

Second Coming

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Date: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Ian Naismith

[0 : 00] Hello, my name is Corrie and I am a member here at Brunfield Evangelical Church. Our first reading this morning is from 1 Chronicles chapter 16 verses 28 to 36.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad. Let them say among the nations, the Lord reigns. Let the sea resound and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant and everything in them. Let the trees of the forest sing. Let them sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Cry out, save us, God our Saviour. Gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Hi, I'm Jonathan, also one of the members here. Our second reading is going to be from 1 Thessalonians in chapter 4.

[1 : 30] We're going to be reading verses 13 to 18 and then I'll pray for you before we hear him preach God's word. So 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, starting at 13.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope.

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive on our left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

[2 : 36] Therefore, encourage one another with these words. Let's pray. God and Father, we thank you that we can meet, albeit on YouTube, online.

We thank you for Ian, and we thank you for the work that he's put in to speak to us this morning. And we pray that you'll give him the words to say. And as he speaks to us, we remember that it is all coming from you, and that you will soften our hearts to your word, and that everyone who is listening, no matter where they may be, or what situations they find themselves in, will be deeply affected by your word.

We'll be encouraged and challenged as we listen to what Ian has to say. So bless him as he comes to speak to us. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

My name's Ian, and we're delighted to have you sharing with us in our morning service today. I've been asked to speak on a subject which is at the same time wonderful and really challenging, the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Let me begin by asking you some questions. Are you eagerly waiting for the second coming of Jesus? Do you wake up in the morning and think, this could be the day when the Lord returns?

[3 : 52] When you're talking to Christian family and friends, does your conversation naturally turn to the Lord's return, and does that bring you comfort and encouragement in your troubles?

Are you motivated by the fact that Jesus is coming back to live a life of purity and seeking to please him in every way? And does it make you all the more eager to talk to those of your friends and relatives who are not Christians about the need to trust in Jesus and to be ready for his return?

If you're able to answer yes to all or most of these questions, I suggest that you're in a fairly small minority of Christians today, certainly of those of my generation and younger.

I can look back to when I was young, and I think there was a lot more we talked about and sang about and probably thought about the coming of the Lord Jesus. And certainly if we go back to the

time when Paul was writing to the Thessalonians in the passage we're particularly looking at today, there was an excitement, an expectation of the Lord's return, which I think is lacking today. And so we might ask ourselves, why is this? Why are we not more excited about the fact that Jesus is coming back? I'd like to suggest a few reasons before we look at the passage and other passages that talk to us about the Lord's return.

[5 : 17] First reason I think why we're not more excited than we are is that it's been a long time. Over 700,000 days when people have been saying, maybe this will be the day when the Lord returns.

And maybe we think after 2,000 years of the Lord not coming back, it's probably unlikely that he'll come back in my generation. But of course, that is exactly what the Lord warned against. The Lord says you need to be ready because you don't know when he'll be coming back. He told the parable about the bridesmaids who were ready for a wedding and they were all dressed up and they had lamps with oil in them.

But the very groom was held up. And by the time he came back, half the bridesmaids had no oil left in their lamp and were excluded from the wedding. They thought he wasn't coming, that he wouldn't be there that day, and he came unexpectedly.

And the Lord Jesus similarly will come unexpectedly. And we'll think about that in a few minutes. But we shouldn't be thinking because he hasn't come for nearly 2,000 years, he won't come in the near future.

[6 : 28] He very well could come today or in the next few days or next year or two. We just don't know. Second reason why I think people are sometimes reluctant to think and talk about the Lord's return is that there are a lot of areas of it that are subject of debate, where people disagree on the details of what will happen.

The passages in the New Testament that talk about the Lord's return, some of them are among the most difficult in the Bible. The words of Jesus in Matthew 24, which we'll be looking at a bit later on, or passages in the book of Revelation, they're quite difficult to understand.

And a lot of people have come up with a lot of different thoughts about how things might look on the Lord's return. Different sequences of events. And different interpretations of what is to be taken literally and what is to be seen as figurative.

And in the debate, you tend to classify it as belonging to one schooler thought or another. For what it's worth, I think I would be considered a premillennial futurist.

But actually, the thing I'm most confident about is that the Lord's second return will be like his first coming. That his return will be different from what anyone expected.

[7 : 50] But we'll look at it and we'll realise how it exactly fulfills prophecies about him in the scriptures and we'll marvel at the wisdom of our God. And the fact that there are some things we don't understand and that people disagree about shouldn't deter us from thinking about the Lord's return and taking comfort and strength from it.

The key things, the really important things, all Bible-believing Christians agree on. The Lord Jesus will come back. He will come back physically.

He will defeat completely the evil one and bring about a world which is perfect and without sin. And there will be a judgment. There will be those who are saved by the grace of God and there will be those who are lost.

These are clearly stated truths from the Bible and there is no doubt about them. It is the slightly peripheral things, not trivial, but slightly peripheral things that we tend to disagree on.

Then the third reason why we perhaps don't think as much as we should about the Lord's return is that we're uncomfortable with the prospect of judgment for many. As I said, that is a fundamental part of the return of the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 09] That some will be saved and some will be subject to God's judgment. And we don't like to think of that happening to those who may have been our relatives or our friends or on the face of it, perfectly decent, respectable people.

But the truth is that all of us deserve God's judgment. There is none of us that deserves to be saved and to be with Jesus forever. And it's only by the grace of God that we have come to believe in him and to trust him.

The Lord's judgment certainly should motivate us to go and to tell others about the need for salvation. But it's not a reason not to think about or to look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus.

And then finally, and perhaps most significantly, I think most of us are just a bit too comfortable in this world.

We're used to a modern world with technology and all the rest of it, and we enjoy it, most of us, and we don't want to leave it behind. And perhaps we have a picture of heaven and of going to be with Jesus that almost is taken from the first century.

[10:22] We see ourselves as going back from the mod cons of the 21st century and walking around in white robes in a very first century world. I have a picture that was in my mind as I was preparing this message, rather a silly one, but I think it illustrates my point.

My picture was of someone who has been caught up to be with the Lord Jesus and they're reaching out and they're trying to grab their iPhone or whatever other device they had so that they can go up and they have something to do when they're up in the clouds.

Yes, it's silly, but I wonder sometimes whether many of us are so comfortable in this world. We so enjoy the technology and things that are around about us that we don't realise how wonderful it will be when we go to be with the Lord.

It won't be a disappointment. It will be something that is marvellous and we will look at it and we will be amazed at how good our God is.

After all, our God is the one who made the whole universe and the best scientists and inventors today, they are simply thinking God's thoughts after him.

[11:34] He made all the things that make modern technology and modern comfort possible. And so we need to be very wary of getting too attached to the things of our day because what is to come is so much better.

And we really should be rejoicing in the fact that Jesus is coming again. When we look at the scriptures, there is a real excitement in many of the passages that look forward to it.

The passage we read earlier from 1 Chronicles, the immediate context of that is David's rejoicing in God as he prepares for the temple to be built under Solomon.

But he is also looking forward to the day when the Lord will be seen to reign and to judge. And he says, Let the heavens rejoice. Let the earth be glad.

Let them see among the nations, The Lord reigns. Let the trees of the forest sing. Let them sing for joy before the Lord. For he comes to judge the earth.

[12:40] The second coming of the Lord Jesus is something that should be very much in our thoughts and something that we should be looking forward to with an eager expectation, knowing that it will be so much better for us to go and to be with our Lord.

So what does the Bible have to teach us about the return of the Lord Jesus? There are many different passages we have chosen to read today. The return, the second coming of the Lord Jesus is one of the things that is most talked about in the whole Bible.

Someone has estimated, and I don't know how they counted, that around one in 30 verses in the Bible refer in one way or another to the return of the Lord Jesus. And we refer to quite a number of others, particularly of what the Lord Jesus had to say about it as we go along.

But we've chosen to read from the passage in 1 Thessalonians, where Paul presents a very clear picture of how he sees the Lord coming back for the church.

And Paul, as he writes, is addressing a question that's been put to him by the Thessalonians. The Christians in Thessalonica were quite worried because the Lord hadn't returned.

[13:51] It had only been a few years, but they had expected he'd come quickly. He hadn't returned and some of them had died. And they were saying, well, these people that have died, what a shame they seem to have missed out on the return of the Lord.

And Paul says, by no means. In fact, it's almost the opposite. Those who have passed away believing in the Lord Jesus, they will be the first to meet with him when he returns.

And he bases that on some very important theology. If you're looking at it in your Bible, it's in verse 14. Paul says, we believe that Jesus died and rose again.

And so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. We believe that Jesus died and rose again. That must be about the simplest statement of Christian faith that there is in the whole Bible.

The death and the resurrection of Jesus are absolutely fundamental to Christian faith. He died for our sins on the cross. And as we were thinking at Easter, he then rose again on the third day.

[15:03] And Paul says here, as he does separately in 1 Corinthians, in a more expanded version, Paul says because Jesus rose from the dead, and we have this as a fundamental belief of our faith, we can also have confidence that those who die knowing Jesus will also be raised from the dead.

And that will happen when Jesus returns. They will be the first to go and meet him. And then those of us who are still alive on earth who are Christians will be caught up also to meet him in the air. Now, there are a number of things I think we could point to that are features of the return of the Lord Jesus. And I've selected four things which all begin with the letter S, which hopefully makes them a little bit easier to understand.

They're based largely on verses 16 and 17 of 1 Thessalonians 4, but also I've said on other passages. So 16 and 17 say, For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

[16:24] So four things about the return of the Lord Jesus. The first of these is that it will be sudden. We've already alluded to that a little bit. It's not explicitly stated in the verses in Thessalonians, but I think it's certainly implied there.

The shout, the trumpet call, the Lord's voice. These are things which just suddenly happen, and then the Lord returns, and Christians are caught up to be with them.

The Lord Jesus himself, in an awful lot of his teaching about his return, his emphasis was very much on the fact that it would be sudden, that it would be unexpected.

So in Matthew chapter 24, he says, in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark.

And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

[17:28] So on Noah's day, people had no clue that judgment was about to come. It came suddenly, and Jesus says, his return will also be sudden.

A few verses later, he talks about a thief coming in the night, and says that the owner of the house knew the thief was coming. Then he'd have made provision, he'd have had the police waiting outside, he'd have made sure that the thief couldn't get in.

But the whole point of the thief is it's unexpected. He takes people unawares, and so is able to get away with what he steals. And Jesus says again, it will be like that.

People won't be expecting me to return. My return will be sudden. And none of us knows when it will be. We don't know whether it will be tomorrow, whether it will be in the coming weeks and months, or whether it might be many years ahead.

We won't know until it happens. It will be a sudden and a glorious event. And that brings me to my second thing about it. It will be spectacular.

[18:35] This is something that is really, really dramatic. Do you get it in the language Paul uses? The Lord will come, and for Christians that will be the most wonderful thing, to see Jesus coming back.

There will be a command. There will be a trumpet call. And people will be raised up to be with him. Graves will be emptied. And people who are dead, people who have been long dead in some cases, will be resurrected to go and be with Jesus.

And then those of us who know him, those of us who are Christians, who are still on the earth, alive at that point, we too will be caught up. It will be the most spectacular event in history.

And it will be something that will be unprecedented compared with what's gone before. Jesus expands a little bit more on this in Matthew chapter 16.

He says, The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels. So it's not just the Lord returning. It's the angels like the angelic host that there was at his birth.

[19:44] He will be coming back with his angels. Angels. It will be something that is really spectacular, that is really different. And then the third thing, the third S about the Lord's return is separation.

It will be an event like no other that separates people into two groups. There will be those who know the Lord and have their trust in him and will go to be with him in glory.

And there will be those who don't know the Lord, who don't have their trust in him and who ultimately face judgment for that. Again, in Matthew 24, the Lord pictures this. And he pictures two people doing a similar kind of thing. He pictures people perhaps walking through a field or working together. Two people together. Looking at them, you wouldn't know there was any difference between them. And yet one will be taken and the other will be left behind. I think we get that in the passage of 1 Thessalonians as well. [20 : 50] Because Paul says, it will be the dead in Christ who rise first. It will be Christians who have died who rise first. Those who are not Christians, there will be a later resurrection to judgment. But the first to rise will be those who knew the Lord Jesus. And we, he says, we, I'm sure he means the Christians, it's not everybody in the world, it's those who know the Lord Jesus. We will be caught up to meet him in the air. And so there will be this separation at that point between those who know Christ and those who don't. And then there will be the subsequent separation of those who are declared righteous, not because of any good in them, but because they have trusted in Christ and have been forgiven through his sacrifice for them. And there will be those who haven't trusted in Christ and they will be judged for what they have done. At the beginning of 2 Thessalonians, Thessalonians chapter 1, Paul says he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [21 : 54] And then a couple of verses later on that day, he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. There is a separation associated with the Lord's return. And that is a very solemn thing to think about. That either you are saved or you are lost. Either you know Christ or you don't. And today your trust isn't in the Lord Jesus. If you haven't believed that he died for you and that he rose again and that he can save you from your sins and from what you deserve, then I would urge you to put your trust in him and to come to know him and have that assurance of eternal life. If you are a Christian, let's be motivated by the return of the Lord Jesus and the consequences of that to reach out to others, to tell them about his love and his care for us and that the gospel is for everyone. That whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. The Lord's return will be a time of separation. When I was young, there was a film that was very popular called A Thief in the Night. [23 : 15] And the theme song on that was sung by a Christian rock singer called Larry Norman. And it was called, I wish we'd all been ready. The kind of hook line inside that was, there is no time to change your mind. The sun has come and you've been left behind. Let's all of us make sure that we are ready and that we help others to know the truth of the Lord Jesus, that they too may be ready when he returns. And then the final S, the second coming of the Lord Jesus, is about our Saviour. It is above all about the return of Jesus. And that will be the most wonderful thing for those of us who are Christians, that we will see him and more than that, we will be with him forever and more than that, we will be like him. We will be changed, we will be transformed to be like Jesus. Paul in this passage, many times he talks about the Lord and what will happen when the Lord returns. [24 : 21] The Lord himself will come down from heaven. We will meet the Lord in the air and so we will be with the Lord forever. The return of Jesus is very much associated with him. And it is him that we will look at and it is Jesus who we will focus on and Jesus who we will worship when he returns. 1 John chapter 3 verses 2 and 3. We know that when Christ appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. And then the challenge, all of us, all who have this hope in him, purify themselves just as he is pure. And then we have the wonderful scene in Revelation chapter 5. John gets a glimpse into heaven. And what does he see? What is the focus of heaven? It is the Lamb who is on the throne. And the message, the song that's being sung is this, to Jesus, you are worthy to take this scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and by your blood you purchased for God people from every tribe and language and people and nation.

[25 : 43] You have made them to be a kingdom and priest to serve our God and they will reign on the earth. And then there's a great chorus of the thousands and thousands of angels worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.

And there's a second coming of the Lord that is the thing that will be most precious to us. That we will be with Jesus. That we will be changed to be like him and that we will be with him forever and be able to join that wonderful choir in heaven and to sing his praises and to rejoice in all that he has done for us.

I don't know if you've ever thought and I sometimes have if you were asked to go on Desert Island Discs what songs would you choose to get played? Well it's not going to happen for me but I know if I were ever to be asked one of the songs that would be one of my first choices it would be Timothy Dudley Smith's hymn When the Lord in Glory Comes.

The version by the All Souls Choir and Orchestra I think is particularly good and I think there are details of that on the screen just now they're also on the website and the email that went to church members today.

Timothy Dudley Smith looks forward to the return of Jesus and he says some of the things that we've been saying today it will be spectacular and there will be sound of trumpets and voices shouting that there will be evidence of the glory of God and all the angels and everything else but he says what really matters is that Jesus will be there and he says his voice upon when he appears shall be music to my ears his face upon my sight shall be darkness into light and then the last verse and I finish with this he says this when the Lord to human eyes shall bestride our narrow skies not the child of humble birth not the carpenter of earth not the man by men denied not the victim crucified but the God who died to save but the victor of the grave he it is to whom I fall

[28 : 14] Jesus Christ my all in all may that be true of all of us let's pray together our father we thank you for this wonderful theme that we thought of this morning that Jesus is coming again that he is coming to take those of us who know him to be with him forever and to enjoy his presence through eternity we thank you that it will be a glorious thing when he returns and when we see him and when we become like him and we pray that those of us who know him may take that and that it may change our lives that we may really be excited by the prospect that we may encourage one another with these words as Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to do that we may seek to purify ourselves as he is pure as John exhorts us to do and that we may wish to redouble our efforts to help others to know about the Lord and the salvation that's available through him we pray for any watching this morning who don't yet know Jesus and we pray that they may come to put their trust in him and to know the salvation and the hope that he offers we pray for your help for us all during this week in this difficult time of the coronavirus crisis we pray that you will help us to keep a strong faith and confidence in the Lord that those who are lonely may be comforted by him and also by the phone calls of others that those who are struggling in other ways may be really helped and strengthened through this period we thank you that you are in control we thank you that you are the great God of heaven and that you have all things in your hands and so we commit ourselves to you and we ask for your presence and your help we give you our thanks in Jesus name

Amen you you you you you you you