

"The Lord Jesus Christ our hope"

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Our Lord Jesus Christ, at this late hour in the witness of His own in the world which crucified Him, would call our attention to the truth of His coming again. This is the Christian hope. Believers have an appointed witness, a responsible life, but they are destined for glory. God has chosen them to "obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2: 10). Christ has "died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thessalonians 5: 10). This is our prospect, not only to go to heaven, not only to reign with Him in His Kingdom, but to "live together with Him." We are going to "see Him as He is" (1 John 3: 2).

We have not seen Him, as did the apostles, as He was. We learn of Him as He was, in the meekness, grace and charm, of His pathway through this sin-benighted world in the record of holy, and imperishable gospels. But we are going to "see Him *as He is*." Not then as the humbled One, but as the glorified One, and we shall then be "like Him."

Then shall the spiritual aspirations of all saints be realized at the rapture, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, for He shall then come for His own. He has loved them — the cross is the witness of this — and that love has followed them all the way, through everything. The blessedness of its consummation shall be known when He has all believers with Himself.

"Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5: 25-27).

How wonderful that love which procured the church by His dying! The day of preparation for the glory is hastening to its blessed conclusion; then shall He present it to Himself for the satisfaction of His loving heart. Then shall all those who have believed on Him to the saving of their precious souls be affected by His transforming and translating power. Those who have fallen asleep "through Jesus," with all those who "are alive and remain unto His coming," shall be caught up to meet Him and to be for ever with Him. May we be helped then, in this consideration of the truth of His coming again while we wait for Him with expectant hearts.

The first direct statement that He would come again for his own is in John 14: 1-3. There He promised to come for His own that they might be with Him where He is. Let us note He has plainly said, "and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again (I am coming again, N. Tr.) and receive you unto Myself." Not just that He would come at some time in the distant future, but from the moment of His going away He is the Coming One. Immediate and constant expectation of His coming again was to mark the faith of those who should be left here during His absence from this Christ-rejecting world. Notice, this is not His "coming to" His own, as in verse 18, blessed though this is; nor is it their going to be with Him at death as in Philippians 1: 23. This is His Personal return *for* them. Nor is He coming only for those believers to whom he spoke in John 14. His wonderful prayer to the Father in John 17: 20 warrants the application of the truth of His coming again to all who believe on Him, from Pentecost to the Rapture. He prayed not only for the apostles but for those also who should believe on Him through their word. Also, in that wonderful prayer, He desired of the Father that those whom the Father had given Him should "be with me where I am."

John 21: 22 suggests that while some might not continue here on earth until His coming again,

others might. He is coming and His own who tarry until then will be caught up in company with all the resurrected saints to meet and to be with Him. What a meeting that will be when faith gives place to sight — when hope shall be realized.

As described in Luke 24: 51 and Acts 1: 9, His disciples beheld Him being taken up into heaven at the close of forty days after His resurrection. During that time, "He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs," also speaking to them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." He promised to send down from heaven the Holy Ghost by whose power, for a period of unstated duration, His witnesses should testify in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Then the Lord would "so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1: 11).

Note — a cloud received Him out of their sight, was this the cloud of glory which had enveloped the scene of His transfiguration on the holy Mount? See Luke 9 and 2 Peter 1.

1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17 transcends the angelic declaration as to His coming again. He would descend from heaven and the Rapture (the catching up of the saints) would take place. Then they shall be all caught up together, "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." According to Acts 17, the apostle Paul spent at least a fortnight (covering three sabbath days) at Thessalonica opening and alleging, from the Scriptures, "that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Some from among the Jews believed his report, and also a great multitude from among the devout Greeks. These consorted with Paul and Silas. How blessed that privilege and what a test to the reality of their faith, to associate with the heralds of the gospel. Persecution was immediately stirred up. The gospel is in affliction in the world, as were its preachers — following thus, their rejected Lord and Saviour.

We learn from 1 Thessalonians 1, that the truth of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ formed such an integral part of Paul's preaching that the believers "turned to God from *idols* to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven . . . even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." They were so affected by the truth that Paul remembered "without ceasing their work of faith, and labour of love, and *patience of hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1: 3).

One blessed feature of Paul's gospel was HOPE and it centred in Christ, causing those converts to separate, serve, and wait — see also 1 Timothy 1: 1. There Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as "our hope." Grace gives hope to the hopeless. We are looking for the coming again of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The reason for His coming again; the manner and effect of that coming are all unfolded to us in a distinct and distinguished revelation — one of several given to the apostle Paul. This revelation — "this we say unto you by the *Word of the Lord*" — is found in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18.

These young saints — in the sense that they were only about one year converted — were obviously in distress, for some of their brethren had died, and it was thought they had thereby missed the coming glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear from the Scriptures that the Christian hope embraces the wonderful prospect of sharing in that coming kingdom with Him. To set their minds at rest in this sorrowing over departed brethren, the apostle acquaints them with the word he had received from the Lord in regard to His looked for coming. So he writes in this remarkable chapter: "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*."

Christ shall come with all His saints to reign over the very world which had rejected and crucified Him. Universal glory awaits Him in answer to that work well done at the cross. God has determined to gather up everything in heaven and earth in the competent hands of Christ (see Ephesians 1: 10). He

shall not be alone then as once He had been in the suffering of death at Calvary. Among the several things He had prayed for in the unique prayer of John 17 was the unity of His own. He looked on to that coming day of display when the world would know that He had been the Sent One of the Father in His first coming, and also that the world would recognise that those for whom He prayed were loved by the Father as He was Himself. This unity of His own would be displayed in glory, and so he said, "and the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them" (John 17: 22-23).

This necessarily involves that when He takes up the reins of universal government His own must be with Him to share with Him the glorious inheritance. The day is approaching when the world-kingdom of God and His Christ shall come. We learn then from our passage in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13, 14 that our Lord will *first come for His own* in order that they may be *brought with Him* in the glory of His kingdom. "Them also which sleep in (through) Jesus will God bring with Him."

Note, too, that our being brought with Him in the glory of His coming reign is as certain as have been His death and resurrection: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, *even so* them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." This revelation of His coming for us is given for the comfort of our hearts, to assure us that though death should intervene nothing shall hinder our coming with Him. So for this very reason He will come for us.

How will He come for us? "With a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." That shout will rally all His own. How wonderful will be the immediate effect of His coming! "The dead in Christ shall rise first." His own will hear the voice of the Son of God and will come forth from their burial places. He manifested His glory at the tomb of Lazarus, when "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth." Someone has said that had He not on that occasion cried, "*Lazarus, come forth*" all that were in the tombs would have come forth. In John 5: 28, 29 we read that "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth." Hence He spoke selectively in the day of John 11, and His shout when he comes again will be *selective*, for only those dead *in Christ* will recognise and respond to it. All the sleeping saints will be raised, and all the living saints changed, and all caught up to meet their Lord. To be *with Him for ever* is our prospect.

He will come *Himself* to effect this translation to glory. No angel will be entrusted with this blessed action. He who died to save us, who lives to keep us, will come Himself to take us to glory. Such is His love, such His longing to have His own with Himself. Glorious and blessed hope, sure and certain hope, and He Himself will give it fruition.

MAY/JUNE

There are certain prophetic events to be fulfilled before Christ comes in His kingdom. His glorious appearing — "the brightness of His coming" (the epiphany of His parousia) — will bring in judgment (see 2 Thessalonians 1: 7-10; also, 2 Thessalonians 2: 8-12). This judgment will fall on the apostates and their satanically inspired leaders. But we are not instructed to look for any events that precede the rapture. Indeed, the apostle Paul, writing on the blessed theme of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ invariably wrote as expecting His coming in his own lifetime. In such Scriptures as 1 Thessalonians 4; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 Corinthians 15, it is evident that the hope of the Lord's return was in immediate expectancy. Hence we do not merely await an event, we wait for *Him* who has assured us "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

The Rapture, unlike the Appearing, will be private and thus outside the cognizance of the world at large — Christ is coming for those that are His "at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15: 23).

Some have thought because of the language used, "a shout, voice of the archangel, the trump,"

that the world will be alerted. However, we know from John 12: 28-30, that on the occasion of our Lord praying to the Father and receiving the Father's answer, those that stood by could not understand, although they heard the voice from heaven. They said that it thundered; others said that an angel had spoken to Him; but none could truly perceive what had really occurred. So on the occasion of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the men who were with him "stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts 9: 7).

They were aware of some strange occurrence, but it was outside their ken. When the saints are caught up to heaven they may be missed, for their absence from the world will be noted, but where they have gone and how they have gone will be completely unknown. The march of events after the catching up of the saints will be so rapid that men's attention will be quickly otherwise occupied.

According to Philippians 3: 20 saving grace has given us a new citizenship. We are enregistered in heaven (see Luke 10: 20). Our hope is a heavenly hope — "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Colossians 1: 5). "From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3: 20). In Ephesians 5: 23 we read, "He is the Saviour of the body."

While we experience the practical salvation of Christ as we sojourn here in the body in the life of responsibility, soon we shall experience that salvation, as to our bodies, in the fullest possible way. According to Romans 8: 23, we are waiting for the day when the power of redemption will touch these bodies of ours and lift them out of the region of weakness and death. So in Philippians 3: 21 our Saviour at His coming "shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and it will be exerted by him to subdue everything to Himself. Yet, the first touch of that power will be experienced by His saints at the rapture, when He raises the sleeping and changes the living, all caught up together to be for ever with Himself.

The apostle in 1 Thessalonians 1: 3, had expressed his assurance of the enduring constancy of hope of those young believers. That hope would not be disappointed. We learn from 1 Corinthians 15: 20-23 that the power for the resurrection of believers who sleep has been demonstrated in Christ's own resurrection from among the dead. Thus the certainty of the realization of the Christian hope has been emphasised, for we read "but now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . But every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming."

Who then are Christ's at His coming? Certainly those believers alive when He comes. But then sleeping saints are His too. At His coming for His own they will be raised and the living changed. What of saints of pre-church days? John Baptist was quite happy and content to be a friend of the Bridegroom (John 2: 29). The 19th chapter of the Revelation gives us a prophetic pre-view of the marriage of the Lamb. The wife of the Lamb is there in the garments with which she has made herself ready, "the righteousnesses of the saints." Then we are told "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." We conclude that the Baptist will be an honoured guest there. Also such as Abraham of whom our Lord said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day" (John 8: 56). The marriage in heaven is the immediate precursor to the commencement of the "day of Christ." Abraham will be at the marriage supper as one of the many friends of the Bridegroom. So, too, those holy myriads of saints from every past day in the dealings of God — all will be there to celebrate the marriage of the Lamb in the day when the church is presented to Him. How will they get there? They will experience the resurrecting power of Christ when He comes to claim His own. All saints will have their distinctive

family positions in that day — "each in his own rank . . . Christ's at His coming."

The church will have the nearest place to Him, for she only is the body and the bride of Christ. The church only will be given to Christ as an help-meet for Him — just as Eve had been given to Adam to share with him in the dominion entrusted to him, so shall the church share with Christ in the administration of the world to come. Indeed, the church which is His body is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1: 22, 23). Following the marriage and its festivities the heavens will be opened and the glorified Christ come forth in power and great glory. No longer to be alone as once upon that cross of shame. God will bring with Him all those who have believed that He died and rose again, trusting Him as Saviour and Lord during the time of His rejection. Then shall be answered the word of our Lord in the prayer of John 17: 22, 23, "And the glory which thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me." In order to their being *brought with Him* He will first *come for them*. They will be caught up to meet Him, their heavenly Bridegroom, that they might *come* with Him as the King.

So then, as we have seen earlier, sleeping saints will not miss the kingdom, indeed, they are given precedence for moment, for we repeat they will be raised first, the living will then be changed, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," and together they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so shall they "ever be with the Lord."

The very sphere from which Satan has for so long conducted his nefarious operations is to be the meeting place of Christ and those that are His own at His coming; glorious triumph! Welcome victory! His coming draws near; as soon as the Father gives the word He "Shall descend from heaven with a shout" (the grand rallying shout), "He that shall come will come and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10: 37). and they answer, "Even so come Lord Jesus. Amen."