

Lesson

12

THE SECOND COMING

In this study we are going to be looking at '**Judgement and The Second Coming of Jesus Christ**', concentrating on its relevance to us as new believers in Christ. It is an important topic. An understanding of Jesus' imminent return will revolutionise your life regarding obedience, service, and hope for the future.

Jesus will Return

When Jesus was taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9-11) right after his resurrection, and whilst his disciples stood staring after Him, two men (angels) dressed in white said:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11)

This statement, coupled with many which Jesus actually spoke regarding His ascension and imminent return during His earthly ministry, sparked off one of Christendom's favourite speculative pastimes over the centuries. Each theory regarding the return of our Lord Jesus Christ has been fervently supported by those who either "knew" that God was coming very soon by "special revelation", or believed they had special insight into what God's Word said about the subject. More than a few cults, and "pseudo-Christian" religions, have been founded on such a premise (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons etc.).

Provocative Commentary

Many theories abound regarding when and how the Lord will return. By careful study of what the Bible teaches it is possible to piece together a personal 'eschatological' (Second Coming) theory. You may even become quite convinced that this theory is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You will not be the first to follow this well worn path, and certainly won't be the last. However, you may also find that over time, and with some experience, your viewpoint alters as you gradually change your mind about the specifics, and realise that the more you learn, the more you do not know - and cannot know - because some truth will remain hidden '*until He comes*' (Matt 24:36; Acts 1:7). When Jesus finally arrives, His chosen method will probably please some and disappoint many!

The preceding paragraph is meant to be a little provocative, and I trust it does not offend you. There are few subjects that are as controversial as the doctrine surrounding the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the coming Judgment.

One thing is Certain

That He is coming back is a certainty. On the millennial (1,000 year) rule, there is little disagreement. That there will be an Armageddon battle, and a new Heaven and a new Earth, few will argue; but how, when, and in what order, remains a subject for the best seller's list at any Christian bookstore.

The one certain thing is that ***Jesus is coming back!*** He is coming in power and glory to take His bride (the Church), and to deal once and for all with the forces of darkness that work against Him.

Remember also, that the return of the Lord is imminent for each of us. He may not come back in the way we had it worked out, but our eternity is only a breath away, and should our lives suddenly end we will be settling accounts with our Maker sooner than anticipated.

As far as how this will be accomplished, take your pick. There is the Pre-Millennial, Post-Millennial, and A-Millennial theories. There are those who believe the Rapture will happen before the Great Tribulation. There are also those who do not, or that there will not be a rapture. There are even some odd groups that believe He has already secretly returned some years ago. This final one has no Scriptural basis, and must be rejected as error, but the others - well ... ?

It goes without saying, if we assume that speculation on the exact nature of the Lord's return is all theory, then the best theory to settle on is the one you feel most comfortable with. Jesus said that neither He, nor the angels in heaven, know when He would return, only His Father does (Matt 24:36).

What we are encouraged to do is observe the signs, study the teaching of Scripture, and live our lives as if Jesus was coming back very soon (Matt 24:29-44), for when He does come, it will be as a "thief in the night" (1 Thess 4:16-18), and many will be caught by surprise.

So if you have strong beliefs - be prepared to defend them. If you do not know what you believe - be prepared to learn and be challenged. We will avoid drawing final conclusions on what we believe as a church in this study because, while we believe firmly in what the Bible teaches, and it is firm on many issues of Jesus' return, it is vague on many aspects. We can only know what God reveals to us through His Word. All else is speculation.

You are free to choose whichever theory you prefer, as long as it is sound and biblical. It will have little lasting effect on your relationship with the Lord unless you make the fatal mistake of majoring on this topic, in which case you must guard against becoming a little 'off-balance' as a Christian.

Our main objective here is to prove, from the Bible, that Jesus will return, and to show, as far as Scripture allows, something of the manner of this return. To go further than this is outside the scope of this study, although Christian bookstores are full of interesting and controversial books on the subject, many of which make excellent reading.

The most productive thing that results from this type of study is an increase in our awareness that the age we live in is coming to an end. With this in mind, we should surely live with the same attitude that the early church lived with - expecting the soon coming return of our Messiah.

If you are so inclined, and as long as it does not become an obsession, become a student of eschatology (doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ). It will not harm you to be more aware in this area of biblical study.

The most Productive thing

Raise your sights and change your perspective from being earth-bound, to being more heaven-bound - for we are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) - and our eternal destiny can never be fulfilled on this earth.

Judgement and Mercy

The Bible is very clear about matters of judgment and mercy. It is the mercy of God that all men should come to a point of repentance, and accept the saving work of Jesus Christ in their lives (John 1:12,13).

The world's popular idea of "doing good and keeping the golden rule" will not carry any weight before the great Judgment Seat of God, because ***"ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23).***

TWO FINAL JUDGEMENTS

There are two final judgments spoken of in the Scriptures:

- ♦ Firstly, there is the judgment by Father God of sinners whose names are not found written in the Book of Life. The Bible teaches their unfortunate destiny is an eternity in Hell (Matt 10:28; 23:33).
- ♦ Secondly, there is the Judgment by Jesus Christ of his Church. This second judgment is more an acknowledgment for good deeds done and rewards for obedience (John 14:1-6).

As Christians, it is important that we have an understanding of the difference between these two judgments, and that we are aware of the fact that the Bible speaks about certain "rewards" being made available for those who "run the race", and in so doing, "complete the course".

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:24-27)

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7)

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1)

Judgement of Sinners

Scriptures: Matt 23:23; Rev 20:11-15; Rom 1:20; Pet 2:20-22; John 5:28-29; Dan 12:1-4; Matt 12:36; Heb 9:26-27

The Bible clearly indicates that, ***"it is appointed for men once to die, and after that the judgment" (Heb 9:27).*** For those who die without Christ as their Saviour this judgment will be a thing greatly to be feared. Even for those who once believed but fall into a "backslidden" state in a fairly consistent and determined way, the Bible has this warning:

“it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

Jesus is ***“the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6)***. No one comes to the Father except through Him. For those who choose not to follow Him, despite all of the opportunities surrounding us each and every day of our lives, there is an no alternative but eternal separation from God. This place is often referred to in the Scriptures as Hell, or Hades. This is not a nice place at all - a place anyone in their right mind would avoid.

Those not cleansed by the blood of the Lamb cannot survive in the glorious presence of the Lord God Almighty. Hell is God’s provision for them, by default. It was never intended for Man, but for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). However, if we persist in choosing to walk a path of disobedience we leave God no choice. He has made a covenant with us that He will save those who come to Him freely, accepting the work of the cross and becoming born-again. On the other hand, He has declared He will banish those who won’t accept Jesus as their Saviour in this life to an eternity of separation from Him, in a place called Hell. This decision reflects both the justice and mercy of God.

Those who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord are not subject to this judgment, as the cross of Christ, and the shed blood of the Lamb of God, washes away our sin. He remember our sin no more, it having been removed from us ***“as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12)***.

So, as God’s representatives on the earth, and the beneficiaries of the free gift of eternal life and heaven as a reward, we are commanded to share our faith with those who have yet to inherit eternal life, and whose end is eternal spiritual death and Hell without Jesus.

Judgement of Christians

Scriptures: **John 14:1-6; Heb 10:34; 1 Pet 1:3-9,13-23;
2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 3:11-15; Rom 2:6,16.**

For those who choose Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, eternal life is their reward. By the grace of God, Christians are exempt from that fateful day, when those who die in their sins receive their just reward.

However, our reward is not based upon our goodness, for no one is good but God alone (Matt 10:18). Rather it is based upon how much of the character of Jesus we have allowed to permeate our being, and how obedient we have been according to His specific Word for our lives.

The main thing to note about the Judgment Seat of Christ is that salvation is a free gift from God. Our eternal rewards are based upon our application of faith, good works, and obedience to His Word. Here are a few passages relating to this great day when God rewards his obedient servants:

- ♦ The Crown of Life - James 1:12; Rev 2:10
- ♦ The Crown of Righteousness - 2 Tim 4:8
- ♦ The Crown for Soul Winners - 1 Thess 2:19
- ♦ The Crown of Glory - 1 Peter 5:2-4
- ♦ The Eternal Crown - 1 Cor 9:25

The most important thing for a every Christian to understand is that we are eternal beings, and we will live forever. Eternal life is bound up in our creation. Wherever our ultimate destination, it will be for all eternity!

What we accomplish on earth will be reflected in the heavenly realm one day. As the fire of God sweeps through our works and burns up everything that is not pure, we will see our reward for honouring Jesus as Lord in this life. Jesus encourages us to make sure that our spiritual “house” is built on a solid foundation - and He is that foundation! What we build on this foundation will be either gold, silver and precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble, and it will all be made evident:

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:10-15)

In Summary: What it all means

1. Jesus Christ is coming back again, to take his church unto himself, and to set up his kingdom permanently, with a new heaven and a new earth. Our responsibility is to be ready.

We are not to be led astray into following false Christs, and false prophets, who preach doctrines that tickle our ears, but proclaim a different gospel from the one we preach (Gal 1:6-10; Matt 24:24). Neither are we to love this life to the point where it has greater value than the eternal things of God (1 John 2:15-17).

2. No one knows the day, nor the hour, of His return. Although we may speculate we will never know for sure until the day actually arrives. However, there are definite signs that will warn us that His return is close. We must be aware of these signs and be prepared, for He will ultimately come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:1-11).

What we do know is that in the last days will come times of stress, where men will be lovers of self, holding a form of religion but denying its power (2 Tim 3:1-5). We know there will be wars and rumours of wars. Major famine is another sign of the imminent return of Jesus, as is the increase in incidents of ethnic groups rising up against one another across the world (Matt 24:6-8). However, this does not necessarily signify the end. We know that men will be unable to endure sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:1-5), but turn instead to teachers of their own choosing, turning away from the truth.

3. Many Christians support the pre-tribulation rapture theory despite little biblical foundation for this view (see article on the origin of this theory). We may well be the generation that sees the return of our Lord despite many generations before believing the same thing. We need to be ready should we be called to suffer for our faith.

It is only by God's grace we weren't born into a country with a history of persecuting Christians. We were never promised immunity from this, for if the world hated Jesus it will also hate his true disciples (John 15:18-25). We should not seek out persecution either, which would be stupid, but we are wise to be prepared for it if it comes, or perhaps God sends us somewhere where this is prevalent.

4. We should not sit around waiting for the Lord's return. We know Jesus will return very soon, but at the same time we are encouraged to plan for our grandchildren's future (Prov 13:22). We must have a responsible and mature attitude towards daily activities such as our careers, studies and relationships.

There are those who would prefer for Jesus to take them out of this troubled and strife-ridden world right now. For the most part, at least in this country and culture, trouble and strife are mostly self-induced; and even on the occasions when they come from external forces the resulting problems can be perpetuated by stubborn and inflexible attitudes. These days, with the advent of social media, conspiracy theories abound. Remember, God wants to prosper us and give us abundant life (John 10:10). If we believe in, obey and trust Him to the end He is well able to do this, no matter what our circumstances might indicate.

5. The Scriptures clearly state (Mark 10:21; Luke 6:23) there are eternal rewards dependent upon our performance and obedience in the world. So ask yourself this question, *"What is the state of my treasure in heaven?"* Will it stand the test of fire that is coming upon it to burn all that is not pure and undefiled? Is there sufficient gold, silver and precious stones in my heavenly vault? We should perhaps be giving some serious, ongoing consideration to this as it has such significant consequences for our eternity (Rev 21:1-5).

Finally, let us consider the subject of death. Before judgment can begin, death must first be overcome. The last enemy to fall is death itself (1 Cor 15:26). With the work of the cross complete, Jesus now has the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). We can therefore have confidence that death is not the end because death itself will be destroyed, and all the prisoners of death will be released to face their various fates (Rev 20:13-14). Death is actually their captor, not their destroyer (1 Cor 15:22-26; Rev 21:4).

Jesus Christ is coming again! We do not know the exact hour or day. But He is coming, and it is imperative that we are ready to meet Him when the time comes. We should look forward to this day with joy and a great sense of excitement and anticipation. Death no longer holds power over us.

Room Enough In Heaven

Let us take a verse from The Book of Revelation as the basis for computation. The text is Rev 21:15,16 and reads as follows:

“The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia (that is, about 1,400 miles or about 2,200 kilometres) in length, and as wide and high as it is long”

This represents a space of **151,521,889,400,000,000,000** cubic metres. It sets aside one half of this space for the Throne and the Courts of Heaven, and one half of the balance for streets. This would leave a remainder of **37,880,472,350,000,005,000** cubic metres.

If we then divide the remainder by 366 (the number of cubic metres in a room 10 metres square with 12 foot ceilings) this will produce **103,498,558,333,333,346** rooms of the size indicated.

Proceeding upon the hypothesis that the world contains, always has contained, and always will contain **3,000,000,000** inhabitants, and that there are three generations to each 100 years. This gives the total number of inhabitants each century as **9,000,000,000**.

Now, let's assume that the world will stand for 1,000 centuries before the return of our Lord (or 100,000 years). This would give a total of **9,000,000,000,000** inhabitants for this period of time.

We must therefore reach the conclusion that if 100 worlds of the same size and duration, and containing the same number of inhabitants as earth, were to also find their way to heaven, there would be more than 100 rooms of the size indicated for each person.

Based upon these calculations we should have no problem in finding enough room for every believer. It also shows us somewhat graphically why Jesus needed to return to heaven to prepare our mansions for us.

Food for thought!

Article Written By An Atheist

If I firmly believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean to me everything.

I would cast away earthy pleasures as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought, and my last image before sleep into unconsciousness.

I would labour in its cause alone. I would esteem one soul won for heaven worth a lifetime of suffering.

Earthly consequences would never stay my hand or seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its griefs, would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon eternity alone and on the immortal souls around me.

I would go forth to the world and preach to it, in season and out of season, and my text would be, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul".

That is what I would do, if I firmly believed!

Pre-Tribulation Rapture Origins

David McPherson, director of the Heart of America Bible Society of Kansas City, in his pamphlet, "Why I believe the Church will pass through the Tribulation", states the following concerning the origin of the pre-tribulation rapture theory.

Edward Irving was a minister in the Church of Scotland. His magnetic personality drew large crowds to his church in London, England.

In 1830, Irving was expelled by the London Presbytery, because he wrote a booklet in which he claimed that Christ's human nature was sinful! However, he rejected their decision and continued his ministry. In 1831, disturbances began to take place in his services. He was removed from his church the next year, and died two years later.

On April 30th 1831, a Mrs J.B. Cardale, who later joined Irving's church, had uttered a personal revelation in a home prayer meeting that Christ would soon return, but she was only echoing a Scottish girl's novel 1830 revelation of a rapture before the tribulation!

It was from this supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and modern phraseology regarding the pre-tribulation rapture arose. It did not initiate from Scripture, but from what many see as that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God.

Irving accepted this teaching, and it was taught as prophetic at meetings at Powerscourt House in Ireland, attended by Plymouth Brethren organiser John Darby. Irving's views influenced Darby, C.H. Mackintosh and C.I. Scofield, whose Bible popularised the new theory. Later, however, some of the leading Plymouth Brethren scholars, including Benjamin Newton, and S.P. Tregelles, rejected this pre-tribulation theory.

For some 1,800 years, the Church had believed only in a post-tribulation coming, which, during persecution, was occasionally thought to be imminent. There is not a shred of historical evidence, before 1830, that the Church ever believed in a double coming, or rapture, before the Great Tribulation!

McPherson goes on to explain that Margaret McDonald was the young woman who originated the pre-tribulation rapture theory. According to Robert Norton's book "The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church" (London 1861), she claimed (page 15) to have received a "revelation" in Scotland in the spring of 1830, while living in Port Glasgow, that Christians would be raptured before the Great Tribulation - something never taught before 1830. Before 1830, the Church taught only one coming, which was after the period of Tribulation!

Margaret McDonald's revolutionary "revelation", split the second coming of Christ into two phases: (i) a first pre-tribulation rapture, then later, after the tribulation, (ii) the return of Christ to earth. Her own statement covering three pages in Norton's book, clearly contains most of the major tenets found today in pre-tribulation dispensationalism:

"Meeting the Lord in the air, secrecy, suddenness, invisibility, imminence, pre-tribulation separation of believers and unbelievers, and distinction between the raptured bride and the tribulation elect"

Darby's pre-tribulation view soon sprang from her partial rapturism.

F.R. Coad's "A History of the Brethren Movement" (Eerdmans 1968), page 63, states: "Darby, at Newton's suggestion, had already investigated (in 1830) these prophecies in the course of visits paid to their first place of occurrence in Scotland and had rejected them". Darby was 29 at the time, Newton was 22.

By February, 1831, Benjamin Newton was strongly opposing Irvingism and Margaret McDonald's underlying "revelation" of 1830. Coad, on page 128, writes "This rejection included a feature of prophetic interpretation which Darby had adopted, the doctrine of 'secret rapture of the saints'". Plymouth Brethren organiser John Darby rejected Margaret McDonald's miraculous gifts of revelation but accepted her novel two-phase coming.

As recorded in Robert Baxter's 'Narrative of Facts' (London 1833), on page 18, Baxter himself had a 'revelation' in an Irvingite prayer meeting on January 14, 1832, that Christ would return in three and a half years on July 14, 1835. Not to be outdone, Darby also set dates. In his 'Etudes sur L'Épître aux Hébreux' Darby wrote (page 146), "There are excellent brethren in all countries who have sought to calculate these days ... some have fixed 1844, others 1847. I myself have made several calculations in times past, and in the same sense."

And this same Darby influenced Scofield.