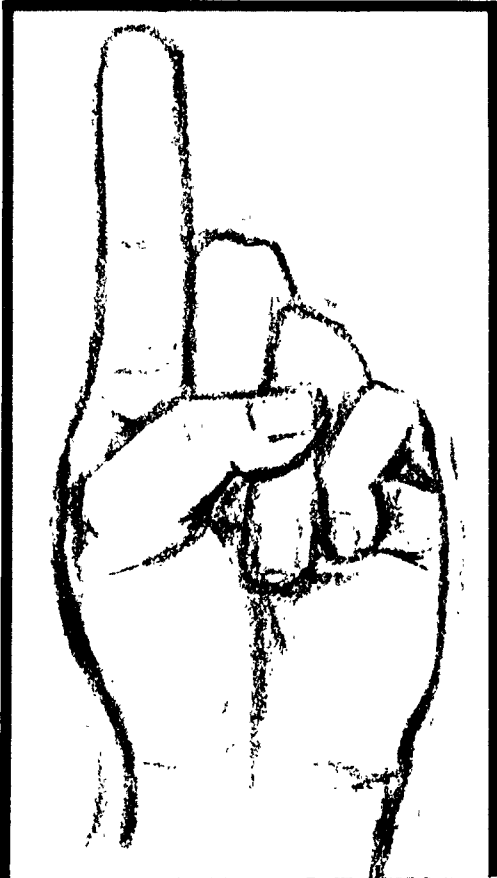


**We Believe In**

*"...then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."*

**LUKE 21:28**

**the  
Second  
Coming  
of  
Jesus  
Christ**



REF 7  
KRE 11

## **WE BELIEVE IN**

### **THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

The material in this booklet was taken from the Foursquare Sunday School Lessons, **Declaration of Faith** series, Year 2, Part 3. It has been edited to deal only with the essential elements of this important subject of the second coming of Jesus Christ. For a more complete study of eschatological teaching, see the **Declaration of Faith** manual, Year 2, Part 3.

**We believe that the Second Coming of Christ is personal and imminent; that He will descend from Heaven in the clouds of glory with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and that at this hour, which no man knoweth beforehand, the dead in Christ shall rise, then the redeemed that are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and that so shall they be with the Lord; that also seeing that a thousand years is as a day with the Lord, and that no man knoweth the hour of His appearance, which we believe to be near at hand, each day should be lived as though He were expected to appear at even, yet that in obedience to His explicit command, "Occupy till I come," the work of spreading the Gospel, the sending forth of missionaries, and the general duties for the upbuilding of the church should be carried on as diligently, and thoroughly, as though neither ours nor the next generation should live in the flesh to that glorious day.**

**Declaration of Faith, Aimee Semple McPherson**

Printed in U.S.A.

AS202SF

Foursquare Publications

1100 Glendale Blvd.

Los Angeles, California 90026

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE BLESSED HOPE	3
II	RAPTURE AND REVELATION	9
III	WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE?	16
IV	YOUR REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH	21
V	THE LAST DAYS	27
VI	READINESS	33
VII	PRACTICAL EFFECTS	40

# I. The Blessed Hope

## INTRODUCTION

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church. It has been called "The Very Pole Star of the Church." Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, the chief ordinance of the church, we do so in remembrance of Christ and His finished work of redemption until He comes. Every communion service is, in itself, an illustrated sermon on the second coming as well as on the first coming. According to Paul the early believers were "looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

We have unmistakable evidence that the Christian church held the blessed hope of Christ's imminent coming for several centuries—in fact, until the time of Constantine, when the same apostasy that caused the eclipse of the blessed truths of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and of divine healing, caused also the eclipse of the truth of the literal coming of Christ. With the spiritual awakening after the Reformation came renewed expectancy of the blessed appearing of our Lord. Today one who spiritualizes the second advent is hardly considered fundamental in his belief.

That Jesus will come again in person, in visible form, should not

seem to us strange nor improbable. When Jesus came to earth on the occasion of His first advent, He literally fulfilled the score of prophecies concerning Him recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. The prophecies of Christ's first advent could not have been fulfilled more literally. Now if the prophecies concerning the first coming had a literal fulfillment, why should not the prophecies concerning His second coming in both the Old and New Testaments have an equally literal fulfillment? How can we reproach the Jews for scoffing at a literal advent and rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, if we spiritualize the second coming of Jesus? Yet there are thousands of Christians today who have been taught that the second advent of Jesus will be fulfilled only in some figurative sense.

We believe that Jesus will come again in just as real and literal a manner as He came the first time. No other interpretation of the second advent is consistent with the teaching of Scripture. We believe that Christ's coming is imminent—i.e. that He may come at any time—and that His imminent approach is the glorious hope of the Church and the only solution to the world's problems.

This emphasis of the doctrine is not inconsistent with the place given to it in the New Testament. One verse in every twenty-five pertains

to the Lord's coming. There are, in fact, more references in the New Testament that refer to Christ's coming than to personal salvation.

Now if we accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, there is no possible way we can reject the truth of the literal, personal, visible, second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus announced His own coming (Jn. 14:2); the angels announced His return (Acts 1:11); and the apostles constantly preached His coming as a literal, personal event (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

## EXPOSITION

### JOHN 14:2,3

*In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Christ's second coming is the culmination of His work of redemption. He who prepared for us a place in heaven by His death on the cross will finally come and personally usher us into the presence of the Father.

The believer, in a carnal world antagonistic to God, has no certain dwelling place; certainly no permanent resting place of security. The world that hated Jesus will always hate the servants of the Lord. It is indeed a comforting truth that Jesus will personally escort us to a final abode which is suited to our spiritual nature.

This is not to say that we are other-worldly to the point of neglecting our present responsibilities. We who are admonished to look for the appearing of the Son of man are also admonished to occupy until He comes. Yet in all our labors, whatever our faithfulness, we realize that our work is not that of salvaging the world order, but that of witnessing for Christ's kingdom and that our ultimate reward will be that of participating with Christ in the new order.

When the disciples of Jesus were troubled and sorrowful, His finest, most comforting message to them was that of His personal return and His personal presence with them in the Father's abode. Is it improper for us to take hope in the message of Jesus concerning His coming again? We think not.

### ACTS 1:10,11

*And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*

*Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.*

Not only do we have the personal promise of Jesus of His second coming, but here we have the announcement of angelic heralds that the ascending Jesus will come again. Note that the very departure of the Lord is marked by a heavenly assurance of His return.

Note further, that He who is com-

ing in the clouds to receive the redeemed into heaven is the same Jesus of Nazareth who lived, died, and rose again. Moreover, He is coming again in exactly the same manner as that of His ascension.

Now how did He depart? His departure was personal and visible. His disciples were gazing at Him as He ascended heavenward. They were not in a trance nor an ecstasy, but fully conscious and in normal command of their faculties of sense. This is an important fact, for many say that the second coming refers to death or conversion. When we die Jesus does not come to us in visible form, but we go to Him in invisible form. The same holds true of salvation in which there is no visible return of Christ.

The message of the angels makes possible only one interpretation of the second advent; that is, that of His personal, bodily, visible return. Any spiritualizing of the second coming must be done with a complete disregard of the plain teaching of the Scripture. After listening to many spiritualized interpretations of the Bible, people are likely to ask, "Why did not Jesus mean what He said, or say what He meant?" We believe indeed that Jesus did mean what He said, because He spoke to plain people. We believe that when He said, He would come again, He meant what He said and that He meant it literally. The Old Testament often prophecies both of the advents of Christ in the same chapter or verse; why should one coming be meant literally and the other figuratively? We believe they are both literal comings just as the angels announced.

## I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

*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.*

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

*For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

*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:*

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

### Verse 13

To the Thessalonians, the coming of the Lord was a very precious truth. So hopeful were they of enjoying the blessed experience of their Lord's return that no thought of death intervening had occurred to them. At the time of Paul's writing to them, some of their number had died, with the result that there was great sorrow in their midst over the concern that the deceased one would not participate in the soon coming of their Lord.

## Verse 14

But even in the matter of Christ's personal return, the blessed dead are not at a disadvantage. Jesus, who rose from the grave, triumphant over it, will secure also the resurrection of the believing dead. Christ's resurrection is the assurance of our own resurrection.

## Verse 15

Here Paul explains why the living believer has no advantage over the one who has died in the Lord. If anything, the dead in Christ will have a slight advantage inasmuch as they will rise first. The phrase "shall not prevent" is an archaic English expression meaning "shall not precede"; the living believers at the time of Christ's coming are not caught up until the deceased believers are first raised up in bodily form. Then we shall be caught up together into heaven.

Here we should explain that the resurrection of the deceased saints at Christ's coming will consist of the transformation of their corruptible bodies and the reuniting of their spirits and their bodies, capacitating them for their eternal existence. The souls of the deceased saints enjoy conscious existence with Christ from the moment of death, but not in their glorified bodies until the Lord comes (11 Cor. 5:6-8.)

## Verses 16, 17

This passage describes the manner of the Lord's coming.

1. He is coming in person ("the Lord Himself").

2. He is coming publicly with a shout.
3. His coming will be heralded by an archangel.
4. The trump of God will be sounded.
5. His coming will be attended with the resurrection of the saints.
6. The saints will be raptured from the earth to heaven.
7. The saints will meet the Lord in the clouds.
8. The saints will enjoy, from the moment of rapture, inseparable communion with Christ.

## Verse 18

The truth of the coming of Christ and the rapture of the saints, both living and resurrected, is comfort for the sorrowing in times of the death of loved ones. This truth of the second advent is that which makes the Christian different from the unbeliever in the face of death. This is a blessed hope that overcomes the fear of death and alleviates sorrow.

## THE MANNER OF CHRIST'S COMING

### NEGATIVELY

1. The coming of Jesus cannot be spiritualized to mean the death of the believer. When one dies, the Lord does not come to him, but he goes to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:23, 24.) Furthermore, the dead in Christ are not raised up every time a believer dies, nor does the Lord descend from heaven with a shout.
2. The coming of Jesus cannot be made figuratively to refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pente-

cost. This is evident from the continued references to the second coming in the epistles, written long after the day of Pentecost. There is a sense, indeed, in which the descent of the Spirit was a "coming" of the Lord, but not the coming mentioned 318 times in the New Testament, which is a literal coming. At Pentecost the same Lord did not come in the visible manner in which they had seen Him go away, nor were the dead raised.

3. The second coming cannot be said to be fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman General, Titus, in A.D. 70. It is true that some things that happened during the destruction of Jerusalem resembled conditions which will prevail during the Great Tribulation, but the destruction of Jerusalem cannot by any means be construed as a coming of Christ. Moreover, John, writing after the destruction of Jerusalem, still speaks of the coming of Christ as future. In A.D. 70 there was no resurrection of the righteous dead nor any rapture of the living saints.

4. While Christ does come into the believer's life at conversion, this experience cannot be construed as being the actual second coming promised by Jesus and the angels, for the same reasons set forth above. Believers who have already been regenerated are admonished by Paul to "*look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*" (Phil. 3:20, 21).

## POSITIVELY

1. The coming of Jesus is a personal return. He who died and rose again is going to return in person to complete the redemption of the saints by calling them forth from the dead, catching up the living saints, and ushering all the redeemed into the banquet room of heaven. The same Jesus of Nazareth who ascended from the mount in view of His disciples will return in like manner. We are careful to emphasize this fact because the modern church is tending to reject the idea of a personal return of Christ. William Newton Clarke says in his *Outline of Christian Theology*, "No visible return of Christ to the earth is to be expected, but rather the long and steady advance of His spiritual Kingdom; if our Lord will but complete the spiritual coming that He has begun, there will be no need of a visible advent to make perfect His glory on the earth," pg. 444.

Of course it makes no difference what any theologian may think about God's plan; our only valid source of knowledge is the Word of God. Throughout the Bible the coming of Jesus is represented as an act in which the Lord will catch up and reward His saints and in which He will bring judgment upon unbelievers.

Furthermore, the Lord's coming, according to Scripture, is preceded by apostasy and tribulation, not by a long, steady advance toward the perfect realization of a kingdom of righteousness on earth. The reign of peace and righteousness will be possible only when Jesus comes again to put down tyranny and set

up His own kingdom.

Considering the matter from a practical standpoint, history does not show that the church is bringing the world to the service of Christ, but rather that the church now as always has been a minority witness for Christ, preparing a people for the Lord. The believers will always be lights shining in a dark world until the Sun of Righteousness arises.

2. The Lord's coming will be a physical one. That is, it will be a real return as indicated by Acts 1:11.

3. The Lord's coming will be a visible coming. *"Every eye shall see him."* Neither the rapture nor the coming to reign will be secret. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Jesus came in 1914, but invisibly. If men say, "Lo! He is here or there," we are to believe them not, because He will come before the eyes of all with a shout (Matt. 24:26, 27; I Thes. 4:13-18). Secret comings and invisible comings are ruses to deceive the unwary.

4. The Lord's coming will be a sudden coming. There are a number of Scripture passages that represent Christ's coming as occurring with little or no warning (Matt. 24:37; Matt. 25:1-12; I Thes. 5:2, 3; Rev. 3:3, 15, 16). Such statements of Scripture eliminate any theories of a progressive or gradual appearing of Christ over a period of centuries. The Lord will come in a moment when many think not.

5. Finally, the coming of the Lord will be a glorious, triumphant com-

ing. The Lord came the first time in condescension and humiliation, but He will come again in glory and exaltation. In his first advent He was the Lamb of God; at His second advent He will be the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (John 1:29; Rev. 5:5). When Jesus came the first time, He was crucified under the sovereignty of the Roman empire; when He comes again He will reign, Himself, whose right it is to reign. The triumphant coming of Christ will complete the dispensation of the Church and usher in the eternal reign of the King of Kings. The final triumph of the Lord in His glorious appearing is also the glorious triumph of every believer.

#### THE BELIEVER'S PROPER ATTITUDE

It is important that we have the right attitude toward the Lord's coming. Prophetic truth should be an incentive to faithful service and to soul winning, not a reason for inactivity. If Jesus would come today, we should be spared many toils, cares, and trials, but we should also have to leave behind many unsaved friends and neighbors whom we might win if we had more time.

We are to joyfully anticipate the Lord's coming, but we are not to long for the rapture as an escape from our duties or our trials.

Furthermore, we must be careful not to misinterpret every spectacular happening in the world such as wars and upheavals of nature as a sure indication of the immediate coming of Christ. We are always to expect the coming of Christ as imminent, but not necessarily as immediate.

## II. Rapture and Revelation

### INTRODUCTION

Upon first examination, a comparison of scripture passages referring to the Lord's coming may suggest several contradictions. Some verses represent Christ as coming for His saints while others represent Him as coming with His saints. Some passages refer to the return of Christ as the time of the rapture and reward of the church, while others refer to it as the time of judgment of and vengeance upon the ungodly. Sometimes we are told that we are to look constantly for the coming of the Lord as if it could occur at any moment while at other times we are told that the "day of the Lord" cannot come until some other things happen beforehand. There are passages which suggest the taking away of the redeemed at the beginning of tribulation in order that they may escape it; yet there are also passages which place the Lord's coming at the close of the great tribulation. How can all the seemingly contradictory facts be reconciled?

There is a fairly obvious explanation which quite satisfactorily clears up this seeming contradiction. It is that Christ's second coming consists of two stages. There are two distinct aspects of the second advent. The Lord will come at the beginning of the tribulation for His saints who will be changed and raptured along with the righteous dead who have been resurrected. Being raptured, the saints will es-

cape the tribulation, a time of suffering for the Jews, called Jacob's trouble, during which the man of sin will hold sway upon the earth, and the saints will be rewarded in heaven for their faithful labors.

At the close of the tribulation the Lord will come all the way to the earth, accompanied by the saints, defeating the man of sin (Antichrist) and his evil hosts and establishing His kingdom of righteousness in which the saints will rule with Him.

This double aspect explanation permits all the facts relative to Christ's coming to fit together into a clear picture of the events of the last days. It is the theory most prevalent today among fundamental students of prophecy.

### EXPOSITION

#### I THESS. 4:16,17

*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: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

This passage was treated in the last chapter. Here we point out the statement that the saints will be

caught up in the air to meet the Lord. Here the Lord is represented as coming for His church. Nothing is said in this passage about judgment upon the unrighteous. We assume that the Lord in the first stage of His second coming comes only into the upper air for the purpose of translating His church out of the world. This coming is imminent; it can happen at any time, and is the blessed hope for which the Church awaits.

While certain events must precede the final triumphant appearing or revelation of Christ with all His saints (Rev. 19), no predicted event or events must precede the rapture here recorded. This is an important fact, for if we knew that the Lord could not come until certain things had transpired, how could we be constantly watchful of His coming before they had happened? If Christ's coming for His saints were not imminent, of what significance would be the words of Paul to Titus, *Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:12, 13).

#### I COR. 15:51,52

*Behold, I show 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

This passage, like I Thess. 4:16,17, obviously refers to the first aspect of the Lord's coming, at which time the living saints will be trans-

formed into their immortal state and the dead in Christ will be raised up incorruptible. This cannot refer to the final stage of the Lord's coming, for at that time He rides out of heaven followed by His saints. The blessed hope of the living saints is not that of the Lord's appearing in judgment and vengeance, but His appearing to transform and rapture His own.

#### II THESS. 2:1-3,6,7

*Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.*

*That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled. . . as that the day of Christ is at hand.*

*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. . . .*

*And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.*

*For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.*

#### Verse 1

"Our gathering together unto Him," refers to the rapture or first stage of the second advent. This first stage is to be distinguished, in this passage, from that which is called the "day of Christ." In his first epistle Paul had written to the Thessalonians concerning the rapture and interpreted it to mean

that the Lord was about to come in His final judgment upon unbelievers, which interpretation had disturbed the minds of the people whose loved ones were yet unsaved.

#### Verse 2

Paul here corrects the false impression made from his first letter, pointing out the truth that Christ's final revelation in wrath could not occur until certain other events had occurred, such as the arrival of Antichrist and the apostasy. Now, notice that he is not denying the imminence of Christ's coming. The aspect of the Lord's coming which could not occur until after the appearance of the man of sin was the revelation, the day of Christ. Nowhere is any event placed before the rapture. It is important that we understand that the "day of Christ" of verses two and three refers to the final stage of Christ's advent.

#### Verse 6

The power here mentioned which withholds the appearance of the man of sin is the Holy Spirit, who abides in the Church. Antichrist cannot come in his full influence as long as the Holy Spirit is present.

#### Verse 7

The mystery of iniquity, or spirit of Satan, is always at work but unable to reach a full manifestation in the form of an incarnate Antichrist until after the departure of the Holy Spirit and the Church from the world. Verse seven should read, "Only he who restrains, will restrain until he is out of the

midst." or "He who holds down (the full appearance of Satan) will continue to hold it down until he is out of the midst."

When the Church in which the Holy Spirit abides has been caught away, then the man of sin (evil incarnate) will take full sway in the earth. These verses obviously refer to the rapture in verses one and seven, the revelation in verses two and three. The revelation cannot occur until the man of sin appears, but the rapture can occur at any time; it is imminent.

#### LUKE 21:36

*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

Here the believer is admonished to pray to escape the period of tribulation. For those who are alive at the time of the end there is only one manner of escaping the great tribulation and that is by being translated from the earth.

#### REV. 19:11,14

*And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

*And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*

This passage concerns the final stage of Christ's coming when He will come in order to triumph over the

man of sin and the hosts of evil, and to reign in power, glory and righteousness upon the earth. Here He comes with His saints who share in His triumphal descent to the throne of His kingdom. This scene cannot refer to the rapture spoken of by Paul in I Thess. 4:16,17. All confusion is avoided in prophetic interpretation when we keep distinct the two stages of Christ's coming.

## COMING EVENTS

### AT THE RAPTURE

1. The dead will be raised up. The resurrection of the righteous dead is mentioned only in connection with the first stage of the Lord's coming (I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:52).

2. The living saints will be changed into an immortal and incorruptible state suited to their celestial existence (I Cor. 15:51; Phil. 3:20,21; I John 3:2). The incessant yearning of every believer is for that moment when, at the Lord's appearing, he will be changed into the likeness of his Lord, *"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body"* (Rom. 8:23).

There are two aspects to the redemption of our bodies. The work of Christ upon the cross purchased our redemption, including the redemption of our bodies, so that by faith we may appropriate His righteousness and healing for our bodies. The Lord has bought us, and we belong to Him, but He must leave us

in this world of evil as witnesses until the time of His return in glory. When He comes He will fully redeem us by giving us glorified bodies no longer subject to mortality.

Some argue that only our souls are now redeemed, and that the redemption of the body is not until the Lord comes. On the basis of I Cor. 6:19,20, we believe that our bodies as well as our souls were redeemed at the cross, entitling us to divine healing (see Romans 8:11). However, our complete bodily redemption awaits the coming of Christ when our bodies will become immortal.

3. The believers will be caught up to meet the Lord and will return with Him to His judgment seat where rewards will be given and the marriage supper will be celebrated (I Thess. 4:16,17). In the account of the rapture, which Paul claims to have received by a word from the Lord, nothing is said about the Lord's coming all the way to the earth. He comes only to the clouds where the Church meets Him. This is His coming for His Church, not His coming to reign on earth with His saints. Unless we keep these two phases separate, we will little understand prophetic teaching.

4. The saints will be rewarded with many crowns including the crown of righteousness (II Timothy 4:8; I Peter 5:4). One of the reasons the Lord is coming for His saints before He comes with them is that He may reward them with their crowns in preparation for their ruling and reigning with Him. It is between the rapture and the revelation that the judgment of the believer in respect to his rewards takes place (II Cor. 5:10).

### AT THE REVELATION

The raptured saints will return to earth with Christ to reign. This is at the close of the tribulation and at the beginning of the Millennium (Rev. 19:11-16).

1. Christ will appear in glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He who in His first advent was the humble Lamb of God will return as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The only hope for an ideal society on this earth is that of a kingdom of Christ governed in righteousness, equity and truth. All human efforts to set up a truly just society have failed and will continue to fail until He rules who alone is just. The woes of this present age are the result of the basic selfishness of mankind. When Satan is bound, who is the author of selfishness, and Christ reigns, who is God's perfect incarnation of love, then right will prevail and peace will abound.

2. The ungodly and disobedient will be destroyed in flaming fire (II Thess. 1:7-9; Psalms 2:9).

If Christ is to set up a righteous kingdom upon the earth, He must necessarily change or eliminate those who will inhabit His kingdom. There seems to be no remedy in earth or heaven for stubborn unbelief. Many who now stubbornly resist the loving offer of the gospel will be found still unresponsive and disobedient at the day of His coming. There is no evidence whatever that a second chance after death would be accepted by those who now refuse their opportunities of salvation. God cannot create men free moral agents without the chance that they will choose sin and reject salvation; yet

those who choose God and righteousness will be to His eternal glory and delight.

3. Christ will, in His coming as a thief in the night, overtake many unprepared and sleeping (I Thess. 5:1-9). At the rapture, the Lord does not come as a thief in the night, for the saints are not sleeping nor are they children of night. Worldly, self-centered, pleasure-seeking unbelievers, however, will be so madly bent upon the vain quest of their selfish goals that the day of Christ will overtake them suddenly and unexpectedly. They will be saying "peace and safety," but sudden destruction will come upon them. When Christ comes in His wrath the saints will not be here; they are not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation at the rapture (I Thess. 5:9).

4. The beast and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire. During the tribulation the Antichrist will appear to be all powerful and invincible, but that will last only for a short time. He who defeated Satan by His work of redemption on the cross will ultimately defeat the whole satanic trinity. Antichrist will be no match for the Christ of God. Satan incarnate will be utterly defeated by God incarnate. The King of heaven will take captive the king of hell. God's glorious cause is the winning cause. Love and justice will ultimately triumph over selfishness and wrong. Let those who choose to follow Antichrist know that theirs is a doomed cause. We who suffer in a selfish world for Christ's sake may be assured that our patient waiting and laboring is worthwhile in light of Christ's final triumph (I Cor. 15:58).



5. Christ will judge the nations (Matt. 25:31,32). There will be, evidently, some nations that will give no official recognition to Antichrist, who will be judged worthy to keep their identity during the Millennium. This is not an individual judgment, but that of nations only (Zech. 14:16; Rev. 15:4; Isa. 2:2,3).

6. Israel as a nation will turn to the Lord, (Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10; Isa. 25:9; Jer. 23:5,6; Rom. 11:26). When the Lord comes in His glory to defend Jerusalem and to reign as King of Kings, then Israel will turn to the Lord and recognize Him as the Messiah. It is sad that Israel must be subject to so much suffering, tribulation, and shame before recognizing Him whom they should have recognized twenty centuries ago. Jesus saw the desolation of Israel and Jerusalem, and the ultimate salvation of Israel at His coming before He went to the cross. (See Matthew 23:36-39). When the awful trials of the great tribulation have been endured, then will Israel look upon Him whom they have pierced and say, "*blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.*"

7. The curse will be removed from the earth (Romans 8:19-21; Isaiah 55:13; Isaiah 65:25; Isaiah 32:15; Isaiah 35:1). In order to make perfect His reign of righteousness upon the earth and to assure the complete happiness of His subjects, the Lord will remove the effects of the curse from all nature, and God's creation will be seen in its true beauty.

## CHRIST'S IMMINENT

### RETURN

We believe in the imminence of Christ's coming for His church. We do not look for any definite fulfillment of prophecy that must precede the rapture of the saints. There are several prophetic events which must precede the day of Christ, the day of His revelation in flaming fire taking vengeance upon the disobedient, but His coming to take His bride into the marriage supper is absolutely the next event on the prophetic calendar.

It is our belief that a period of seven years called the tribulation intervenes between the rapture of the Church and the coming of Christ with His saints to reign. The tribulation is also called "Jacob's trouble," and the "seventieth week" in the terms of Daniel's vision of the seventy weeks. Christ, in the 24th chapter of Matthew and the 21st chapter of Luke, as well as Paul and John, makes it clear that a period of tribulation precedes the final stage of the second coming.

We do not believe, however, that the church will go through the tribulation for the following reasons:

1. The tribulation is a Jewish period called "Jacob's trouble"; there is no particular reason why the church should be on earth during it.

2. The tribulation is a time of judgment upon the earth. There is no point in the Lord's subjecting His own bride, His body on earth to this judgment.

3. We are admonished of the Lord to pray that we may be counted worthy to escape the tribulation.

4. The saints are represented as being in heaven and as partaking of the marriage supper of the Lamb before the final return of Christ with His saints (Rev. 19). In order for the Lord to come with His saints, He must first have come for them.

5. If the saints are to go through the tribulation, there could be no looking for His appearing until after the appearance of Antichrist. The Lord's coming would not be imminent, and the church would be looking for the appearance of Antichrist more than for the coming of Christ. If the saints had to go through the tribulation before Christ could come, what significance could there be in such verses as I John 3:2,3, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure?*"

# III. When Shall These Things Be?

## INTRODUCTION

We need to lay carefully several foundation stones of prophetic facts before approaching the study of the signs of Christ's coming. First of all, we believe that Christ's coming is imminent, that is that the Lord could come at any time. There are no unmistakable signs that must be fulfilled before the rapture of the church—the first stage of the second advent. Moreover, we believe that no man knows nor can know the exact time of the coming of Christ. The signs of His coming are not such as to point out the day and hour of its occurrence.

Now, while we cannot know the exact time of the rapture, we certainly can know the times and seasons (Matt. 24:32–34; I Thess. 5:1). When we see the fig tree (Israel) put forth its leaves we know that the summer is nigh. When we see the accumulation of all the trends and movements that will end in the Great Tribulation, we can know that the last days have arrived.

Most of the signs will reach their full manifestation during the tribulation period, after the rapture, but "coming events cast their shadows before." Before the Great Tribulation, there will be shadows of tribulation. Before the night of great sorrow for the earth, there will be

a twilight period called the "beginning of sorrows." The saints will not go through the Great Tribulation, but they will be tried by a preliminary time of tribulation, during the final days when the forces that will cause the Great Tribulation are converging.

We are to look always for the coming of Christ, but if we are discerning of the times, we shall be able to sense the increasing nearness of the glorious day. We do not know just when the Lord will come, but as we look around us today, we find every indication that we ought to look up and lift up our heads. It is not at all unlikely that our redemption draweth nigh.

## EXPOSITION

### MATTHEW 24:3–14

*And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

*And Jesus answered and said unto them, take heed that no man deceive you.*

*For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*

*And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must*

*come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

*For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*

*All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

*Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

*And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

*And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.*

*And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."*

### Verse 3

Here His disciples ask of the Lord the question that all prophetic students are asking over and over again, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" The verses that follow must be interpreted in the light of the question asked by the disciples. They must refer to conditions to prevail in the last days at the time of the second advent, because they are in answer to a specific request for information regarding end time.

Now, the "end of the world" referred to here is not the destruction of the physical earth, but rather the end of the age—literally, "the consummation of the age." It refers to the time of the Lord's coming when He will bring to an end or consummation the age of grace and usher in the age of His kingdom. The coming of the Lord and the "end of the world" are, then, the same thing. The coming of the Lord brings the consummation of the age. Dr. G. R. Berry's Interlinear Greek Testament translates verse three as follows: "What is the sign of thy coming and of the completion of the age?" The signs given by Jesus in answer to the disciples' question will indicate that both the coming of Jesus and the completion of the age are at hand.

### Verses 4–5

Jesus is eager that His disciples be watchful and alert, but He is equally concerned that they be not deceived by false Christs and false prophets. We are to labor always as if the Lord were coming at any time, but we are not to be diverted by any false claims of the re-appearance of Christ, nor are we to be deceived by any false prophets who would have us cease to preach the gospel of grace. There will be no change in this age or dispensation of the gospel until the Lord appears visibly in His glory.

In spite of the Lord's admonition about deceivers, thousands have been led astray by false Christs and false prophets. In fact, the very widespread deception of nominal Christian people constitutes a sign of the last days as is pointed out by the apostle Paul in I Timothy 4:1 (see also Matt. 24:11).

## Verses 6-7

We are all eager to identify the signs of the Lord's coming, and we are confident that we are living in a time when there is a remarkable accumulation of all the various signs of the last days; however, we must not miss the point our Lord is making in this chapter and fasten upon certain conditions as sure signs of the end which are not by themselves signs at all. It is just as important for us to avoid deception as it is for us to recognize the signs of the end.

Such conditions as wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are not unfailing signs of the end, nor does the Lord here say that they are. What He does, say is that there will always be wars, famines, earthquakes and calamities which men interpret as the sign of the end, but which are not necessarily so. These are only the beginning of sorrows and Christ said about them, "but the end is not yet."

We must keep in mind the fact that the Lord may come for His church at any time, and that there will always be some kinds of trouble and unrest present to keep us looking up. There will be troubles and sorrows and calamities during this whole age, but at the end there will be a time of great trouble, sorrow, pestilence and warfare. We are always to be watchful for the Lord's coming, but we are not to attach special significance to signs such as those just mentioned until other, more specific, signs are added to them.

No single earthquake, war, famine,

or catastrophe alone is an indication of the end, but when all these coincide with other fulfillments on a world-wide scale, there is reason to believe that they constitute signs of the end time.

## Verse 8

Evidently in the latter days the troubles and strife will increase, but even this intensification of woes is not to be construed as the time of the end or as the Great Tribulation which cannot begin until the Antichrist comes on the scene. At the end of the period called the "beginning of sorrows" the church will be caught up to escape the greater sorrow of the Great Tribulation (Luke 21:36.)

There is some special significance in the phrase of Jesus, "the beginning of sorrows," (Matt. 24:8). This verse is rendered by the Centenary translation as follows: "*For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these things are the beginning of birth-pangs.*"

"Sorrows" is here more accurately translated "birth-pangs." The idea here is that the increase of all these disturbances in the political, economic, social, and geological spheres occurring simultaneously in various places constitutes the travail that brings about the birth of the new age. These birthpains will increase in their intensity until the Lord comes as king to set up His kingdom—a new age in which righteousness prevails. It is difficult to say how long the period of travail will continue before the new age is born. We do not know whether the shadows of the tri-

bulation are long or short but we do know that the rapture of the church will occur before the last violent birth-pang of tribulation begins.

Surely we would be foolish in these troubled times to say, "The Lord delayeth His coming." Wherever we now may be on the calendar of prophecy, one thing is quite certain: we are now living in the period denominated as "the beginning of sorrows" or as Mrs. Montomery puts it, "the beginning of birth-pangs." However far or near the tribulation may be, these upheavals of our time are the shadows of tribulation.

Those who put their hope in the material values of this perishing world are indeed short-sighted. Why cannot men awake and see that one's only hope is that of refuge in Christ, the only champion whose triumph is assured and whose kingdom is eternal?

## Verse 9

Christ's followers are not to be greatly surprised if they suffer persecution and are hated for Christ's sake during this age. The ungodly forces which will finally head up in a satanic world dictatorship are now operative in the world and in the forces that actually influence this present world civilization. The nominal church has sometimes gained temporarily a place of esteem, but true, vital Christianity has always been a rather troublesome and irritating phenomenon to the powers that be. Evidently, the persecution of the believers will become more intense as the end approaches.

## Verses 10-12

These verses describe the lamentable state of the nominal church during this age and up until the end. So-called Christians will hate one another and betray one another, a fact so painfully true that it hardly needs to be commented upon.

Furthermore, much of the division in the church's ranks during this age is to be caused by false prophets who will deceive and mislead, a prophecy which has been fulfilled to the letter. The dark picture is completed by a prediction that the sorrows and persecutions of the age will occasion the apostasy of many who, like Demas, forsook the Lord's cause for the love of the present world. Everywhere we look, we see that the love of many has waxed cold because they are not willing to pay the price of vigilant, overcoming Christian experience.

## Verse 13

In spite of the widespread coldness and apostasy, and in spite of the persecution and sorrow, there will be a body of true overcomers who will endure to the end and who will be saved at the Lord's coming (Rev. 3:10; 3:21).

## Verse 14

One sign that the end of the age is approaching is that of the world-wide extension of the preaching of the gospel. It does not here say that all men will be converted, but that the gospel will be preached to every nation as a witness. There are certainly very few places in the

world today where the gospel has not been at least a strong witness. In this day of rapid transportation and communication vast areas can hear the witness in a very brief period of time. All true believers do well today to keep the upward look. At any hour of morning, night or noon the Bridegroom may come.

#### THE PROPHETIC RULE OF DOUBLE REFERENCE

There is a rule in the science of Bible interpretation which especially applies to prophecy that we call the rule of "double reference." Double reference means that a prophecy may have more than one fulfillment. Sacred history often repeats itself. A prophetic utterance may refer to some event relatively near at hand, but may refer also to some more distant event which is its complete fulfillment.

Some of the prophecies of Daniel refer in part to a blasphemous, Satan-inspired, Syrian ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes of the second century B.C. who profaned the Jewish Temple, but they also refer to the Antichrist who will more completely fulfill them. Some prophecies of the first coming of Christ apply also to His second coming. A few prophecies relative to the Roman empire will be completely fulfilled only with the revival of the Roman empire under the "beast."

Whenever a prophecy is not completely fulfilled by a certain event, it will certainly have a second reference to a more distant event.

Many Bible commentators have in-

terpreted the events prophesied in Matthew 24 as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It is quite probable that these prophecies have a double reference. In fact, they answer two distinct questions asked by the disciples: "When shall these things be?" and "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?"

When the disciples asked "When shall these things be?" they had reference to the destruction of the temple mentioned by Jesus when He said, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down," (Matt. 24:2).

Now some of the things pointed out by the Lord would most likely be in answer to their first question about the destruction of the temple.

The Lord did not point out which things would happen within a few decades and which things would happen in the very last days, and the reason why answers to the two questions were blended together was that there would be a double fulfillment. Many conditions prevailing at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. will also prevail again in the end time. Inasmuch as the nation of Israel with Jerusalem as the capital is to be restored (a prophetic development which has now been realized), there is no reason why that which happened in 70 A.D. cannot happen again with a more complete fulfillment of Christ's prophecy.

## IV. Your Redemption Draweth Nigh

### INTRODUCTION

Our Lord certainly did not mean for us to be in doubt about the signs of His coming. Long prophetic discourses of Christ are recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke and the new details added by each indicate that the original discourse was longer than any of the accounts we have in the gospels.

Each writer recorded the details which to him seemed most significant. Altogether the evangelists have given us a vivid picture of the last days as portrayed by Christ Himself. The fact that divine inspiration has given us so much relative to the signs of the last day is an indication of the importance of prophetic truth, especially for those who see the fulfillment of the signs.

We have ample enlightenment, and if we are taken unawares at His coming we shall have no valid excuse to offer. Now that we are living in times in which the conditions in the social, political, and economic spheres resemble so closely those predicted for the latter days, it behooves us all to study diligently the prophetic word. It behooves us even more to labor untiringly for the salvation of precious souls. We must work while it is yet day for the night cometh when no man can work.

### EXPOSITION

#### LUKE 21:24-36

*And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;*

*Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

*And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;*

*When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.*

*Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.*

*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

*For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.*

*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

#### Verse 24

The first part of this verse perhaps refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. at which time the Holy City was totally devastated by the Roman general Titus. Not one stone remained upon another as Jesus had prophesied, and, as a result of the calamity, the Jews were more widely scattered among the nations. For more than six hundred years the land of Palestine had been a subject state under the dominion of Gentile empires, but from 70 A.D. on the Jew indeed became the wandering Jew without a homeland. Only God could have foreseen the amazing fact of the Jew's dispersion among all nations in a sense not applicable to any other race of people in all history.

During the centuries the second

part of this verse has been fulfilled. Jerusalem, indeed, as no other city, has been constantly trodden down by the Gentiles. The great miracle is the survival of the city in spite of so many destructions. Cities of far greater size and earthly glory have completely perished. Jerusalem has survived because it is an important barometer of prophecy. The final events will occur around Jerusalem and the final struggle will be fought to capture this much violated city. We do well to keep our eyes upon the Holy City for there we will find the plainest signs of the Lord's coming. That is happening in Jerusalem now which has not happened in centuries. All indications are that the final act in the drama of Gentile imperialism is now being played and Jerusalem is the stage.

The phrase "times of the Gentiles" is an interesting one. This very significant prophetic phrase refers to the period of history during which Israel remains in subjection to the Gentile nations. The book of Deuteronomy contains a prophecy predicting the captivity and subjection of Israel to the Gentiles, a captivity which would be the result of Israel's disobedience and sin (Deut. 28: 28-68).

The prophecy was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar took Israel captive in 606 B.C. This same Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great image which prophetically portrayed the march of Gentile world powers beginning with Babylonia and continuing until the coming of the Lord (Daniel 2). Daniel himself had a vision of four beasts which represented the same four world empires of Babylonia-606-538 B.

C., Medo-Persia-538-330 B. C., Greece-330-63 B.C., and Rome 63-?

The tenfold partition of the Roman empire has yet to be fulfilled, but could take shape very quickly, for the final ruler of the last Gentile world empire will be the Antichrist. The Antichrist (the beast of Rev. 13) will organize and lead the last Gentile forces against the Jews, but he will be defeated and slain by the Lord Himself at His coming with all His saints.

The term, "times of the Gentiles," is an important one for it describes a period the end of which will be marked by the coming of the Lord. When the Lord comes, the Jews will accept Him at long last as their Messiah and as a result will dwell in their land in peace and independence for the thousand years of the Millennium.

The division of the Gentile nations into two camps or spheres and the reestablishment of Jews in Palestine under their own flag seem to point to the early fulfillment of the times of the Gentiles.

Verse 24 seems to indicate that there would be a considerable lapse of time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent scattering of the Jews through all nations and the events of the end time predicted in the following verses, twenty-five through twenty-eight. For nearly twenty centuries Jerusalem has continually been trodden down, but perhaps her redemption is not far away. During these twenty centuries the Lord has been taking for Himself a bride

from among the Gentile nations. The bride will be caught up before the Antichrist comes on the scene and before the final conflict between the last Gentile world power and the returned people of Israel.

#### Verse 25

The signs foretold here will not come into full manifestation until the time of the Great Tribulation, especially those of the sun, moon, and stars; but the social and political upheavals will be apparent for some time before the rapture. The church will not see the full development of these signs, but during the time preceding the rapture called "the beginning of sorrows" or "shadows of tribulation," when these signs are beginning to develop, their prophetic character will be sufficiently clear to show us what is about to come to pass.

The political situation of the last days is here described by the phrase "distress of nations." That is, the international relationships will be such that distress, anxiety and bewilderment will prevail everywhere. Statesmen themselves will have no solution for the complex problems that will arise. The "distress of nations" is further explained by the word "perplexity," meaning that there will be absolutely no way out of the mounting difficulties.

Escape from disaster obviously will be impossible from any human point of view. The word translated "perplexity" means literally an anguish caused by having no way out. The Greek word *a-poria* is a compound formed from two words, one of which means "a ford" or "crossing," with the negative prefix which

means "no" or "not". The distress of nations in the end time will be caused by an encircling peril out of which there is no way of escape.

The cause for this embarrassment of nations will be the "sea and the waves roaring." The "sea" in prophetic scripture refers to the masses of humanity. The "roaring" apparently means unrest and revolution and anarchy on an international scale, perhaps a movement led by the Antichrist—who at first may not be recognized as the Antichrist. In Revelation 13, the "beast"—another name for the Antichrist—will arise out of the sea, a symbol of the masses. A comparison of Luke 21:25 and Rev. 13:1, 2 suggests that the upheaval of the masses that will cause the "distress of nations" will be the same movements in all the nations, and who is not aware of the distress of nations caused by the surge of communism?

#### Verse 26

After the rapture the consternation will become so great among those left behind that men's hearts will fail them for fear. Even now the fear and dread occasioned by the prospect of an atomic war to the finish is nearly world-wide, but the most frightening thing is the conviction that no one has a plan to avert such a catastrophe. The coming of the Lord seems to be the only hope.

#### Verse 27

This verse refers to the second stage of the Lord's coming which we call His "revelation." The rapture will have taken place long before this "coming."

#### Verse 28

The "redemption" spoken of in this verse is the rapture, the translation of the saints. This is the blessed hope. Note that this event takes place as soon as the signs mentioned in the preceding verses "begin to come to pass."

This phrase, "your redemption draweth nigh," unquestionably refers, not to the final coming or revelation, but to the first stage of the Lord's advent which we call the rapture. The word translated "redemption," *apo-lutrosis*, has reference to that final act of our redemption by which we are fully possessed by the redeemer. The Greek word is a combination of two words meaning "redemption" and "from." When the Lord comes for His people they will be fully redeemed in the sense that they will be taken from the scene of their enslavement.

He who has paid the price of our redemption will take full possession of His purchase, removing us from the sphere of sin and mortality. We now enjoy our redemption (*lutrosis*), but when Christ comes we will enter into our full redemption (*apo-lutrosis*). *"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption (apo-lutrosis) of our body"* (Romans 8:23).

Now we are to expect our final redemption as soon as we see these signs "begin to come to pass." Is it not significant that fundamental Bible interpreters the world around are becoming increasingly

expectant of the Lord's coming? Certainly, there are signs enough in evidence today to make us believe that the events of the end times are already "beginning to come to pass." We shall continue to "occupy till He comes," but we shall also "look up and lift up our heads" in expectation of our complete redemption which was purchased up on the cross.

#### Verse 29

In prophetic typology, the fig tree symbolizes Israel. There seems to be a reference in verse 29 to the restoration of Israel to her own land as a sign of the last days. Israel, a dead tree nationally for centuries, has recently put forth her leaves in a national re-birth. Does this not seem to indicate that the summer is nigh? Everything that happens to Israel and to Palestine has some Biblical and prophetic significance. These recent developments in Palestine cannot fail to have some meaning relative to the consummation of the age. Not only is Israel budding, but there are signs in the other nations ("and all the trees") of activities predicted of the end time. Who will say that the summer is not nigh?

#### Verse 32

Some have interpreted the word "generation" as meaning "race" and have taken this verse to mean that Israel would not pass away as a race of people until all these signs were fulfilled. While it is true that Israel's survival is promised in various passages of Scripture, it is not likely that this verse prophesies it. The explanation that

best fits the context is that the generation that sees the signs of the second coming begin to come to pass will not pass away until the rapture takes place. In other words, the first appearance of the signs and the rapture will take place within a generation.

The term "this generation" cannot refer to the generation living in Christ's day, for nearly a hundred generations have passed since the predictions were made on Mt. Olivet. The signs mentioned cannot, either, refer only to the destruction of Jerusalem, because they were not all fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

When we consider the tremendous changes that have taken place within the range of our own memory in the political and scientific spheres, we are not likely to doubt that all signs of the second advent could be fulfilled within one generation. Even with our ultra-rapid means of communication it is difficult for us to keep up with the rapidly changing kaleidoscope of history. Our own may be the generation of greatest opportunity in all history. Let us make the most of it.

#### Verse 34

The tragedy of our day is that men are resorting to drunkenness and pleasure, seeking to drown their fears and cares instead of resorting to prayer and worship. Such will be overtaken by tribulation. The Lord's coming will be to them as the midnight visit of a thief. It behooves the church to accelerate its programs of evangelism as never before and to call men to prayer

that they may be counted worthy to escape the dreadful things coming upon the earth. Already the fig tree is putting forth its leaves; may God give us wisdom to read the signs of the times.

#### Verse 35

This statement surely does away with the post-millennial doctrine which represents the world as becoming better and better until the Millennium is achieved by the work of the church. The church is to evangelize as a witness and to win for Christ a people for His name's sake, but not to make the world into a millennium—something that only the Lord, Himself, can accomplish by His coming. The coming of Christ is not to a world made righteous and peaceful by the conquest of religion, but to a world in distress, mutiny, and perversity. The sudden coming of Christ will be as a snare upon a world plunged in surfeiting and drunkenness, one unaware and unprepared.

In spite of the millions who are being won to Christ and made ready for the rapture, the world itself is not being made better. Both Bible prophecy and actual history are against the doctrine of post-millennialism. The decisive effect of the gospel is upon individuals, not upon societies and civilizations. The so-called Christian civilizations, societies and nations have been Christians only superficially.

#### Verse 36

Verses 28 and 36 seem to refer to the same event, namely, the rapture of the church. The only escape from the Great Tribulation will be

the rapture. Apparently prayerless, superficial Christians will be unprepared for His coming; otherwise, why the warning of verse 34? This whole discourse was delivered for the sake of disciples. True consecrated believers will be made even more prayerful in the face of trying times. While judgment is poured out upon the earth, the saints will stand before the Son of man and receive their crown of righteousness.

## V. The Last Days

### INTRODUCTION

There are two influences constantly at work in this world and in human nature. In God's behalf, the Holy Spirit strives with man in order to effect in him consecration, righteousness, faith in Christ, and unselfish service. The "prince of the world," on the other hand, strives unceasingly to move man to strife, selfishness, rebellion, pride, evil, and unbelief. Satan takes advantage of the sinful nature of fallen man, urging him on to every form of sin and perversity. For the present, during this dispensation, Satan is the "prince of this world," the "prince of the power of the air," the "mystery of iniquity" who does already work. In what we call civilization or society, "the prince of this world" seems to have the upper hand, at least temporarily.

God has His people who are saved by faith in Christ and by the regeneration of the Spirit, and who are sons of God and heirs of God, but their relationship to this present world order is that of pilgrims and strangers. Christians have an influence upon the world which is obvious in the best music, art, and literature, but their influence is not the dominant influence. Christians are as salt in the world; they retard the process of deterioration, but they do not prevent it altogether. Christians are the few that go in at the strait gate, not the many who take the broad way. The uplifting

influence of the church of Christ has been greater in some eras of history than in others, but it has never overthrown the "prince of the world."

The "mystery of iniquity" was already at work in Paul's day and has continued to work through the centuries with considerable success. He has kept the world in such a state that the apostle had to admonish Christians not to be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). *See also*, Luke 16:8; John 3:16; John 7:7; John 14:17; John 15:18; I John 3:13; John 16:33; John 17:16; I Cor. 1:21; II Tim. 4:10; James 4:4; I John 2:15-17; I John 5:19; Rev. 13:3.

Anyone who knows anything about human nature can well imagine to what extremes of perversity, hatred, and violence the world's social order would drift were it not for the restraining influence exercised by the church. However, when Satan sees that his time is short and that Christ will soon come to redeem the world order, he will launch a final desperate effort to bring out the worst there is in unregenerated humanity. The last days will be perilous times when the worst in man will begin to manifest itself. After the rapture, when the church will have departed and the Holy Spirit will have withdrawn from the world (II Thess. 2:6-8), then the earth will become

a veritable madhouse of violence and self-indulgence.

The Lord's description of the conditions which are to prevail among the nations in the latter days is certainly a frightening one. Instead of progress in the political sphere, we are to have deterioration. Instead of international peace and security we are to have "distress of nations" and mutiny of the masses. If we are to have a millennium of enlightened statesmanship as a result of religious conquest, Jesus said nothing about it. We are not to look about us in the political sphere for our redemption, but to look up for the coming of Christ who will bring His kingdom with Him.

Speaking of the conditions at the time of His coming Jesus said (Matt. 24:12), "*Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*" In place of the world's becoming progressively better, it seems that it will become worse, especially in the last times when iniquity not only will continue to exist, but moreover will abound. The word translated iniquity literally means "lawlessness." This same word is used twice by Paul in II Thess. 2:7, 8 to describe the conditions of the end time. We quote from the Centenary Translation of the New Testament:

*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work: only there is one who is hindering and will continue to hinder till he be removed: and then the lawless one will be revealed. Him the Lord will consume with the breath of His lips, and destroy with the brightness of His appearing.*

Conditions are going to become worse before they are better. Christ will come to establish His glorious kingdom of universal peace and righteousness but not until after troubled times, during which Satan will make a last dying gesture of hatred toward God. The kingdom is not coming in through the gradual progressive advance of Christianity, but by the sudden coming of the King who will destroy the "man of sin" and lift the curse from human nature. There can be no triumph of ideals as long as human nature remains what it now is. Only a lifting of the curse will make possible a peaceful and righteous world order, a fact which even the historians are beginning to recognize. (See *Civilization on Trial*, by Arnold J. Toynbee.)

The great mission of the church, then, is not that of dressing up a doomed civilization, but that of winning as many individuals to Christ as possible, and of instructing them in the truths of God. This mission is now more urgent than ever as we see the perilous times approaching.

## EXPOSITION

### MATTHEW 24:37-39

*But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

*For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark.*

*And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so*

*shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

### Verse 37

The days of Noah were days near the end of a dispensation just as the days of Christ's coming will be at the close of this dispensation. Just as Noah was preparing a way of escape from impending disaster for a minority of believers in a corrupt civilization, so we are preaching the gospel of Christ with the purpose of calling out of a doomed civilization a redeemed people for the Lord. The days of Noah were days of coming judgment, so will the days of Christ's coming be days of impending judgment.

### Verse 38

In Noah's day they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage with no thought of anything except the purely physical routine of life. They did not deny God's existence, but they lived as though God did not exist, and as if they had no eternal souls. Their concern was for the body only; they ignored their real selves. Like animals they lived only from day to day, satisfying only their fleshly impulses. They fixed their attention upon the earth with no thought of heaven. They had become so attached to the carnal life that they considered anyone strange who had spiritual desires or interests.

Likewise, in the last days, man will live like animals in a constant fleshly routine. Life will mean nothing more than eating, drinking, marrying, and surviving. Christian

people who have yearnings after God, who feed their spirits and souls as well as their bodies will be considered somewhat abnormal. Second advent preaching will be met with scorn and ridicule. Millions will be spent on liquor, theaters, gambling and pleasures, while little will be spent for that which cultivates the soul. If this describes the conditions of the day in which we now live, then perhaps it is time to look up and lift up our heads.

### Verse 39

In Noah's day, the most grievous sin was that of indifference. Indifference to their spiritual needs and indifference to the coming disaster. They neither took heed of the warnings of the flood, nor availed themselves of the way of escape. The day of destruction found them completely unprepared. When Jesus comes again He will find men just as indifferent as they were in the day of Noah. If Christ were to come today, He would find the world more concerned with carnal satisfaction than with preparation for eternity.

## II TIMOTHY 3:1-7

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

*Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

*Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers*



*of pleasures more than lovers of God;*

*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. . .*

*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

#### Verse 1

The last days are described as perilous times. The word translated "perilous" means "hard to bear or endure." It will be difficult for godly people to bear the rotten civilization, perverted by greed, vanity, arrogance and selfishness. Perhaps it will be difficult also to resist the trend toward worldliness, so that much prayer and Bible study will be necessary in order to remain victorious.

Paul is careful to indicate that he is making a divinely inspired prophecy. Verse 1 of II Tim. 3 begins with the words "this know." He here refers to divinely revealed knowledge. The perilous times are not what he imagined, nor what he would have expected. As a holy man of God moved upon by the Spirit, he was informed that the latter times would be perilous. Paul no doubt refers to the same revelation alluded to in I Tim. 4:1 when he wrote, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils."

To a certain extent, there would always be perilous times, but in the end times even the Christians would find difficulty in resisting the power of evil.

#### Verse 2

The only love will be love of self. It is no wonder that civilization will completely disintegrate, for without some love for others and willingness to serve others, there can be no ordered society. Today we see every indication of the breakdown of society for lack of altruistic service. When human beings become entirely self-centered they cease to respect God, government, and even parents.

The fall of man consisted of the loss of God's full image and the enthronement in God's place of the "ego." The more perverse and devilish men become, the more selfish, proud, vain, and contentious they will be. The more the "man of sin" prevails, the more selfishness will manifest itself. It is the basic, deep-rooted selfishness of man that makes the elimination of war an impossibility. Consequently, the upsurge of satanic influence in the last days will be marked by the increase of wars and bloodshed. Man was originally created to be God-centered, but through the fall into sin he has become self-centered or ego-centric. Regeneration means the enthronement of Christ at the "center of one's life." Only a rebirth will dethrone self and enthrone Christ.

The word *covetous* is translated from a double Greek word which literally means "lovers of money." One form of selfishness is that of greed for money. Self-lovers are often money-lovers. In the last days the love of gain will be so great that honesty will be a rare quality of character.

We are not surprised to see the

word *blasphemers* in the list of the characteristics of latter-day men who are guided by Satan. The devil is the original blasphemer who delights to degrade the name of the Most High and to motivate men to do so. Blasphemy is definitely forbidden in the Ten Commandments, but an age that despises the Bible and the law of God will be an age of blasphemy and cursing. The Antichrist will devise numerous ways of blaspheming the name of the Lord and of causing his followers to do so. If our age is one that disrespects divine things, it is because we are entering into the perilous times.

The commandment to honor one's father and mother is also a part of the decalogue, (Exodus 20:12). A special promise of longevity is made to those who obey their parents. One who does not respect and honor his parents seldom respects God. When one kind of authority breaks down, soon all authority breaks down. Satan knows that if he can destroy the unity of the home, he can easily undermine the whole society. Children soon learn selfishness and ungratefulness from the adult members of the home. Parents who are disrespectful of God and of law need not be surprised if they find their children disrespectful of them. The latter days will be marked by anarchy in every sphere of life. May God be pleased to send a sweeping revival to our land! If revival does not come, then perilous times are indeed upon us.

#### Verse 3

Good people are usually loved, but latter-day society will be char-

acterized by the hatred of good people. Men will not have natural affection, so great will be their perversion. When the "man of sin" arrives, he will find men ready to do his bidding. In II Thess. 2:9-12, Paul describes the fate of the God rejecters of the last days: "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

#### Verse 4

Men who love pleasure more than they love God, their maker, are deserving of the awful fate that awaits them. An exaggerated devotion to pleasure-seeking has characterized every civilization in the decline of its history. Belshazzar's feast was the last of a series of drunken parties. It was interrupted by a telegram from heaven announcing Babylon's doom. That same night the city and empire fell. The decline of the Roman Empire was a time of circuses, spectacles, games, and drunken orgies.

Man was not made to live merely for physical sensation; he was created to have communion with God and to serve God by serving humanity as a witness for truth. When men love pleasures more than they love God, they have descended to the animal plane. Such are easy

victims of the "man of sin."

#### Verse 5

The prophetic Word does not predict the cessation of religion. Man is incurably religious; he will always worship something even if his god is the Devil. Even in the indescribably perilous times preceding the coming of Christ men will have their forms of religion. Religion is neither good nor bad, necessarily. It may be divine or satanic.

Even religion itself will be very superficial in the last days. It will consist largely of a form of godliness, but there will be no faith in the real power of God to transform. Men will go through the motions of religious worship, but they will live like sinners, making mockery of true faith. The Antichrist, no doubt, will make use of powerless, faithless religion.

We do not preach religion, but salvation through faith in the redemptive work of Christ. However, much of what poses as Christianity is only a form of godliness. The Antichrist, in imitation of Christ, will have a church, but one composed of religious persons to whom religion is merely a form (Rev. 13:11,12). True believers must separate themselves from sham religion just as they separate themselves from the world.

#### Verse 7

The last days will be days of cultural and scientific advancement, but at the same time days of spiritual ignorance.

The greatest scientific progress in

history has been that of the past two centuries. More progress in invention has been made in the past two centuries than that which was made in two millenniums previously. Knowledge has, indeed, been increased in these times, even if wisdom has not increased (Daniel 12:4).

George Washington had hardly any greater comforts or facilities for work than those possessed by Julius Caesar; but if Washington were to visit us today, he would be amazed at our gadgets. However, Mr. Washington would not find us more God fearing, nor more just, nor more Christian. With all our learning we are no nearer, as a people, to the knowledge of the truth. We now know too much for our own safety. Science is out of control. Our inventions have become our enemies. It is now time to seek after the knowledge of the truth. It is later than we think.

## VI. Readiness

### INTRODUCTION

There are many very interesting aspects of this great subject of the second coming of Christ. First of all it is an interesting fact that Jesus is coming again. The hope of the return of Christ keeps the church joyful and working. It prevents our becoming discouraged in times when the forces of evil seem to prevail over the forces of righteousness. The fact of our Lord's return was very interesting to the New Testament writers for they refer to the second advent more often than to the majority of doctrinal truths.

The manner of Christ's coming is also a very interesting disclosure. It is thrilling to think of His coming as a triumphant event in two stages, by which He rescues His people and appears in all the royal majesty of heaven to fill the whole earth with the glory of His kingdom. It is good to know that the crucified Lamb of God will become the King of Kings; that the rejected sufferer seen by Isaiah will yet appear as the triumphant Messiah seen by Daniel and Zechariah.

It is of exceeding interest to read of the signs that are to announce the Lord's approach and to look for those signs as they become increasingly clear in the shaping of world events.

Furthermore, we are interested in

the plan of God and in His manner of dealing again with His people, the Jews, who have wandered homeless for so many centuries. We will not be thought too curious if we seek to know what will happen on earth between the rapture and the revelation, when sin is being headed up in a single satanic being, who, though overwhelmingly powerful and successful for a season, will be destroyed by the glory of the returning Lord.

However, nothing can be of greater interest to true believers than the revelation of that kind of life and conduct that will make us ready and keep us ready for the hour of His coming. It is of great practical importance for those who await the return of the Bridegroom to know how to array themselves in the wedding garments and how to go out to meet Him. In almost every part of the Bible where the second coming is mentioned there are also warnings to be ready and instruction relative to that which constitutes readiness. The discourse of Jesus concerning His return, recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, is full of warnings and admonitions about readiness.

What did Jesus mean when He said, "*Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*"? Cer-

tainly He infers that many will not be able to escape the tribulation. Obviously, conditions will be such at the time of the Lord's coming that those who do not watch and pray will be in danger of not escaping.

Now the latter clause of this verse (Luke 21:36) "And to stand before the Son of man" apparently points to the same event described by Paul in I Thess. 4:17, which we call the rapture. How else could one escape what is coming upon the earth at the time of the great crisis except by being caught up in the rapture?

Our Christian profession must be maintained by continual fellowship with God and by the constant exercise of our faith in the redemptive work of the cross. He who believes in Christ with his whole heart keeps on believing. Salvation, in its fullest meaning, is not the result of one act of surrender; it is the state of a life surrendered and kept surrendered.

We are not saying that salvation is by the works of the law, nor are we suggesting that failure is inevitable. We believe that salvation is by faith and that He is able to keep us from failure, but we also believe that faith is a life, not a single act and that He keeps only those who trust in and appropriate His keeping power. We daily avail ourselves of the grace of God; we do not presume upon His grace. We believe that faith is faithfulness, not presumption.

Paul's treatment of this subject in I Thessalonians, chapter five, written to a fully established Christian Church, is quite applicable to

our day and easy for us to understand.

#### I THESSALONIANS 5:1-9, 15-23

*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.*

*For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*

*For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

*But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

*Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.*

*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.*

*For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.*

*But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*

*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.*

*Rejoice evermore.*

*Pray without ceasing.*

*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

*Quench not the Spirit.*

*Despise not prophesyings.*

*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*

*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

## EXPOSITION

### Verses 1, 2

It was common knowledge in the early church that Christ's coming would be sudden and unannounced by anything more than signs which would be disregarded by the people of the world.

When the Lord is ready to return, He will appear in a moment of time to take His church out of the world. Only the waiting bride will be ready to go; many will be spiritually asleep, unmindful of sacred times and seasons, and heedless of the second advent. The rapture is definitely a provision made for the benefit of a prepared and waiting people, a people who expect and love the Lord's coming.

Note Paul's words in II Timothy 4:8; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." The "day of the Lord," of I Thess. 5:2, and "that day," of II Tim. 4:8, refer to the same day. At the rapture, the church will be caught up to heaven where, at the judgment seat of Christ, the crowns and rewards will be awarded.

The Lord will not catch away every pretending Christian, but only them who love His appearing. The warning about the suddenness of Christ's coming was nothing new to the Thessalonian church, but Paul knew well that there would be many in the last days who, while professing faith in Christ, would say and teach that He was delaying His coming. In our day we need to heed Paul's second advent teaching, for many are the churches where there is no hopefulness of the Lord's coming nor any preparing to meet Him.

### Verse 3

No one is to conclude that he is safe from judgment because no calamities are in sight. The days immediately preceding the second advent may be days of material prosperity, marked by scientific progress, but let no one put his trust in the arm of flesh, nor in the man-made security provisions. The calm often comes just before the storm. Not until sin and selfishness are banished can there be any "peace and safety" anywhere. The only peace and safety in this world is that of the soul secured

through faith in Christ. If all men would trust in the Lord, there would be no impending judgment. Sin brings calamity and judgment. Safety comes only when sin is forsaken. The message of Christ's coming in power and glory cannot be good news for a sinful world. However, His coming can become good news to us if we make peace with God.

#### Verses 4, 5, 6

The unbeliever lives and walks in darkness. He is engulfed always in the blackness of spiritual night. The blessed hope of the believer is always like a midnight visit of the thief to the unbeliever. On the other hand, the "brethren," that is, those who are sons of God, look not upon the Lord's return as a thief's intrusion, for they are not living in the night. The Lord's appearance to the believer will not be less sudden than His appearance to the world, but the believer will be ready and waiting, while the unbeliever will be sleeping and unprepared.

Now, it must not be overlooked that Paul is here warning believers of the possibility of their slipping back into the carelessness of self-indulgence, and finally into the sleep of apostasy. We are not of the night but of the day, therefore let us walk as children of light.

#### Verse 7

Carnal self-indulgence is unbecoming a child of the day; it marks the life of the benighted. If one is drunken, greedy or enamored with pleasure, he marks himself as belonging to the darkness, because

such are the works of darkness. If men are sleeping at Christ's coming, He will leave them in the darkness they have chosen.

#### Verse 8

Here is an admonition for the believer to clothe himself in God's armor, to put on the wedding garment in preparation for the Bridegroom. The believer's best defense is that of faith, love, and hope. They are a breastplate and a helmet protecting him against worldliness, selfishness and despair. The enemy's attempt to relax our vigilance will be made through attacks upon our faith in God, our love for souls, or our hope of the Lord's coming. Let us not have faith, love, and hope as vague ideals but let us put them on as our armor so that they become an integral part of us.

#### Verse 9

The Lord's coming will be in wrath upon the sinful world, but in blessing upon the believing church. When we believed, God appointed us to salvation. While we continue to believe, that appointment stands. Unbelievers, through persistence in sin, bring upon themselves an appointment to judgment. These acts of God are not arbitrary, but conditioned upon the attitude of the believer. We determine what God's appointment for us will be.

#### Verse 15

From this verse on, there follows a list of commandments for those who are preparing for the Lord's appearing. The first is that believers render good to all men,

even to them who render evil. If we are spiteful and revengeful, how shall we stand before Him who said, "Father forgive them"? Only if we have the mind of Christ are we ready for the coming of Christ.

#### Verse 16

The Christian way is a way of rejoicing, a happy way. Perhaps more reverence and seriousness are needed, but not at the sacrifice of joy. Let us not mistake lightness and superficiality for Christian joy, however. Our aim is a deadly serious one, but our hearts are filled with the joy of the Lord which is our strength. In Christ we may rejoice evermore even in trial and persecution.

#### Verse 17

Prayer has a very important relationship to Christ's coming. Our Lord Himself admonished His disciples saying, "*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*" As the day of the Lord approaches, prayer becomes increasingly essential to the overcoming life.

#### Verse 18

The great sin of the Israelites in their wilderness journey was their murmuring. It was perhaps the cause of their ultimate defeat. An attitude of thanksgiving marks a truly devoted Christian. Seldom do the grateful fail in an hour of trial.

#### Verses 19, 20

The Holy Spirit is our guide and strength giver. Without the Spirit's aid our worship becomes formal and barren. As the day of Christ approaches it will become increasingly difficult to worship and to preach without the full anointing of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that restrains the influence of the spirit of Antichrist, both in the world and in the individual believer's life.

#### Verse 21

The enemy, in view of his impending defeat, will bring every kind of error into circulation. It is important to prove all things in the light of divine truth and to embrace only what is good by God's standard.

#### Verse 22

Arthur S. Way translates this verse as follows: "Shrink away from evil, in whatever form it appears." Satan will advance evil in a multitude of forms in order to entice and deceive. Let us who watch for the Lord resist every form of evil.

#### Verse 23

Two things are clearly inferred by this verse: first, that sanctification is a progressive work of God through the Spirit, with entire cleansing as the goal; and second, that it is the aim of the Christian life to continue blameless in the entire man unto the coming of the Lord. It is the Lord who keeps us, and He is able to do so perfectly, but we have the responsibility to yield to God's working and to cooperate

with the guiding Spirit. It is the Lord who sanctifies, but it is our duty to present ourselves to Him for cleansing.

## QUESTIONS ANSWERED

There are several questions which always arise when the subject of readiness is discussed.

### 1. Is it necessary to be baptized with the Holy Spirit in order to be ready for the rapture?

At one time it was quite widely taught in Full Gospel circles that the baptism with the Holy Spirit was a requisite for going up in the rapture. The basis for this teaching was the parable of the ten virgins recorded in Matthew 25. Of course, the Lord Himself does not make any such statement in the interpretation of the parable, nor is the baptism with the Spirit mentioned in connection with the parable. The whole idea was drawn from the fact that those who went in with the bridegroom had oil in their lamps and from the assumption that oil always stood for the Holy Spirit in Bible symbolism.

Now, first of all, let it be understood that no parable alone can ever be used to prove anything, nor to establish a doctrine unless the Lord Himself interprets the parable with plain statements of doctrine. The only interpretation Christ makes of His parable is that it speaks of an unexpected appearance and the consequent need for constant watchfulness. The parable of the ten virgins certainly does teach the need of preparation and vigilance, but nothing

more, for the Lord made no further application of it.

To say that oil always speaks of the Holy Spirit is an unfounded assumption. Oil does sometimes serve as a symbol of the Spirit's anointing, but that does not mean that every time oil is mentioned it must be with reference to the Holy Spirit. If we will read the parable closely, we will note that all had oil in their lamps when they went out to meet the bridegroom, but that the wise virgins took along extra oil in their vessels in order to be able to replenish their original supply. The foolish virgins failed, not for the want of any oil, but for the want of sufficient oil. During the night while the bridegroom tarried the lamps had used up their oil. The wise poured in more oil from their vessels of extra oil, but the foolish had brought none, having expected an earlier arrival. When the foolish saw their mistake, they begged oil of their companions saying (literal Greek) "Our lamps are going out." While they were gone to seek oil, the bridegroom came and the foolish virgins were excluded. There is nothing that can be made out of the *oil* except that it stands for faithfulness and a watchful attitude.

With the parable of the ten virgins ruled out as a source of doctrine, there remains no scriptural proof of the teaching that believers without the Holy Spirit baptism will be left behind at the rapture.

We must not confuse the Pentecostal experience with salvation (regeneration). It is a power of ability-giving experience, not a saving experience. One must be genuinely

converted before he is a candidate for the Pentecostal experience. Every truly regenerated person has the Spirit in him (Romans 8:9), but not in the fullness resulting from the Pentecostal experience. A Spirit-baptized believer is not more saved than one who has not yet received the experience; he is more potentially able as a witness for Christ. On the other hand, however, a Spirit-filled believer with his added spiritual experience may be in a better position to persevere to the end and to avoid errors and temptations to worldliness. But to say that an experience is helpful, beneficial, or important is not to say that it is a positive requisite. Faithfulness and loving watchfulness are the necessary qualities that keep one ready for Christ's coming.

Paul says in I Thess. 4:16, 17 that "*The dead in Christ shall rise*" just before the rapture of the living. If the dead in Christ will be resurrected at the rapture, then the living in Christ will be caught up together with them. He who abides in Christ, in the full meaning of the term, will be raptured, even if he has not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. The in Christ experience is more fully described by the Apostle in Galatians 2:20; "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*"

With many, Christ is more a name than a living refuge. Many are for Christ who are not in Him. There are some who follow Christ's philosophy of life who have no experience of the resurrection of Christ.

Many have begun in Christ who are continuing in self. He is a persevering believer who abides in Christ and who grows in His grace. If one is abiding in Christ, he will love His appearing, watch for it, and be patient unto the day, and he will be found ready.

### 2. Will there be a partial rapture?

Some teach that only the Spirit-filled will be ready at the rapture, or only those who are fully sanctified from every fault. They say that all other believers will be left behind to be martyred and thus be saved in death. We do not deny that there will be tribulation saints who will resist the Antichrist and give their lives for their faith. We cannot quite agree, however, that any truly regenerated believer who is abiding in the Lord will be left behind. We consider that all true and faithful believers are in the body of Christ. Many may become severed from the body through selfishness and carnal lusts, who will later be found among the tribulation martyrs, yet those who are in the body of Christ when He comes will be in the rapture.

They who are in the body are not the children of darkness who seek selfish interests, but the children of day who love His appearing; therefore, they are not appointed unto wrath, but to receive salvation (I Thess. 5:8, 9).

# VII. Practical Effects

## INTRODUCTION

God's revelation to us of the events of the last days and of the Second Coming of Christ was not given to us merely to satisfy our curiosity about divine mysteries.

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is one of the most practical of all the Christian doctrines. Every New Testament writer appealed to the imminence of the Lord's coming as an incentive to more diligent and patient Christian living. Even the early church was looking for Christ's return as spiritual believers have looked for the blessed appearing during all the centuries.

There is no doubt that the knowledge of the exact time of the second advent has been withheld from the church for the very reason that constant expectation of the Lord's appearing exercises a salutary influence upon the believer. The Lord has been wise in not divulging the date of His return. If we knew that He could not come for a long time, we would be tempted to be careless about extending His kingdom. On the other hand, our awareness of the possibility of an immediate rapture keeps us working lest the night in which no man can work should come upon the world.

So important is the consciousness of the imminence of the Lord's return that we are reminded of it on every

occasion of the observance of the Lord's supper. Observe the words of Paul which we repeat in every communion service: *"For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."* Just as the Jew in the celebration of the passover sets an empty chair at the table with the hope that, before another year's celebration, the Messiah will have come, so the Christian in his partaking of the bread and the wine of the communion, symbols of the absent Lord, looks forward to His return and His visible presence. The regular observance of the Lord's supper not only reminds us of what Christ has done, it also reminds us of our responsibilities while we wait for His soon return.

The words of Jesus in Mark 13:32-37, must continue to be applicable to every age as long as He tarries.

*"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son but the Father." Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the*

*cockcrow, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:32-37).*

In the New Testament there are between 30 and 40 different kinds of Christian duty and Christian virtue that are declared to be urgent in view of the coming of the Lord. This chapter sets forth a few of the many practical results in the believer's life of his looking for the second advent.

## EXPOSITION

### I PETER 1:7, 13

*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

### Verse 7

When the Lord comes to catch away His Church, He will immediately set up in heaven His judgment seat for the appraisal of the works of believers. There crowns and awards will be given. All true believers will be there, but not all believers will receive the same reward. Some will receive great glory while others receive less. Our works do not earn for us salvation, but they do earn for us our crowns and awards. We may be sure that no labor in behalf of or sacrifice for

the Lord's cause in this life will go unrewarded. There is every reason to believe that the standard of our judgment will be our faithfulness (see Matt. 25:14-30). God apportions tasks to us in proportion to our ability, but rewards us in proportion, not to our talents, but to our faithfulness to the tasks given us.

Peter here suggests (verse 7) that the patient endurance of trials is one manner of showing forth one's faithfulness, and that such patience in tribulation will be rewarded gloriously at the appearing of the Lord. As the day of Christ approaches, the trials of the believer will multiply, but let him know that patient endurance unto the end brings great reward. J. B. Phillips translates verse 7 as follows: *"This proving of your faith is planned to bring you praise and honor and glory in the day when Jesus Christ reveals Himself."* God is using trials to get us ready for His Son's appearing.

### Verse 13

Here the believer is urged to tighten his mental belt in readiness for an imminent appearance of Christ who brings with Him His gracious rewards. We are not to let our minds become stupefied by earthly cares, nor diverted into frivolous concerns. We must so give our minds to our spiritual tasks and to the sober contemplation of divine truth as to be found well pleasing to our coming Lord.

### I PETER 4:13

*But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that,*

*when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

The believer has every reason to rejoice even in tribulation, if he has hope of the Lord's coming, for His appearance will bring an end to persecutions and at the same time the added joy of the Lord's presence. Our suffering for Christ's sake is in itself an indication of our readiness for His coming and an assurance of joyous reward.

#### **HEBREWS 10:36,37,38**

*For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*

*For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*

*Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

#### **Verse 36**

Inasmuch as this world is, in a sense, a proving ground for eternal souls, patient endurance is a necessary virtue. It is not enough to begin in the pathway of godliness; one must persevere to the end. There is no reward for runners in a race who drop out half way to the goal. In the Christian life we have great encouragement to continue faithful, however, for at any time He who brings our reward with Him may come.

#### **Verse 37**

The race of life is not exceedingly long. If one is patient through the

relatively few trials, victory will come sooner than he thinks. The believer has the hope that at any moment His Lord will appear. If we have the hope of the Lord's coming, we reason always that we must continue faithful, for perhaps He will return at the next moment, and how tragic it would be to give up the battle only a few moments before the great rescue.

#### **Verse 38**

The Christian life is not a single act of faith, but a life of faith, "*The just shall live (keep on living) by faith.*" If one draws back into unbelief or rebellion, he no longer lives by faith. There is no reason why one should draw back, for there are ample divine resources to keep him, but if he does draw back, the Lord will have no pleasure in him when He appears. He will be appointed to wrath. This is no time to draw back, for the Lord is coming. Certainly no one will draw away who loves the appearing of the Lord (see Hab. 2:3,4).

#### **I JOHN 2:28**

*And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

Whoever ceases to abide in the Lord after enjoying the multitude of His tender mercies cannot be other than ashamed at His coming. Here again the need of continuing in Christ is urged. The doctrine of the imminent coming of Christ is an incentive to continuance in the faith as perhaps no other doctrine could be.

#### **I JOHN 3:2,3**

*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

*And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

#### **Verse 2**

One of the most blessed aspects of the Lord's appearing is that of our being made like unto the Lord. One glimpse of our glorious Lord and we shall be transformed in His likeness.

#### **Verse 3**

Now, the hope of being like unto Christ stirs us to seek cleansing and purification in order that we may be as much like Him as possible before the day arrives. The hope of the second advent is a purifying hope, a cleansing influence. How greatly such an influence is needed today when the whole spirit of the age is that of worldliness! There are a multitude of contaminating influences all around us; we need a hope that will keep the heart pure and sincere. God forbid that at the sounding of the trumpet we should be found impure of heart.

#### **II PETER 3:10-14; 17-18**

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements*

*shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*

*Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

#### **Verses 10, 11**

The day of the Lord will be a day of judgment for the world. The works based upon divine truth will stand. The consuming fire will destroy all that is defiled by sin. In view of this great day of judgment we must walk in righteousness and holiness. "Conversation" in the New Testament means "manner of life."

We seek to maintain a holy manner of life that shall be able to stand in the day of testing. Godliness is fireproof.

### Verses 12,13,14

Here the same thought is advanced. God has warned us of the fate of this sinful world. We who have hope of heaven must keep unspotted from the world, for our desire is to be found without blame when He whose eye pierces every false pretension and scrutinizes every heart's intent appears on the judgment throne. Our desire is to do God's will, but sometimes the flesh is weak. We need the truth of Christ's coming to keep us alert in availing ourselves of every divine provision for victory. If the second advent doctrine was one of the most prominent teachings of the early church, how greatly essential it is for us today to proclaim this blessed truth.

## PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THIS TRUTH

### It promotes watchfulness.

Believing in the imminence of Christ's coming, we must look for Him to come at any moment. We must not sleep, for He might come at midnight. We must not become absorbingly occupied with selfish interests nor with self-indulgence, for His coming might take us unawares.

It is true that there are some persons sufficiently mature as to need no warnings of penalty in order to do their best work, but there are also many who have not yet reached that point of maturity who will not apply themselves to the fullest

extent possible without special incentives and perhaps warnings. Certainly no type of society has yet been organized on earth in which incentives to effort and warnings against transgression could be eliminated. Perhaps God knows us better than we know ourselves.

### It promotes sobriety.

The Apostle Peter wrote, "*But the end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*" And again, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 4:7; 5:8.) Paul expresses the same admonition: "*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober*" (I Thess. 5:6).

Christian sobriety is taking a serious view of life; it is not sadness nor gloom. The Christian is both serious and happy; both sober and cheerful. But the Christian's cheerfulness does not run to frivolity nor questionable foolishness. Man is both a creature of sensation and a creature of thought; he has enough sense of humor to escape being crushed by the weight of responsibility. Some, however, in order to escape responsibility prefer to live in a world of sensation and hilarity, dulling their consciences with carnal indulgence. God is not at all opposed to our having some harmless diversion nor to our seeing the humorous aspect of some situations, but He is displeased when we fail to take our responsibilities seriously or fail to see the gravity of our situation in a world full of suffering and tragedy. Our expectation of Christ's soon return should move us to deep seriousness.

### It promotes faithful labor.

Jesus uses the practical appeal of the fact of His imminent return to urge His disciples on to diligent service when He tells them the parable of the talents. "*After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliverest unto me five talents; behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*" (Matt 25:19-21).

He who uses his God-given capacities for Christian service will be rewarded according to the proportion of his faithfulness. He who does nothing with his capacity to bless others and to extend God's Kingdom will have his capacity taken from him and he will, moreover, lose his reward. There will be great opportunities for creative service in Christ's coming Kingdom, but the opportunities will be given those who have served faithfully here or who are found faithful at His coming.

### It promotes prosperity of the soul.

This idea was forcefully expressed by Jesus when He said, "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works*" (Matt. 16:26,27).

If man's existence were confined to

this world only, he would, of course, be wise in seeking to gain as much as possible of this world's goods, but such is not the case. This life is the testing ground for a future life, which, for the faithful, will begin at the coming of Christ. In view of our eternal destiny, we must conclude that there are things more important than this world's values. When Christ comes, the possession of saving faith will be of infinitely more value than the combined riches of this world.

### It promotes a clean life.

The doctrine of Christ's coming is an incentive for the mortification of fleshly lusts. Paul uses the fact of the Lord's coming in order to impress the Colossians with the need to live a clean life. "*When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry*" (Col. 3:4,5).

The Apostle John expresses the same idea when he writes, "*And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure*" (I John 3:3). The Christian turns from all uncleanness of life because he serves One who, because of His purity, is called the Lily of the Valley. Only by being pure will we be unashamed before Him at His coming. Purity is His very nature and they shall be pure who share with Him His Kingdom.

### It promotes obedience to the word.

When the Apostle Paul desired to



impress upon the young man Timothy the need for living in strict accordance with the commandments of God's inspired Word, he based his appeal upon the imminence of Christ's appearing.

*"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus—That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tim. 6:12-14).*

Jesus said, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments." Obedience to Christ is the test of our loyalty to Him. Disobedience to God's Word marks one as self-willed, as one who resists the will of the Lord for his life. Such disloyalty is the very spirit of the Anti-christ and characteristic of those who will march in his armies. One is a true believer because he has surrendered his will to Christ and because his delight is to do the will of God. If the believer is in any way tempted to be careless in his attitude toward divine commandment, he overcomes the temptation as soon as he thinks of the nearness of Christ's coming.

#### **It promotes brotherly love.**

The new commandment of our Lord is that we should love one another. Perhaps nothing so pleases the Lord as seeing the brethren dwelling together in unity. The rapture is once spoken of as *"Our gathering together unto Him."*

We who expect to be caught up

together, must, indeed, dwell together in love while we await the day. Perhaps if we are often reminded that our Lord expects to find us walking in love when He returns, it will serve to restrain strife and divisions in the church.

Was not this the aim of Paul when he wrote the following to the Thessalonians: *"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"* (I Thess. 3:12, 13).

#### **It promotes caution in judgment.**

We are too prone to judge one another hastily, when, in fact judgment does not belong to us at all. Each of us stands or falls only before the judgment seat of Christ. He will accept no man's verdict regarding our lives. But, whatever we are shall be made known in the hour of His coming. If anyone is displeased with the work of his brother, let him be cautious lest he judge him unfairly. We can all well afford to leave judgment in the hands of the Great Judge, because all things will very soon be revealed. We do well to heed the words of Paul in I Cor. 4:4-5, and we shall if we are sincerely looking for the Lord to come. *"For I know nothing by myself; yet I am not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest*

*the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."*

#### **It promotes patience in trials.**

We can bear almost any trial if we know that our Deliverer is close at hand, and especially so if we are assured that there is a special reward reserved for the patient, which will be awarded by our Lord at His coming. No other message has served to comfort the church in periods of testing and persecution as has the message of the second advent.

Without a doubt we are now entering into a time of great trial. We ought to be fortifying our hearts for this day by the study of the prophetic Word by which we assure ourselves of the certainty of Christ's soon appearing. Even the Isle of Patmos was quite bearable to the beloved apostle John after he had seen the apocalyptic vision of the Lord's final triumph. In the hour of our trial we will be wise to study John's Revelation in the opening chapter of which John himself wrote, *"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand"* (Verse 3).

#### **It promotes bold witness for Christ**

We are fully aware of the urgency of personal witnessing for Christ. It is not always easy to speak in the Lord's behalf in a perverse society where so many think it smart to scoff at the things of God, but we do nevertheless witness for Christ, for we want to be pleasing to Him in the hour of His coming,

which hour no one of us knows. If we are ashamed of Him before men, we cannot but be ashamed before Him in that day. When we are tempted to shrink from testifying we call to mind the very words of Jesus recorded in Mark 8:38: *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*