

REVELATION 19:11-16

WHEN JESUS COMES AGAIN

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”¹

In the Letter to Hebrew Christians, we read, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him” [HEBREWS 9:28]. The Word of God teaches that God sent His Son who presented Himself as an infinite sacrifice because of the sin of mankind. Certified as dead by Roman soldiers who were experts in death, the Son of God was buried, only to be raised to life on the third day. After fifty days, during which time He was seen by those whom God chose as witnesses, he ascended into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Soon, He is returning to this fallen world to receive His people to Himself and to judge the wicked.

Throughout His days in the flesh, Jesus spoke often of His coming to earth a second time. Nearing the conclusion of His labours in the flesh, the Master told His disciples, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” [MATTHEW 24:29-31].

Earlier during His ministry among men, the Master cautioned that “The Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done” [MATTHEW 16:27].

When adjured by the High Priest to answer whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, or a mere man, the Master responded, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” [MATTHEW 26:64].

Even a cursory review of the Gospels demonstrates that Jesus was born in order to provide His life as a sacrifice for sin. Indeed, the Apostle has succinctly summed up the Gospel in these words, “For our sake [God] made Him [that is, Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:21]. According to the Word, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons” [GALATIANS 4:4, 5].

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As contemporary Christians, we are in desperate need of recapturing the excitement, the anticipation that marked the first Christians. They lived in the light of the Saviour's momentary return. That knowledge motivated every activity, coloured every word spoken, and ruled their very thoughts. We have lost that motivating force for righteousness and godliness. What will it be when Jesus comes again? That is the question asked by the message this day; and by God's mercies we will, through review of the words of the text, endeavour to recover that early vision so that we also can be a people living in anticipation of His return.

WHEN WILL JESUS COME AGAIN — Among professing Christians, there is considerable disagreement concerning Christ's return. There are good people who aver that we are now in the Millennial reign of Christ the Lord. These individuals, identified theologically as Amillennialists, hold that each time an individual receives Jesus as Lord of life, that individual enters the Millennium. Since experience tells us that Satan is not now bound, it seems fair to dismiss this view as aberrant at best and at worst deliberately ignorant of the Word.

A second group, Postmillennialists, was once quite sizeable within the world of theologians, but having fallen into disfavour as a consequence of two worldwide conflicts in the twentieth century, they almost disappeared. Today, those holding this view appear to be again growing in numbers. This eschatological view teaches that the world will progress toward goodness, eventually compelling Christ to return as result of the spread of knowledge of His right to reign. The growth of radical Islam with the stated intent of compelling all people to worship Allah or die will likely place a damper on postmillennial views once again.

The third view, to which I wholeheartedly ascribe, is identified as the ancient, apostolic view; it is referred to as Premillennialism. It teaches that wickedness will increase as the age progresses toward a conclusion. Ultimately, Christ the Lord will return to bring salvation to those who look for His coming and to judge the wicked.

Ultimately, one's hermeneutic will determine eschatology. What I mean is that an approach to Scripture that emphasises an allegorical interpretation of the Word will almost inevitably lead one to an amillennial position. After all, if a "thousand years" simply means "a long time," then there is no warrant to imagine that Christ will physically reign on the earth. Similarly, if we interpret Scripture literally, we will naturally adopt a premillennial eschatology. In the former instance, consistency will demand that we interpret passages that speak of the future in an allegorical fashion. In the latter instance, consistency will lead us to understand that God has given us a revelation of His plan for the ages.

I accept Scripture as accurate and reliable; therefore, I am confident that God has revealed His plans for what will occur in the future. The next event on God's timetable is the removal of His people from this dying world. Paul writes, "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

[1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-55]

Again, the Apostle has written, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18]. Now, that is real encouragement!

So, Christ is coming again to remove His people from the earth. Those remaining in the world will receive an explanation concerning the disappearance of those who are removed; the lie they will be told will prove so convincing that they will not question it. Paul wrote the Thessalonian Christians, “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12].

For a period of seven years, divine judgements will rain down on the earth dwellers, as God holds the wicked of the earth accountable for the evil they have done. At the conclusion of that awful time, Jesus Himself will return to judge the unbelieving nations of the earth. Jesus spoke of that event when He informed His disciples, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left” [MATTHEW 25:31-33]. Even when receiving sentence, the unbelieving world will profess bewilderment at why their own self-righteousness was not enough, whereas the righteous will be astonished that their righteous acts reflected a transformed heart [see MATTHEW 25:35-46].

Here is a truth that merits your most serious consideration: the Christian does righteous deeds because his heart has been made righteous. The outsider attempts to do righteous acts in order to compel God to accept what is done. A transformed heart always precedes deeds that are pleasing in the sight of the Lord Christ.

After purging all the unredeemed out of the earth, Christ will reign on the earth, and we who are saved during this present Age of Grace will reign with Him, as we are told in Scripture. Redeemed saints from this Church Age shall sing before the Lamb of God:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for You were slain, and by Your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and *they shall reign on the earth.*”

[REVELATION 5:9, 10]

A benediction pronounced in this book says, “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and *they will reign with Him for a thousand years*” [REVELATION 20:6].

The Millennium will be a time of worldwide peace and prosperity, as Isaiah writes.

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

[ISAIAH 11:1-9]

However, at the conclusion of the thousand years, Satan will be released from the hold where he will have been incarcerated, and mankind will again express the wickedness that marks the fallen heart, for there shall be a rebellion against the reign of the Son of God. John describes what happens at the conclusion of the Millennial reign of the Master when he writes, “When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” [REVELATION 20:4-6].

The text today speaks of the Second Coming of Christ the Lord. This is an awesome description of the events with which the Great Tribulation is concluded. It describes the Son of God displaying His glorious might and power. He comes to bring in a reign of righteousness. Sustained, continuous righteousness is not a characteristic that has marked any kingdom that has existed in all the annals of recorded history. However, as the Antichrist and the False Prophet who will promote his interests gather the armies of the world to halt what God has decreed, the returning Son of God will destroy them with the Word of His mouth.

John writes, “Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.’” And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh” [REVELATION 19:17-21].

No moral knows when this cataclysmic event will take place. We know that it follows the Rapture of God’s holy people and the Great Tribulation, but we are not privy to the precise timing of these events. Jesus cautioned His disciples, “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” [MATTHEW 24:36].

Addressing the question of the Rapture, Jesus taught His disciples, “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” [MARK 13:28-37].

WHY IS JESUS COMING AGAIN — From the passages we have just reviewed, we know that the Master comes again to rule over the earth He created. Immediately preceding His return, we read in this book of events that will be unfolding on the earth. “The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
 who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
 and begun to reign.
The nations raged,
 but your wrath came,
 and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
 and those who fear your name,
 both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

[REVELATION 11:15-18]

Underscore in your mind that Christ returns to reign. At His first advent He came in deep humility in order to provide His life as a sacrifice because of the sin of the world. He is coming the second time to bring salvation for those who await His return. Today, wickedness increases in the world. Language continues to degenerate, as even the people of God sound more as if they were speaking the language of this dying world than the language of heaven. Attitudes reflect a mind that is focused on personal pleasure in this dying world rather than a mind that is set on the things of God. Morals are jettisoned and traded for that which is more convenient and which will permit the holder to live as she wants rather than living as she should. Christians must remember that we shall give an accounting of our lives before the Master.

We who are Christians need once again take to heart the words that Paul recorded in his second letter to the Church of God in Corinth. “We are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-10].

Though I primarily address Christians, those who are outside the Faith need to reflect on the cautionary statement penned by the Apostle Peter. He asked, “If the righteous are barely saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinners” [1 PETER 4:18 NET BIBLE]? Good question! You who are yet outside the Faith must consider that you shall shortly be compelled to face Him whose mercy you now spurn. At the moment, believers are considered to be foolish for not living as the world lives and for looking for the return of One whom they have never seen with their own eyes. Throughout history and throughout the world even in this day, Christians pay an awful price for their faith. Nevertheless, they persist in their faith, and even thrive in the face of opposition as they continue to make every effort to be holy and godly in their lives.

Your perseverance as believers in the face of opposition from sinners and your continued desire to grow in holiness “is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:5-10].

HOW SHALL WE PREPARE FOR HIS RETURN — Of this we may be certain, Christ the Lord is coming again. Even now we who are Christians are being conformed to His image. God is at work in our lives, and we are being prepared to reign with Christ the Lord when He returns. The appropriate question for all who are Christians to ask is, “How shall we prepare for His return?” How may we prepare ourselves for His coming?

First, we must take heed that His coming is imminent, Concerning the suddenness of His return, Jesus said, “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [MATTHEW 24:36-51].

On yet another occasion, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom that was to come. He said, “The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” [MATTHEW 25:1-30].

He is quite clear in informing those who will follow Him to prepare themselves for His return. We prepare ourselves through investing our lives in His work, through living in anticipation of His return, through equipping ourselves to labour more effectively in His work. We must see the church as an opportunity—not solely as a place to worship or even as a duty we perform occasionally, but as an opportunity to prepare ourselves for our eternal labour.

Through studying the Word and praying for others who are wandering from the fold, we are preparing for eternity. Through learning all we can concerning the will of the Lord and implementing that will as it is revealed, we are preparing for eternity. Through exercising the gifts that He has entrusted to each of us, serving others and building them in this most holy Faith, we are preparing ourselves for eternity. Through making every effort to live holy and righteous lives, we are preparing for eternity.

Living in this way, we glorify God and honour the sacred Name by which we are called. However, the more immediate and the more direct benefit to us individually is that by live in this way, we are living in the light of His coming again. It is nothing less than endeavouring to live as John has taught us in his first letter. You will recall that John wrote, “Little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” [1 JOHN 2:28-3:3].

For each of you who are now outside the grace of God, you who have never believed—know that Jesus the Lord lives, that He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Know, also, that He shall shortly come again, bringing salvation for those who watch for His appearing and bringing judgement for all who have rejected Him in this age. Our call to you, then, is to receive the forgiveness of sin and the new life that is offered in Christ the Lord.

The Word of God testifies, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

Believe Him and be saved. Receive the life that s found only in Him and live. Do it today. Do it now. Amen.