

# THEREFORE WATCH

By

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We do not predict the Lord's return tomorrow, or next year, or in a hundred years. Rather we expect Him TODAY. "Watch therefore: for you know not on what day your Lord comes!" (Matt. 24:42).

As one reads the resolutions and expressed objectives of the religious bodies of our day he is often amazed at how far removed are these considerations from the next great event in the Divine plan: the return of Christ. In fact, as one hears the suggestions of foremost religious leaders he is forced to conclude that "mainstream" religion of our day does not recognize the possibility of Christ's personal and literal return to bring to a final consummation the history of the human race.

Yet this is exactly what the Gospel and the Christian religion is all about. It is the return of Christ the Lord which gives reason and purpose to the whole scheme of Bible Teaching. Without His return there is no resurrection, no judgment, no hope, and no final and eternal purpose in all that which goes before. Until He comes the whole process labors endlessly on without accomplishment, like sewing with no knot in the thread. The thread keeps pulling through leaving the cloth as it was. It is the fact of the return of Jesus that puts the knot in the thread. Without this fact there is no definite end-purpose to Christianity nor to life itself. Still there seems to be little effort in today's church to establish a real expectation of Christ's return.

We know the excuses. "Fanatics in previous generations have set dates for the Lord's return, and have been proven wrong." Of course the date-setters are in error, for "of that day and hour knows no one" (Matt. 24:36). But it is interesting to note that believers who came to expect the Lord at any moment became the most enthusiastic evangelists on earth, and their willingness to spend and be spent for God is held as an example for all. Think what might have been accomplished if skeptics of the past century had given up their doubts and had lived in expectation of the coming of Christ.

Another excuse for ignoring the doctrine of His coming is that it was promised almost 2,000 years ago and hasn't happened yet, and therefore is not likely to happen for thousands of years, if at all. The very argument used by such scoffers is fulfillment of the prophecy; "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery saying, "Where is the promise of His coming: for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

But these are only excuses. Anyone who takes seriously the fact that scripture is a revelation of the truth from God must accept also the fact that the entire Bible, and especially the New Testament, focuses its purposeful rays upon the return of Christ the Lord to this world. "I will come again," rings from the lips of Jesus with absolute

certainty. If He is to fail here, then He is a total failure and the whole scheme of redemption is worthless. But He is the Truth, and His message is that He will come again. The angels spoke clearly and positively on the day that Jesus ascended that “this Jesus who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you beheld Him going into Heaven”, and the apostles were dead certain that the object “of the Christian hope was for Christ to return. “Behold, He comes with clouds, and every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7).

Why should men seek excuses to deny the most glorious and astounding event imaginable? The answer is found in the asking: the event is too marvelous for faith to embrace. “Faith” in the present age has come to mean the simple recognition of established history. Faith, in other words, no longer exists as faith, but rather as that which one is willing to admit has been proven. (Of course there are exceptions, or I would not be writing this; there would be no use.) One can believe that which everyone experiences or admits must be so. But to believe that Jesus, the resurrected and immortal Son of Man, shall someday come winging down the corridors of space, defying the “laws” (?) of gravity, of atmospheric pressure, of speed and time – that He will really intervene in the so-called natural processes and interfere in the normal course of human procedure – this is too much. Better stick to something easier to believe. Men generally accept the idea of some kind of spiritual existence outside of this present life. Since it requires no definition and thus no real effort of the mind, it becomes more practical to suggest that the “really important” issue is not whether He will return but whether we will be ready to die. The tragedy is that few seem to be able to tell the difference between the two ideas. There is a difference.

First, the coming of the Lord will affect the dead before it affects anything else. “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” (1 Thess. 4:16). However ready one may be at death, unless Jesus returns to raise him up to life, his readiness will be worthless. Why die in readiness to meet the Lord if one remains dead, and if the Lord does not return? Of what value to embrace a faith if the ultimate end of that faith is never fulfilled? Or can it even be called “faith” if it does not include the essential fulfillment of that faith, the return of Christ? At millions of funerals people have heard the text: “I go to prepare a place for you...” used to indicate that the dead have received their eternal reward. But the meaning of that statement is made clear by the next verse in which Jesus continues, “and if I go to prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN and receive you to myself...” (John 14:3). The receiving of the believer, regardless of when he died, is to be at the return of Christ, when the believer lives again. One who is not ready for Christ’s return is simply not ready either to live OR to die!

Besides this, it makes a difference in the face of world conditions. Anyone who tries to figure a way out of the chaos in which society moves these days is soon to realize that there is no way known to man whereby the problems of the world can be solved. Someone suggests, “If men would turn to God it would all come out right.” “If all Christians would get together...” “If the church put Christ first, we would evangelize the world” “If ... if ... and etc.” But they suggest it knowing it will not happen. Everyone

can see the erosion of integrity even in his own community where there is a prosperous church on every street. We see freedom fast slipping away and something called social progress clamping an icy hand on the ideals and efforts of the individual. Understandable policies give way to new formless theories; sponsored by some unseen hand from the vague media of communication. Work goes on, but unrelated to the purpose in the mind of the worker. Laws come into existence which no one wants, but which turn all the workable systems into hopeless red tape, the roots of which lie enmeshed in other unjust laws and unworkable systems. The result is a condition from which we see no possible human solution.

In the face of such chaos the Scripture speaks the solution: “Behold, He comes with the clouds.” “Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26). There is a vast difference between enduring life until one is released from its perplexities by death, and in living in anticipation of fulfillment of life and purpose in the momentous event of Christ’s victorious return.

His coming will mark the overthrow of all that is party to Satan’s system, and for this reason it will be a day of dread to the unprepared. Undoubtedly this is one of the reasons that the very idea of His literal return is mocked by the world and ignored by much of the church. “The kings of the earth, magnates and marshals, the rich and the powerful, and all men, slave or free” will hide “in caves and mountain crags,” calling “to the mountains and the crags, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the vengeance of the Lamb! For the great day of their vengeance has come, and who will be able to stand?’” (Rev. 6:15-17 N.E.B.). Instead of universal rejoicing, as one might expect, “All the tribes of the earth” will mourn (Matt. 24:30).

Having placed no confidence in the revelation of God, men will panic when they see that, after all, the Bible is true and God carries out His plans to final completion. They will resent the intervention in their lives, the stopping of the machinery of business, the sudden end to their wealth, the final proof that God is sovereign. They will hate Him for revealing their hypocrisy, exposing their ripping off the veneer of false religion. In the light of His absolute righteousness, the concepts of relative goodness will be proven lies, and the philosophies created to camouflage the evil will be burned away by the light of His purity. They shall see to run from the Truth, but it will be as John said, “And there was found no place for them” (Rev. 20:11). For these, it will be judgment: “At the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might” (2 Thess. 1:9). Their punishment will be a fearful and painful destruction in which they will pay the supreme penalty of death, “for the wages of sin is death” — a death that is total, final and eternal.

But for the faithful believers, it will be an entirely different story, “when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed” (2 Thess. 1:10).

It will be the giving of life to the righteous dead. “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” (1 Thess. 4:16). Contrary to popular teaching, the believers who have died are not now enjoying the rewards of eternal life. Nor is there any scripture to support the common idea that Christians enter some angelic state at death. The scriptures speak of the dead believers as “asleep in Jesus” and their only promise of enjoying life is the promise of their resurrection from the dead. At the voice of Christ the graves shall burst open, and the dead, long since forgotten by man, but whose names are recorded in the “Lamb’s book of life”, shall come forth just as Jesus came forth, immortal and eternal. The coming of Christ is the hope, the only hope, of those who died in faith, who on that great day will suddenly find themselves “alive forevermore” in the very presence of the one who “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light” (2 Timothy 1:10).

It will be a day of glorious transfiguration for the living believers. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: we all shall not sleep (for some believers shall be alive on the earth at His return) but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

This, then, is the meaning of eternal life. Not mere existence. Not mere spirit-survival, the “immortal soul” idea of Plato. But the actual changing of our perishing mortality into the imperishable immortality which Christ enjoys. This is the clothing with the house (2 Cor. 5: 1-4). Not a house of stone or pearl or gold, but the house of immortality which will be our own deathless bodies. This is when the savior will “fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21). This is the day when all God’s people will be conformed “to the Image of His son” (Romans 8:29). It is then that God will realize the fulfillment of His creative purpose, to make “man in His own image.”

No wonder that the “earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19). What a day that will be!

Think. Think of the course of history from the tragedy of the first family; rebellion, sin and death. In the time of Noah man became so corrupt that “the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5) and the answer of God was the flood. Since Noah there has been a constant convulsion of sin, rebellion and death. In the present century, with the population increase adding a new factor to human problems with which man cannot cope, and with men grasping ideals so inhuman that humanity knows no weapon against them, the race reaches a point of despair, a page in its history for which there is no precedent and not even a means of recording it in understandable terms. There is a time in history when history cannot repeat itself.

At that time, the very King of the universe, Jesus, the exalted Son of God, shall appear to bring history to a close. In a blaze of glory, with the heavens filled with clouds of angels,

in the radiance of holy light and suddenly as an arrow shot from some powerful unknown bow, the Creator will appear: “Behold, I come quickly (suddenly).”

After reading the words; even after seeing them over and over in your own Bible; even knowing them to be a part of the total and immutable revelation from God-it still is a concept which challenges faith. To think that it will actually happen to this world, to this earth, to people, even to us. Mary and Joseph might have felt the same way, when He came the first time. But He did. And He will. It must be true, or else there is no truth. Now must be true!

When Christ comes He will meet only two classes of people on earth: those who expect Him and those who don't. “Therefore, be you also ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man comes” (Matt. 24:44).

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