

FOOTSTEPS IN SPACE

By

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Last month millions of people watching TV news were entertained by Strategic Air Command as they reported unidentified objects in the sky. The objects turned out to be Santa Claus and eight reindeer. One of the comic strips has scooped the space age by capturing a native from the moon!

Some men are dead serious about objects from outer space. For more than a year they have had highly sensitive listening devices turned to outer space in order to catch any signal or voice from some other world in hopes that we might learn what to do to save our own world.

Thus far, there has not been one shred of evidence that there is any living creature located on any planet other than earth. There is plenty of reason to believe, however, that Jesus Christ, Who once left this earth, shall return from Heaven. The strange thing is that men look to outer space for that for which there is no evidence, but deny the coming of One for which there is plenty of evidence. Religious surveys show that a large portion of preachers do not believe in a literal return of Jesus. Among those who acknowledge a "second coming," are many who consider it to be merely spiritual or mystical.

For example, Chester Sillars, writing in "The Christian," international weekly for the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), says, in answer to a question about the second coming of Christ that he believes that Christ returned at Pentecost as light and illuminated Peter's sermon.

He says that he cannot believe that at some time in the future Jesus will return on a cloud and open the graves for the dead as the first century Christians believed. Christ lives, according to his view, in the hearts of the faithful, having come to them a second time as light, truth, love and spirit. He suggests that the Disciples allow and encourage difference of opinion in the matter of the second coming, and that all have a right to their opinion.

Contrast this view, which is shared by hosts of preachers, with that expressed in the Bible. Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). Speaking expressly of the end of the age Jesus said "and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). Many of the parables of Jesus teach that He will return suddenly, to the shame and dismay of those who reject Him.

The apostles were reminded of this fact when Jesus ascended into Heaven. "And while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, you men of Galilee, why stand you looking into heaven?"

This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

Paul, in the simplest of words, explained His coming in I Thessalonians 4:16. “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.” To the Philippians he wrote that we wait for a Savior from Heaven, “The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed unto the second coming of Christ in the New Testament. The evidence is overwhelming.

What is involved in the teaching of our Lord's return?

His return will be personal and literal. It will be the same Jesus who arose from the dead in the physical body, and who was seen by the disciples as He ascended into Heaven. Jesus did not turn into pure spirit after leaving the earth. Scripture says that “in Him dwells the fullness of the godhead BODILY,” and that when He returns we shall see him with our eyes, and shall be changed into His glorious likeness (Col. 2:9, 1 John 3:2, Romans 8:23).

At His return He will complete redemption. Jesus said, “I will come again and will receive you unto myself.” The believer does NOT receive his reward at death. The scriptures teach that those who die as believers are “asleep in Christ,” and when He returns to this world he will raise them up. “For the hour comes in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). It is then that the people of God shall be transformed into the image and likeness of the “firstborn” Son of God (Rom. 8:23, 29, 1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

One of the reasons that the second coming of Christ is ignored is the false tradition that people go immediately to Heaven or Hell (or some other spiritual harbor) at death. If this were true, there would be no object of Christ to return to judge and reward. If, after the body was dead, the man continued to live and to be rewarded or punished, the return of Christ to resurrect him from the dead would be senseless. Paul wrote that if there were no resurrection of the dead, “then they also that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:18). Since the dead are not to be raised until Christ comes (1 Thess. 4:13-17), they obviously will not live again until Christ returns to raise them from death. Now we have eternal life by promise, but then in reality when Christ comes. At the present time, Paul describes us as “waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23).

His return will mark the end of the age and destruction of the world. Paul wrote that the Lord Jesus shall come “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” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Further, he writes, “and then shall be revealed the lawless one

(the anti-Christ) whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation of His coming” (2 Thess. 2:8).

In the 13th chapter of Matthew Jesus set forth a parable concerning the destiny of men, teaching that at the end of the world he would come to gather the saved and. destroy the rebellious unbelievers. “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world.” Peter illuminates the subject by describing the fire as such as to burn up the heavens and the earth in the judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12).

His return is a part of the Faith. Is the second coming of Christ merely a matter of opinion, one upon which we should be encouraged to differ or disbelieve?

No, not according to the Bible. Scripture says that Christ, “having been once offered to bear the sins of man, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28). The expressions of Jesus are emphatic: “Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord comes.” “Take heed... Watch... and pray always.”

One might as well say that faith in the Gospel is optional as to say that the second coming is a matter of opinion. For the Gospel is the good news that man can be rescued from death and given life. But that resurrection to life cannot be accomplished until Christ returns to raise the dead and judge the world. Therefore, the return of Christ Jesus to the world is essentially a part of the Christian message, the Christian faith and the Christian gospel.

The Bible predicts that scoffers will be numerous, despising the doctrine of the second coming. The fact that the age of such scoffers has arrived indicates that His return may be soon.

“Yes: I come quickly. Amen: Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

JUST FOR YOU–TH

On the same day there came two letters from opposite directions, from youth who are trying to bring their lives into harmony with the Creator. Both of them indicate the same basic problem which is common to every person who becomes serious about being Christian. That problem is one of the egos, the “I want” nature of man.

What it amounts to is this: Christ says we are to be and do one thing, but our tendency (want) is to be and do another.

The trouble is that one cannot succeed as a Christian while merely trying to patch up the outside and do certain things. There has to be a change from inside, a change of the basis purpose and aim. The will of the believer must be willfully surrendered to the will of God. When this takes place one becomes a new creature.

You have seen the problem in others, of course. The salesman is all sweetness and courtesy while trying to clinch the deal with a customer, but when the customer is out of sight, the bitterness and hate reveals his real feelings. The parent is kind and patient with a mischievous child while company is present, but all the time burning with anger that borders on hate! Your friend may be complimentary of your new dress, while all the time boiling with envy and jealousy! And you have experienced it – refusing to participate in something not entirely Christian, but all the time wishing you could throw off the restraint and run with the crowd.

But when one willfully chooses the will of God, the difference between inside feelings and outside action disappears. He is courteous because he really feels this way: he is patient because the anger is simply not there: he is pure because he likes that better than the impure things of the world.

The question then is whether or not one really wants God's will. It's no use saying you want to be a Christian, when you do not want the life God offers. Because you can never give the life God offers when you secretly want the other kind!

But if you do want the life God is offering, then it is a matter of giving up selfish will (“I want”) and seeking God's will (“Thy will be done”). Once you surrender your life to God's control, with faith that what He wants for you is better than what you are trained to want, the conflict ends.

A wolf cannot really live like a sheep, because deep down inside he prefers meat to grass. But we are not mere animals. God has given us the privilege of choice: to live as God desires, or as the sinful world desires. We cannot do both. One cannot have his sake and eat it too!

What is the answer? Since the conflict is between what we “want” to do (in line with the world) and what God wants us to do (in line with His holiness) the solution is to surrender these “wants” and accept the purpose of God. The Bible calls this repentance - the change of our desires and aims and actions - releasing our will to God's control so that what He wants is what we want. This was the way Jesus lived – “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.” (John 4:34)

The “self” is not to be destroyed, for that would be to destroy the person. But it is to be denied, and given up to God. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself . . .” (Matthew 16:24) Of course this isn't easy. But then, whoever said that being a Christian was easy? What God does promise is peace and joy, and a life that is complete and eternal.

Do YOU really want the kind of life God offers?

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