

The Traveling Pulpit

Published Quarterly By



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Volume 11, Number 2

April

Spring 2016

The Second Coming Of Jesus Christ

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober.” (I Thess. 4:13-5:6)

Introduction

In this study on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, I'm not going to get divisive and venture into the various views of eschatology (the study of last things). There are many different eschatological views with perhaps the most popular being Pre-millennial, Historical Pre-millennial, Dispensational Pre-millennial, Post-millennial, and A-millennial. Regardless of which view a Christian holds, we must

all agree on the cardinal doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. For that reason, we can claim to be Pan-millennial, believing that it's all going to pan out the way God has ordained. We can see from our text a clear and unmistakable declaration of hope concerning the state of believers and a warning of judgment upon unbelievers when Jesus Christ comes again.

Some of Jesus' last words of consolation were a promise that someday after His earthly departure, He would return for His church (Jh. 14:1-3). Throughout the New Testament, we are reminded that just as surely as Jesus Christ came the first time, He is coming again the second time. Scripture declares that His return will be personal and physical (Matt. 24:44, Acts 1:11, Col. 3:4, II Tim. 4:8, Heb. 9:28) as well as visible and triumphant (Mk. 8:38, II Thess. 1:10, Rev. 1:7). When Jesus comes the second time, He will bring an end of human history as we know it today. It will be a time when He will raise the dead and judge the world (Jh. 5:28-29). He will impart to His people their final glory (Rom. 8:17-18, Col. 3:4) and deliver His kingdom to the Father (I Cor. 15:24-28). Time has rapidly moved along with the occurring of worldwide events, nations suffering wars, many generations going to their graves, and yet the promise of Christ's second coming is yet to be fulfilled. For over 2,000 years, the bride of Christ has been anxiously awaiting in great expectancy the coming of her Bridegroom. The next great prophetic event on God's calendar is the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Our text is a classic passage that reminds us this world has not seen the last of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Thessalonian Christians had no trouble believing in the resurrection, but perhaps they were curious as to whether the dead saints would be inferior to the living ones when Christ returned. God gives an assuring promise that there is coming a future reunion of all believers in the Church triumphant.

All Departed Believers Will Be Raised When Christ Returns (4:13-15)

Physical death for the Christian is described by the use of a metaphor and referred to as a mere "sleep." When Scripture speaks of "sleep in Jesus" it literally means "put to sleep through Jesus." When the Book of Hebrews says that Jesus "tasted death" (Heb. 2:9), it means that He suffered all our terror and bitterness of death for us. A believer is not to be terrorized at the thought of death because of the "hope" he has in Christ (Col. 1:27, I Pet. 1:3). The death of Christ is what takes the sting, pain, and fear out of our death (I Cor. 15:55-57). Jesus did the dying (suffering) that we might do the sleeping (resting). His glorious resurrection guarantees us a great getting up morning when He comes again.

The word, cemetery, means sleeping place, and is simply the place where the saint's body awaits the resurrection. Death for the Christian is as painless as going to "sleep" and for that reason we often refer to it as dying grace. Now, that doesn't mean a Christian will not suffer in the dying process, because many believers may suffer on their death beds, but all suffering ceases when they cross the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). A beautiful example of dying grace is seen in the death of Stephen when he "fell asleep" being tortured with stones (Acts 7:60). For the Christian, his suffering ceases with death, but for the lost sinner, death is an eternal anguish that never ceases (Rev. 20:14).

This passage found in our text is NOT teaching soul sleep, but simply likens death for a Christian as "sleep" (Lk. 8:52, Jh. 11:11, II Cor. 5:8). "Sleep" is a means of REST - God puts His children to rest at the close of life just as a weary worker longs for rest at the close of a hard day's work. "Sleep" is a means of REFRESHMENT - Just as a weary worker expects to arise with a fresh vitality, so God will raise us to a glorified body free from trials and troubles. "Sleep" implies the expectation of AWAKING - Just as we go to bed expecting to awaken the following morning, we can be committed to the grave in hopes of a glorious resurrection. A sleeper is not UNCONSCIOUS - He may be unaware of some of the externals, but he is conscious and can be awakened, just as the believing dead in the presence of the Lord. One of the hardest things about death is the temporary separation from our loved ones. The KJV word "prevent" is Old English for precede. When Jesus comes again, the living saints will not experience death, but neither will they hinder the resurrection of the dead saints because Christ will "bring" them "with him" in their soulish (spirit) state (II Cor. 5:8, Phil 1:23) when He returns.

All Living Believers Will Be Caught Up When Christ Returns (4:16-18)

The return of Jesus Christ in His second coming to earth is an unmistakable biblical fact. He will return to this earthly atmosphere in a “moment” quicker than with the speed of thought (I Cor. 15:52). His return for His Church will be a personal return because Scripture says, “the Lord himself shall descend.” The coming of Christ is NOT the coming of death, nor the coming of the Holy Spirit, but His personal return to earth. There are three signals that call our attention to the divine majesty of Christ in His coming. “Descend with a shout” – This victorious battle shout of Jesus will summon both the believing dead and the remnant church unto Himself in the air. “Voice of the archangel” – The chief of God’s angelic host will call for the church to arise. “Trump of God” – The blast of the trumpet will be the victory sound that delivers God’s elect into glory (I Cor. 15:50-51).

We need to note that the word rapture does not appear in Scripture, but it means to be “caught up.” All the righteous dead will rise “first” as their soulish bodies return with Christ to receive their eternal glorified residence. “Then”, all mortal saints will be instantaneously clothed with their immortal glorified bodies (I Cor. 15:53-54). All the righteous dead throughout all of time will be a part of this glorious resurrection. Although this passage speaks of a prophetic happening, the primary purpose is to provide encouragement and “comfort” to believers who have had loved ones to die in the Lord. In no way will the “dead in Christ” lose out on a future resurrection. Our text cannot help but give great “comfort” to all believers of all ages as we await its promised fulfillment. A “comfort” of the Christian faith is to know that a time is coming when the family of God will be re-united.

All Unbelievers Will Be Judged When Christ Returns (5:1-3)

The time of Christ’s return is not recorded in detail anywhere in Holy Scripture. Man’s untamable curiosity has tried foolishly to fix certain days to His return (Mk. 13:32). It was the desire of Christ for believers of all ages to eagerly expect His imminent coming by faith and to live godly lives in light of a coming judgment upon the world. What we do know is that Christ’s second coming will be sudden, without warning, and in judgment. A “thief” gives no warning, but is careful to come at the most unexpected moment. Jesus will not come in the character of a “thief,” but the unexpectedness of a “thief.” Nothing is more certain than the Lord’s coming, but nothing is more uncertain than WHEN. However, His return will catch the wicked unprepared and in judgment the lost will reap the consequences of rejecting Christ (Jh. 5:26-29). “The day of the Lord” is a term that is associated with the coming of Christ in Judgment. Throughout both the Old and New Testament the term is used, but in the New Testament, it’s also associated with punishment and final rewards (Acts 17:31, Rom. 2:5,16, II Cor. 1:14). “The day of the Lord” also is used in reference to when the “heavens” and “earth” will be “dissolved” to make way for a “new heavens and a new earth” (II Pet. 3:10-13). There will be many false preachers who will preach “peace and safety,” or in other words a false gospel. Not everyone who claims to be sent of God is true and genuine. God’s judgment will come upon this earth like “travail upon a woman with child” (labor pains), suddenly, and without warning.

All True Believers Should Anticipate Christ’s Return 5:4-6

Saints have been saved from the “darkness” of the world and have become “children of light.” As we “walk in the light, as he (Christ) is in the light” (I Jh. 1:7), we can recognize His precious promises to His Church. To “watch and be sober” means that we are to look for and be aware of His second coming. God forbid that we fall into the nightly “sleep” of indifference and unbelief. It’s time for sleeping churches, and sleeping believers to wake up, come alive, live holy, and warn the lost of a coming day of judgment. We must ever be on guard against sin as we anxiously expect the Lord’s soon return.

Closing

No dates can be predicted as to the time of Christ's second coming because according to Scripture that time remains completely unknown to man (Matt. 24:36). What we do know is that it will be a day of judgment for those who are not ready for His return (Matt. 24:36-51). For the Christian, the expectation of Christ's coming should be constantly on our minds and live in such a way that we'll be ready to meet Him when He comes (Matt. 25:1-13, I Cor. 15:58). The Blessed Hope of the Church is to expect the return of Jesus Christ back to this earth for His Bride at any moment. Today, it is by faith and repentance of sin that one can trust Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. To reject the Lord of Glory means to experience the most terrible suffering imaginable. Jesus is coming again and He's coming soon. The question for us today, IS He COMING FOR YOU? If He came today would you be taken up to forevermore be with the Lord? If you're a Christian, are you living and looking in anticipation of His imminent return?

A Ministry Update

With this issue of ***"The Traveling Pulpit"*** I continue with the theme of eschatology that I introduced from last quarters edition. I trust that the Holy Spirit will stimulate your mind and heart as you ponder the marvelous truth that Jesus Christ is coming again. Just as surely as He came the first time, He is coming the second time. What a day that will be!!

My latest book, ***"Church Government, Which Form Is Most Biblical?"*** is now ready for circulation. I'll be the first to admit that it's a book the average church member may find difficult because probably about 99.99% know little if anything about church government. However, that is even more reason for me writing this little book. I'm convinced that one of the major reasons why churches that practice the wrong type of government have so many problems. I remind you that there is no charge for my books, but simply free for the asking.

I'm also glad to report that as this issue of ***"The Traveling Pulpit"*** goes to press that our webmaster is making updates to our website. My new series that I've begun in Romans is being downloaded to the audio page as well as updates to the publications page. The big news, is that all of my books will soon be available as e-books on our website. Hopefully, this will be ready by the end of April.

This little ministry is made possible by the grace of God as he provides the needs through people like you. Thank you for your prayers and financial support. May the Lord bless you as you feast from the riches of His grace.

Because Of God's Sovereign Grace.....BWM