

“Jesus Will Come Again”

May 3, 2015

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Matthew 24:36–44

³⁶ “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.¹

Sometimes, I try to imagine what Christianity must look like to an outsider, such as an atheist or an agnostic. I imagine that if they heard us talking about how much Jesus has done for us, they might say something like, “If Jesus is so great, why is the world so bad?” Or they might say, “If Jesus is really the God-man who came to earth two thousand years ago, why didn’t he put an end to all evil then? Why are there still wars and earthquakes and injustice?” I don’t think those are bad questions. After all, we have only to look at recent events in the world to see that things are not the way they should be. The recent earthquake in Nepal has killed thousands of people.² Islamic terrorists are active in the Middle East and in Africa. There have been riots in Baltimore because of the death of Freddie Gray, a 25 year-old black man who was arrested and who was seriously injured while being transported to the police station.³ And there are plenty of other problems right here in America. So, why didn’t Jesus put an end to this when he came the first time?

When Jesus came the first time, he came to die for sin. As Jesus said, in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

² The earthquake occurred near Kathmandu, Nepal on April 24, 2015.

³ Gray was arrested on April 12 and died on April 19 after being in a coma. As of now, there is debate as to whether police assaulted him or he injured himself. My point is not to enter into that debate, because I don’t know what happened. My point is that this is another example of problems in this world.

many.” But he didn’t come to put an end to all evil. He didn’t come to be a conquering king who destroyed all his enemies. If this confuses some people today, it certainly confused his disciples.

When Jesus told his disciples that he would die, they didn’t understand why. Peter said to Jesus, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (Matt. 16:22). They thought he would be the Messiah, the promised King of Israel, not a sacrifice. Furthermore, Jesus told them that he would go away to a place where they couldn’t go (John 13:33, 36-36). The disciples couldn’t understand why Jesus would die and then go away.

Consider one passage that illustrates this point. Turn with me to John 14:1-6:

¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus had just told his disciples that he would go away to where they couldn’t go. Then he told them not to be troubled, because he would go and prepare a place for them, and one day he would bring them to that place, to be with him forever. But Thomas didn’t understand where Jesus was going, and how to get there. Jesus told Thomas that he himself is the way to that place. He is the way to the Father. He is truth and he alone gives life.

To understand why the disciples were confused, you have to know something about the Old Testament promises regarding the Messiah, the anointed one of God who would come and make all things right. (Messiah simply means “anointed one.” The Greek word for Messiah is Christ, which is a title of Jesus, not his last name.) The Israelites knew that someone would come and defeat Satan (Gen. 3:15). They knew that a descendant of Abraham would lead to blessings for the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3). They knew that someone from the tribe of Judah would rule over the nations (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17). They knew that a descendant of David, the great king, would be that ruler (2 Sam. 7:12-16). They thought that when that king would come, he would establish a kingdom of peace and righteousness. At that time, the Spirit would be poured out on God’s people and the earth would be restored. They thought this would happen all at once.

We can see why they thought this would happen if we look at some of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Consider Isaiah 9:6-7:

- ⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

Here, we see that a child would be born, and he would be called “Mighty God” and “Prince of Peace.” (You may wonder why this passage can refer to the Messiah, Jesus, as “Everlasting Father.” Obviously, Jesus isn’t God the Father. But in the Old Testament, there are times when Yahweh is likened to a father who cares for his people.⁴) The government will be on his shoulders, he will reign, and he will bring peace, justice, and righteousness. But right now we don’t see a lot of justice and peace.

Let’s look at one more similar passage. This is Isaiah 11:1-10. This passage refers to someone who comes from the line of Jesse, King David’s father. This again is the Messiah, and we know this is really about Jesus.

- ¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—
- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
- He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,

⁴ Ps. 103:13; Isa. 22:21; 63:16; 64:8.

- with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
 He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
 with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
 and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
 the leopard will lie down with the goat,
 the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
 and a little child will lead them.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
 their young will lie down together,
 and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
 and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
 on all my holy mountain,
 for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
 as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

Once again, we have a picture of someone who will bring justice. His words will bring judgment (v. 4). He will bring about a new world of peace. This is illustrated by a wolf lying down with a lamb, and a leopard lying down with a goat (v. 6). Even an infant will be able to play near snakes (v. 8). No one will harm or destroy, and the whole earth will be full of the knowledge of God (v. 9). Obviously, we don't live in a world like that. Nor do we yet live in a world where all the nations flock to Jesus (v. 10).⁵

It seems that the Israelite in the Old Testament didn't know that the Messiah would come twice. Yet, as I said earlier, the first time Jesus came, he died for sin and he rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. The second time Jesus comes, he will put an end to all evil. Why did God make such a plan? I think there are two good reasons. One, God wanted the world to hear about what Jesus did. God was glorified when Jesus died on the cross, and he wanted the nations to hear about the Messiah. In other words, God wanted the gospel message to be proclaimed throughout the world. But if Jesus put an end to evil then, there would have been judgment followed by a new creation, where there is no more marriage and procreation. And that gets us to the second reason why Jesus didn't put an end to evil at his first coming. The second reason is

⁵ Though, of course, people throughout the world are coming to faith in Jesus. This indicates a partial fulfillment of this passage.

that if he put an end to all evil the first time around, then there wouldn't be time for anyone else to repent and put their faith in him, and God wants people to do that (2 Pet. 3:9). And if Jesus put an end to human history as we know it two thousand years ago, you and I would never be born. So we should be glad that Jesus didn't do that.

All of this means that when Jesus came the first time, he inaugurated his kingdom. Jesus' kingdom is real and present now, and if you're a Christian, you're part of it already. But obviously not everyone is part of that kingdom yet. There are many who don't realize Jesus is the ruler of the universe. So we live in the time of the "already, but not yet"—Jesus' kingdom is already here, but the whole world doesn't realize this yet. People still rebel against the King. The earth is not yet full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. But one day it will be, when Jesus returns.

So that answers one question regarding Jesus and his kingdom of justice and peace. But there are many other questions related to his second coming. I don't have time to answer every question and look at every text that relates to his return, but I want to address some of the major questions. Therefore, I'll ask and answer a few important questions concerning Jesus' second coming.

The first question that a lot of people want to know is, When is Jesus coming back? The answer is pretty simple. We don't know. I don't know. You don't know. The guy on TV who is sure he knows doesn't know. Jesus said to his disciples, in Acts 1:7, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." We don't know the times or the dates. And we don't know the day or the hour. Earlier, we heard that Jesus didn't know the day or the hour (Matt. 24:36). Apparently, when Jesus was on earth, he voluntarily set aside some of his divine powers, including his omniscience. So Jesus, as a man, could say that he didn't know the time of his return. But God knows. He has established a time for the end of human history as we know it.

I believe the overall teaching of the New Testament is that Jesus' return will come unexpectedly. Jesus said that his coming would be like a thief in the night (Matt. 24:42-44; also 1 Thess. 5:1-3). The thief doesn't announce exactly when he's coming. So we must be prepared. We prepare by having a right relationship with Jesus. Some people put off turning away from their sin and putting their trust in Jesus. They figure that's something they can do later, when it's more convenient, when the timing is better. But Jesus may return before then. Or he may return

two thousand years from now. We don't know. Still, we could die at any moment. Accidents happen; people die suddenly and unexpectedly.

Jesus said that his coming would be like the flood in the days of Noah. Noah and his family were prepared, because they had listened to God and they built the ark. But everyone else didn't believe that something cataclysmic was coming. They went on about their lives. The people who were not on the ark were taken away by the flood (Matt. 24:37-39). That is how it will be when Jesus returns. The people who are taken in Matthew 24:40-41 are those who are swept away in judgment. It will be too late for some people to put their faith in Jesus.

Again, we don't know when Jesus will return. It could be today. It would be thousands of years from now. People in every generation have thought that Jesus would return in their lifetime. We shouldn't speculate about it. If we live for Jesus today and every day, then we'll be prepared.

Another question people have is, How will Jesus return? I'm not sure that the Bible tells us a lot of specific information regarding how Jesus will come. Remember, the Israelites had the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, before Jesus came the first time. In the Old Testament there are many prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah. The prophets taught that he would be a descendant of David born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Yet when Jesus came, many Jews did not believe he was the Messiah. They couldn't imagine a descendant of David who was also a carpenter's son who lived in a small town (Matt. 13:55). They couldn't imagine a Messiah who didn't free the Jewish people from the Roman Empire's occupation of the Promised Land. If the first coming of Jesus was surprising, we might expect that the second coming is also surprising.

We do know that will return in bodily form and in glory. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he went up in a cloud. The disciples quite understandably stood in awe, staring up even after Jesus disappeared. Two angels said to them, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). When Jesus returns, everyone will see him. Revelation 1:7 says,

⁷ Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.

Those who denied Jesus will mourn because judgment is coming for them. Everyone will know who Jesus is when he returns, but that doesn't mean everyone will repent. In our study of Revelation,⁶ we have seen that many people continue to reject God even as he pours out judgment on them (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). What this tells us is that when Jesus returns, the whole world will know. There will be no missing it.

Here's another major question: What will Jesus do when he returns? Jesus will do many things. One major thing he will do is judge people. Those who rejected him will be cast into hell, while those who are God's people will be rewarded. Their salvation will be complete. We see this clearly in Matthew 25. In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46), Jesus will divide everyone who has ever lived into two camps. Those who responded properly to the gospel by receiving Jesus' disciples, "the least of these brothers of mine," will be rewarded. To those people, the sheep, Jesus will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). To those who have rejected the gospel, brought to them by Jesus' disciples, Jesus will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41).

When Jesus returns, he will deliver his people from "the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10). God's wrath will be poured out on those who have rejected him, those who continue worshipping false gods, who continue living life on their own terms instead of coming to God. That may seem strange if you're not a Christian. But the truth is we were made to worship. And we all worship something. If we don't worship the true God, we'll worship a false god. Idols aren't just little statues. They're anything that we ascribe ultimate worth to. If we love and cherish anything or anyone more than anything else, we are worshipping that thing or that person. An idol could be money or power, entertainment and convenience or a relationship, even an ideology. The apostle Paul, in Colossians 3:5-6, says to Christians, "⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming." In John 3:36, we are told, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

When Jesus comes, he will complete the salvation process of his people. There are passages in the New Testament that say that Christians are already saved (Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9;

⁶ Audio recordings of these sessions are available here: <http://wbcommunity.org/revelation>.

Tit. 3:5). There are passages that say we are in the process of being saved (1 Cor. 1:18). And there are passages that say that we will be saved in the future (1 Thess. 5:8; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5). When we first come to believe in Jesus, we are declared innocent of our sin. We are justified. Throughout the rest of our lives, we should grow to become more like Jesus. We should love God more, and love others more. We should grow in our trust of God and our obedience to him. That's called sanctification, the process of becoming more holy.⁷ When Jesus appears, we will be given resurrected bodies, bodies that cannot die and cannot sin. That's called glorification. So when Jesus returns, he will complete our salvation. We get that sense when we read Hebrews 9:26-28:

²⁶ Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

At his first coming, Jesus died as a once-and-for all sacrifice for sin. And we, too, will die, unless Jesus returns in our lifetime. After that, there is judgment. We only have this life to respond to Jesus. But when Jesus returns, he will bring salvation to his people. In the meantime, we should prepare ourselves. Peter, another apostle, says, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:13). In this life, we should prepare our minds, be self-controlled, and wait for the grace that will be given to us when Jesus returns. God's people will be given more grace at the second coming. We have no wrath of God to fear.

However, those who have rejected Jesus have something to fear. Those who have persecuted and afflicted Christians will be paid back for what they have done. We see this in 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10:

³ We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

⁵ All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶ God is just:

⁷ Tit. 2:11-14 connects sanctification with the return of Jesus, "the blessed hope."

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Paul is writing to a group of Christians who are persevering through trials. They are enduring. And Paul wants them to know that the people who are afflicting them because of their faith will be afflicted by God. Those who do not “obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” will be punished. This is frightening. But those who believe in Jesus will marvel and they will be granted relief.

So, much of what Jesus will do when he returns is related to salvation and judgment. But that’s not all that Jesus will do. When Jesus returns, he will show us our true selves. And this is one of the more surprising things that will happen. The truth is that we are not the people who we will be in eternity. We will be transformed to be like Jesus. We sometimes hear that we should be true to ourselves. But the problem with that thought is that we can’t be the people we ought to be because of our sin. We wouldn’t, after all, tell an addict, “Be true to yourself,” if their current self is addicted to something destructive. Instead, we should say, “Be true to the kind of person God wants you to be.”

The entrance of sin into the world, when the first humans rejected God’s word, brought four problems. First, human beings are separated from God. Two, we are separated from each other. Three, we’re separated from nature—life is difficult, there are natural disasters, work is hard. But the fourth problem, one that we don’t always understand, is that we are separated from the way we ought to be. We should be honest, honorable, selfless, loving people. But we find that we tend to shade the truth, we’re cowards, we’re selfless, and we often simply don’t care. In order to be our true selves, the people we were intended to be, we must wait for Jesus to return.

That concept is what we find in Colossians 3:1-4:

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

If you are a Christian, Christ is your life. And when he appears, then your real life will be appear. You will then be true to your true self.⁸ John tells us something very similar. First John 3:2 says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” You haven’t seen the real me yet. And I haven’t seen the real you yet. But when Jesus appears, what we will be will be made known. Jesus will appear, we will see him, and we will be like him.

The last thing I want to say is that when Jesus returns, he will make all things new. Until Jesus returns, there will be earthquakes. There will be wars. There will be riots, murders, abortions, terrorism, and all kinds of injustice. We cry out, “Come, O Lord!”⁹ Paul tells us that the whole creation is groaning because it has been subjected to frustration. The whole earth is not the way it should be because of sin. Paul writes, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the son of God to be revealed” (Rom. 8:19). In other words, the universe is waiting for us to be what we will be when we see Jesus. And when Jesus comes, he will make all things new.

When Jesus taught the disciples about the future, he told them that they would sit on twelve thrones judging Israel “at the renewal of all things” (Matt. 19:28). The Greek word behind that means “regeneration” or “new birth.”¹⁰ The universe will be regenerated, or made new. Just as Jesus’ body was resurrected, so too will the world have a resurrection of its own. There will be no more natural disasters, no more diseases, and no more death. And there will be no more murders, wars, crimes, or any sin. It will only be God and his people. Jesus will make all things new.¹¹

Earlier, I read John 14, where Jesus says that he is preparing a place for his followers, and that one day he will bring them to that place. The surprise is that Jesus brings this place down from heaven to the renewed earth. When Jesus returns, he will join heaven and earth. We see this in Revelation 21:1-5:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne

⁸ When Polonius says, “To thine own self be true,” in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* I.3.78, that’s what he means—being true to one’s self involves taking the best course of action, the right course of action.

⁹ 1 Cor. 16:22, which translates an Aramaic phrase: *marana tha*.

¹⁰ παλιγγενεσία (*palingenesia*).

¹¹ See Acts 3:19-21, which speaks of a restoration of all things.

saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

The new Jerusalem represents the city of God. In the end, it will be God dwelling with his people in a perfect world. The greatest part of this world is that we will dwell directly with God. Though we feel his presence, we don't see God and we don't live in the fullness of his presence. But in the new creation, we will know and experience God in the fullest sense.

One day, everything will be made right. All our desires for justice and beauty will fulfilled. If you're a Christian, you have something tremendous to look forward to. Your best life—your real life—will start when Jesus returns. You will be with him forever.

If you're not a Christian, I pray that you would consider what you've heard today. You may wonder where Jesus is, and why evil things happen. Jesus will come again to save and to judge, but when he does, he will put an end to evil. That means he will put an end to evil in the world, and he will put an end to the evil that lies within us. God punishes all evil. He punished the evil of those who put their trust in Jesus at the cross where Jesus died. (And when we are glorified, he will remove all the evil within us.) But those who have rejected Jesus are still under God's wrath, and one day that wrath will be poured out. Today is the day to put your trust in Jesus. Only then will you find you true self.