified --- in the fiery furnace that burns out all the dross. The curse on nature will be destroyed. In this way the heavens and earth will be regenerated.

For the believer, the wood, hay and straw will be burned up. The gold, the silver and the precious stones will survive. And if there is nothing of value left from our service, we ourselves still will be saved to enter the new earth, **but only as through fire**.

The Day of Christ will make all things visible. The true nature of things will be disclosed.

This all agrees with what Peter tells us. He is **not** saying that planet earth is going to be **burned up** to no longer exist. He is saying everything is going to be revealed in its true light. All the defiling elements of this present evil Age not worthy of that new world will pass away with a **roaring noise** (*ῥοιζήδον/roizēdon*, literally, a whirring or crashing noise).

Everything is going to become visible. Everything is going to be disclosed in its true colours. No more misinformation! No more disinformation! In the regeneration some things will be found to be worthy to enter the new Kingdom world.

BLOOD ON THE GROUND!

Do you realise the blood of Jesus avails not just for human beings, but for this physical world as well? Remember how once a year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies that he sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial animal on the Mercy Seat? We all concentrate on that part of the Day of Atonement, for it speaks to us about how the blood of the Son of God secures for us the new covenant and saves us.

But what about the bit that says the High Priest then stepped back from the mercy Seat and also sprinkled the blood on the ground? Why would he sprinkle blood on the dust of the earth? This was a prophetic type saying that although God may have cursed the ground because of sin, Jesus' blood has reversed the curse from the ground. God loves this created world, and He has not abandoned our physical world.

The material creation, this planet with all its beautiful animals and plants and waters is going to survive and is going to be restored to its pristine Edenic glory to thrive. The whole creation has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

And when Jesus comes back and the Kingdom of God comes to planet earth, **the wolf will live in harmony with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little boy will lead them. Also, the cow and the bear will graze** (the bear will eat grass and not flesh!). **Their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like an ox** (there it is again --- meat-eaters will become herbivores again as before Adam's rebellion) **(Isaiah 11: 6-7)**

It's hard for us to imagine this. We live in a condition when "Nature is red in tooth and claw". It's hard to imagine not having to tell the kids, "Yes, you can play with that snake. It will no longer bite and poison you." For, **the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt nor destroy in all My holy Mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Is. 11: 8-9).**

AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION. Have you seen that cartoon where a cute little lamb is sound asleep as he lays beside the lion? Everything is happy and peaceful. But the humorous bit is that the lion is reading a book. He's reading *Veggie Recipes!*

My friends. I for one do not believe this is **Alice in Wonderland** fantasy. This is the hope of all the OT prophets. God's earth restored. God's kingdom on earth! Yes ...

I want Jesus to come back so this physical creation, the environment, the birds and the bees, the trees and the seas, the animals and all creatures great and small will finally get what they deserve! Freedom from Adam's curse.

I am sick and tired of animal cruelty. How anybody can treat their animals, their pets, or any creature with heartless cruelty is beyond me. I am sick and tired of the scars we are leaving on this earth. How anybody can deliberately destroy this physical world is beyond me.

In fact, the Bible says that God Himself is angry about man's lack of stewardship and care for His world. And one of the reasons for great joy and glad worship of the LORD is that He is coming **to destroy those who destroy the earth (Rev. 11: 18)**. Did you hear that? God is going **to destroy those who destroy the earth.**

THE FALSE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE THEORY ENCOURAGES DISDAIN FOR THIS PHYSICAL WORLD

Just by the way, this is one reason for rejecting that false teaching that says Jesus is coming back secretly to snatch away the church from this earth. You see, if Jesus is going to save us from this planet, then why bother with it now? If Jesus is going to "rapture" us up and away from our world, then why would we, why should we be concerned now about the environment or animal care or loving our neighbour? According to this false eschatology we won't be here.

If Jesus is just going to treat this world like a **MacDonald's Drive-through** and pick up his pre-ordered hamper, and simply drive on by, then why should we bother with the world? **But that's not the Christian Gospel!**

JESUS' BODILY RESURRECTION GUARANTEES GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED THIS PHYSICAL WORLD

Here's another thing. We believe that Jesus was raised from the grave, brought back up from the dead in a new, immortal, and very material body. But why is the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ so important? Well, amongst other reasons, it guarantees that God is for our physical embodied continuance. We are going to be like the bodily resurrected Jesus. It's the promise that we will live in a physical world. It's the assurance that our material cosmos is going to continue. It's the affirmation that we are going to walk in the garden and pick fruit and play in the sand!

HEBREW VERSUS GREEK IDEAS OF THIS PHYSICAL WORLD

Now, if we find that hard to believe, hard to digest, it only proves how much our minds have been infected by a non-Hebrew way of thinking. It only proves how much we have been influenced by the Greek way of thinking. It stems from the tragic time when the Christian church imbibed Greek philosophical ideas. The day the Church lost its Hebrew perspective about our physical world and became Hellenised was a sad day.

You see, the Hebrew --- the Biblical --- worldview is that this physical creation is good, it matters, and it is to be enjoyed and celebrated. But Plato and the Greeks got this idea that this physical world and this physical body are corrupt, temporary and not important. In fact, they said this body is like a prison for the soul. The real me, the eternal spirit part of my consciousness, is pure and eternal and longs for escape from the body.

This Greek idea developed into two different outcomes which the NT warns about. Greek Gnosticism believed that because the body was unimportant, then you could do whatever you wanted in it — indulge the flesh; eat, drink and be promiscuous. What's done in your body doesn't count, doesn't affect your eternal soul.

The other extreme was that because your soul is eternal and can never die, then the body is to be denied. Your physical appetites will drag you down and hobble the soul. So, the solution was to become an ascetic — deny your body. Food and drink and sleep are a drag upon the real spiritual pursuits of life. Marriage, family, and children are a wasteful distraction.

SIMEON STYLITES A classic example of this warped view infiltrating the early post-apostolic church is "**The Hermit of the Pillar**", known as **Saint Simeon Stylites**. Just west of Aleppo in 420 AD this 'monk' had a 50 foot pillar erected with a little platform on top. The platform was 6 feet in diameter. He wore only leather clothes. And he had

a barrier erected at its base to exclude all women from entering! This platform is to this very day one of the top tourist destinations in Syria! (⁴)

Stylites determined to live on top of that pillar until death released him. He lived atop that pillar for a number of decades. His disciples would daily bring him his food in a bucket which **Stylites** hauled up by a rope. And he would let down his waste products for them to dispose of! Oh, the grip of this warped idea which imagined this was God's ideal for living in this world.



How different is the Hebrew, the Bible, the Christian view, that this physical world and your body are to be celebrated and valued, neither indulged nor denied. The Bible says, enjoy your physical work, enjoy your planting and your harvest times. Enjoy your wine. Be ravished by the body and the love of the wife of your youth! Celebrate your family times. Hug your babies and children who are wonderfully crafted.

A LITTLE FINAL TEST

To gauge how far you and I have been infected by Gnosticism, let me ask your response to **Hebrew 13: 4**, which was written as a protest to the Greek philosophy infiltrating the early church; **Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled."**

Now let me read it to you literally translated from the Greek text, **Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let sexual intercourse within marriage be blameless.** (⁵) So, if you find yourself sitting there squirming quite uncomfortably thinking this is too much, way too graphic, it only goes to prove how far your worldview is from the Bible that affirms the goodness of God's physical creation. And it certainly affects the way a huge slice of the modern church views the coming Kingdom of God. The idea of some kind of celestial, ethereal, cloud-dwelling, harp-strumming, bodiless existence, has become popular church fare.

But ...

⁴ The remains of Simeon's pillar have been chiselled down to a stub of only 8 feet high by the many tens of thousands of pilgrims who have visited his site after his death and carried off small pieces of the column as relics of the 'saint'.

⁵ The actual word is the word from which our English word "coitis" is derived (**κοίτη / koitē**). It means the sexual love-act of intercourse: The pleasure of the intimacy between a husband and his wife itself.

I am looking forward to when the physical creation gets what it deserves at the Second coming of Christ — when “nature” is released from its slavery to decay and is regenerated.

I am looking forward to the new genesis.

I am looking forward to living in a glorious new body, a resurrection body. Oh, what will it be like being immortal and living in a body that will never get sick, old or die?

Let us join all of creation and pray for, look for, long for, live for, that Day of glory when **the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8: 20)**! Oh yes ...

I am looking forward to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when all the faithful ones will be given new glorified bodies. I am looking forward to all of creation being liberated.

Oh good people, the glory of God is coming! And I am on tippy- toes with excitement, craning every nerve and sinew for the day all creation is renewed. Aren't you? Amen.