

Why Jesus Must Return to Earth, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1321

Two thousand years ago, a man lived on earth illegally and with no cause He was executed by Jews and Romans. They put Him on a cross, which was the common form of execution for criminals, but three days later He rose from the dead. And over 500 different people saw Him alive after His death and resurrection. Some people talked with Him. Some people even ate with Him. And 40 days later while they were on the mountains of the east of Jerusalem, He was talking with them and all of a sudden He ascended in their full view straight back into the clouds. And they saw Him physically, literally ascend from the earth.

Immediately, two angels stood by them in white apparel. And said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven. This same Jesus who is taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven." The promise of the angels was that Jesus would return. Now that's not a new promise, Jesus Himself said He was coming back over and over again.

And we who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, we who are what the world has called Christians for it is a name that was given us by the pagans in the city of Antioch originally, but we who are called Christians believe Jesus is coming and we are waiting for Him to return. We have always been waiting for Him. We don't know when He's coming. It's in an hour that we really have no way to know, but we believe He's coming back.

This is what Christians call the blessed hope. Now some people think we're fools. Some people think it's all pie in the sky and the idea that Jesus would return visibly to earth is kind of scoffed at. But that's predictable. In 2 Peter 3:3, Peter says, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts and saying where is the promise of His coming for sense the Father's fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

Peter says, there will always be scoffers and there will be a whole lot of them in the end times and they will be saying oh come on, everything's always gone along smoothly. Where is the promise of His coming, nothing's ever changed since the very beginning of creation. Such mockers have always been around, but their hay day says the Bible will be at the time of the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now I want to show you a parable if I may to begin with tonight. Turn in your Bibles to Luke Chapter 12, this will form our introduction. By the time our series is completed, we will have gone from the why Jesus must return to earth, through the how He will return, to the final consummation in the

eternal state. But as we come to Luke 12:41-48, we find a parable that speaks to this issue of scoffing at the second coming of Christ.

Luke 12 beginning verse 41, "Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household to give him his portion of food in due season?"

And here we find a house owner. And he has a steward as so many did in those days. A steward was one who didn't own anything, but he managed the affairs for the house owner. And he was to manage them with care, that was his duty. Verse 43 then says, "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He comes shall find so doing."

The picture here is of an owner of a house going away. And when he goes away he puts the servant in charge. "And blessed is the servant who does what he should and is found doing it when his lord returns to the house. Of a truth," verse 44 says, "I say unto you, he will make ruler over all that he has." The promise then is of the house owner who goes away, puts the servant in charge and when he comes back if the man's been faithful, he is fully rewarded.

And there you have the promise in a parable form that Jesus is coming back to reward those who have served Him faithfully. What a promise that is. In 2 Timothy 4:8 we read this, "Hence forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord shall...the Lord the righteous judge shall give me that day and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." In other words, those who live as if Jesus was coming in the next moment will be rewarded with a crown of righteousness.

Now contrast with the faithful servant, verse 45 of Luke 12. "But and if that servant say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming," he's not going to be here for a long time, maybe he'll never come back. "And to begin to beat them menservants and maidservants and eat and drink and be drunk, the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him and at an hour when he is not aware and will cut him in sunder and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."

Now Jesus said then there are some people who when the Lord goes away are going to be unfaithful with the obligation of the trust committed to them. This is the one who doesn't live in the light of the return. Who scoffs and said oh my Lord delays His coming. Maybe He'll never come. Unfaithful, he throws off the robe of stewardship and he begins to misuse everything. He badly treats the fellow servants. He pushes them around according to his own whims and wishes. He indulges himself in the food and drink of the master and even gets drunk wastefully taking that which is not his. Despising the others, not supplying as he should.

And notice in verse 46 that the Lord comes back at a time and a day when he's not looking and an hour when he's not aware and cuts him in half. Interesting note there, that was not an uncommon kind of death in that day for someone who was deserving of death. If you read in Hebrews 11, I think it's verse 37, you'll find that one of the Old Testament prophets was also saw and a sunder.

And so he would be cut in half and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. Now you'll notice that there's a suddenness to the return of the Lord here. And here our Lord Jesus Christ is beginning to talk about the fact that He is going to be coming back and He's going to evaluate what men have done in His absence.

Verse 47, "And that servant who knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required and to whom men have committed much of him, they will ask the more."

What's that saying? That's saying that even in judgment there are degrees. Even in hell, there are degrees. "But for an individual," look at it, in verse 47, "that knows the lord's will and doesn't prepare and doesn't take care of it, he gets the severe judgment." Now you may scoff my friend at the second coming of Jesus and you may think it's pie in the sky that Jesus is said to come physically, literally to this earth, but may I say tonight that from this hour on, you have been warned. You have heard the truth. You no longer find yourself in the category of 48 who doesn't know, but you are in the category of 47 who knows what the Lord has promised to do, it's up to you whether or not you obey.

From this night on, you stand responsible before God and your conscience. Now Jesus said in that parable that He was going to come back. He is obviously the house owner. And men are obviously those to whom the stewardship is committed. This present age will end with the return of Jesus Christ. We've used a little overhead just to give you a kind of an overall picture and this follows the little chart that you have. Although it's somewhat different. The chart includes all of the varying Scriptures that you can refer to through the series.

But you will notice as we look at it that the church age, just a brief look, the church age concludes with the rapture. The rapture concludes the church age. From that point on, all of this period here is involved in the second coming of Christ. It includes all of this period. The Tribulation for seven years and the thousand year kingdom before the great white throne is set up.

This age, the church age, as we know it ends then with the rapture and then begins on earth the horrible Tribulation and we'll get into that in detail. Now how do we know that Jesus is really going to return? What is the evidence to indicate that He is going to return? How do we know this isn't just pie in the sky? What causes us to be sure of a literal, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, I believe there are at least nine reasons. And last week, I gave you the first three and this week we'll endeavor to give you the last six and see how far we get. First of all, and just by way of brief review, we stated last week that the first reason Jesus must return is the promise of God demands it. We saw that throughout the Old Testament, God continually promised a deliverer, didn't He?

He continuously promised a redeemer, a Messiah, a Savior, a king who would deliver me, who would forgive their sin, who would bring justice out of injustice, who would make right out of wrong, who would reverse the curse, who would change everything. God repeatedly made this promise. According to one writer we saw there are at least 333 prophecies in the Old Testament telling about this deliverer. Now Jesus is that deliverer, but the first time He came, He only fulfilled 109 of those prophecies. Which means there are yet 224 prophecies of what the deliverer would do when He came and those 224 prophecies have never been fulfilled.

Now, if they have yet to be fulfilled then He must return, do you see? God promised this is what Messiah would do. He only did one-third of what God said He would do on earth, so He has to come back and do the rest on earth or God comes out a liar, right? Or God's word is suspect. If Jesus doesn't return, God's word is unfulfilled. God's predictions don't happen. God is a liar.

And so I say the first reason that Jesus must return is the promise of God demands it. And listen, the first time Jesus came, He came physically and literally to earth and believe me, the second time He will also come physically and literally to earth. That is the promise of God. And Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man that He should lie." If God said Jesus is coming, believe it. Jesus is coming.

And if He only fulfilled a third of the prophecies the first time and God said He'll be back, He'll be back. God cannot lie. Now listen to this little thought. If God, this is for your brain to mull over, if God gave out the information that wasn't true, then God would be destroying the very thing He was trying to establish, His own trustworthiness, right?

God wants man to believe in Him, true? Now if God rattled off 224 prophecies that didn't come to pass, the God is foolishly undermining just exactly what He's trying to accomplish. Why do you think God gave prophecies in the Old Testament? To vindicate Himself. God said such and such would happen, we see it happen. We say oh you can trust God. God said Israel be scattered and they'd be gathered and placed in the land. You say yeah, and I see it in my day. Boy that makes me believe God.

God said the Messiah would come and they would cast lots for His garment and the Messiah would come and He would be crucified and the Messiah would come and not a bone of His body would be broken and He would rise from the dead and it all came to pass. And when know that we say God is true. God is right. What God says happens? God says in the end times there will be certain features

coming to pass prophetically and we look around and we see them and we say wow, you can trust God. But if God rattled off 224 prophecies that never happened, then God's word is suspect, right? And He can't be trusted.

In Genesis 18, there's an interesting little encounter between Abraham and God that maybe points this up for us. Abraham was God's friend incidentally. And Abraham walked with God by faith. Paul even makes that point clearly in the New Testament. And God was always revealing to Abraham what He was going to do. God would say now Abraham, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that and then Abraham would see it happen and say Oh God you did do it. Your word is valid.

Now God was about to wipe out Sodom and Gomorrah, right? I mean wipe them out totally. And now He didn't want Abraham's faith shattered. So He said to Abraham, "Abraham, I am going to wipe out Sodom and Gomorrah." And God was in effect saying "Now Abraham if I do it you'll learn to trust my word won't you? So God told him, in verse 17, let's look at it. God gives the rationale for telling Abraham. "And the Lord shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do? Should I hide it from him?" No, I want to tell him what I'm going to do.

God didn't want a confused Abraham. God wanted him solid in faith and one of the greatest...and I think this in my own personal life, one of the greatest things that establishes my faith in God is fulfilled prophecy, isn't it yours? It's powerful, and so he used this even with Abraham telling him what He was going to do. He then did it. And Abraham's faith would grow instead of Abraham being confused by strange circumstances. He knew they were going to happen and he was trusting God all the more.

Now in verse 20, "And the Lord said because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and because their sin is very grievous, I'll go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it." I'm going to go down and look and see if it's as bad as it sounds. And if not I'll know. So He's going to go down and judge them.

Well, if you read on down from 21, 22, clear on down you'll find out what happened. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. And you know what happened? Abraham's faith became stronger. Now if Abraham hadn't have known Abraham could have been a little bit shaken, because that was the town where Lot was. And maybe Abraham wouldn't have understood so God gave him the plan and then brought it to pass and instead of Abraham being confused, he was strong in faith.

He said God has done it again, kept His word. You see for God to promise to do that and then not to do it, would have been to destroy the very thing He was trying to accomplish by promising it in the beginning. Do you see? You and I don't need to know what He's going to do. Other than the fact that when He tells us and then does it, it secures our faith. You got that point?

And so for God to tell us and then not do it is to destroy what He sets out to do in the first place. Say, if somebody comes to me and says MacArthur, I don't trust you. I doubt your word. You can't keep a promise. And I say all right, I promise such and such and such. And the guy says well I'll meet you Tuesday at three o'clock on such and such a corner. All right, I will be there, you can believe my word and I'll prove to you once and for all that I'm worthy of your trust. Tuesday at three o'clock the guy waits there. Wednesday at three o'clock he's still there and I haven't come yet.

You think he's going to trust me? The very thing that I wanted to use to get his trust, destroyed his trust, right? God would never make prophecies that couldn't come true. He'd be undermining the very thing the prophecies were given to do in the first place. You got it? And so God has made predictions and God brings them to pass. And strengthening faith is the result.

All right, point number two, we said that Jesus must return to earth because God's promise demands it. Number two the statements of Jesus demand it. Jesus kept saying He was coming in direct statements in John 14, He said He was coming. "To receive us unto himself." In parables in Matthew 24, Matthew 25, and we just read one in Luke 19 didn't we? We Jesus says, "I'm coming, I'm coming, I'm coming."

And in Revelation six times He shouted pass the clouds "Behold I come quickly." He's coming believe me. He kept saying it. And He is the same one who said I am the way, the truth, and the life and if He is the truth, He cannot lie, right? You know, Jesus went further than just saying it. Jesus...did you know that Jesus gave a demonstration of the second coming? I want to show it to you. It's Luke 9. And this was very vivid. In fact, it just...it stayed in Peter's mind all his life.

Luke 9, just to show you that Jesus really meant what He said about coming again, verse 22. Jesus is talking with His disciples and He's going to tell them that He's going to have to die. In verse 22 He says, "The Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by elders and chief priests and scribes and be slain and be raised the third day."

Now, this is like a bomb that's unloaded on the disciples. Just fantastically shocking. And it's at this point, of course, that the little interlude of Peter occurs where Peter says "Not so Lord," and he has to say "get thee behind me Satan." But anyway, He announces His death. And then in verse 26, but He says something I want to tell you. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words of Him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory and in the Father's and the holy angels."

Now there Jesus says, yes, I'm going to die. Yes, I'm going to rise again, and then I'm going to what? Come back. He says he's going to come right in verse 26, "when He shall come in His own glory." Jesus says I'm coming. Now Jesus then gives them a fantastic illustration of the second coming.

Absolutely mind shattering.

Verse 28, "It came to pass about eight days after these sayings that he took Peter, John, and James and went into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, His appearance...the appearance of His countenance or His face was altered. And His raiment was white and glistening." He just like somebody had turned on a light bulb, a fantastic light bulb inside of Him, he became translucent. Right in front of their eyes. What it was was the glory of God just beaming through Him.

"And behold there talked with him two men, Moses and Elijah," all of a sudden landed there. And of course, Peter was just completely flipped out by this point. And we'll see what happens, literally he was. "Who appeared in glory and spoke of His deceased, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." There's Moses, Elijah, and Jesus up there talking about His death.

"But Peter and they that were with Him were heavy with sleep and when they were awake, they saw His glory and the two men that stood with Him." These guys slept through almost every prayer meeting and they finally woke up...you've done it. They finally woke up and they saw this fantastic thing. And of course, it came to pass as they departed from Him that Peter said unto Him "Master it is good for us to be here, this is terrific." Let's make three booths, that's houses, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. And typically of Peter not knowing what He said.

"While He thus spoke there became a cloud and overshadowed them and they feared as they entered into the cloud and there came a voice out of the cloud saying this is my beloved Son, hear Him. And when the voice was passed, Jesus was found alone and they kept it close and told no man in those days any of the things which they had seen."

You say well, what's all that. Jesus appeared, what? He appeared in His second coming glory. When Jesus comes, He is going to appear on earth with His saints, Old Testament and New Testament and they were weren't they. Moses and Elijah representing the Old Testament saints glorified. Peter, James, and John representing the New Testament saints glorified and Jesus in His second coming glory all gathered on the mount just to give a glimpse, a fantastic illustration of the final glory of Jesus when He comes in His second coming.

This was a little preview. Now when Jesus comes, He's going to bring the kingdom, isn't He? He's going to bring the kingdom. Go back to verse 27. People have really gotten messed up with this verse. Let me give you a simple explanation. "I tell you a truth, Jesus said, there are some standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." You say that was 2000 years ago. There's no 2000 years...2000 year old Peter, James and Johns. They're gone. What does He mean that there's some standing there who want die until they see the kingdom?

What He meant was they would see the full glory of Jesus Christ as it would be revealed in the kingdom in a preview and they saw bang in the next verse. As they took off in verse 28, they went to the mountain and there it was.

Verse 27 doesn't refer to the kingdom that came that comes at the end of this age. It refers to the glimpse of second coming glory that they saw right there on the mount of transfiguration. They saw Jesus as the flesh was pulled back and His glory as the God of the universe was unveiled through the flesh. And there was Moses and Elijah representing the Old Testament saints that'll reign with Christ in the kingdom and there was the church represented by Peter, James, and John also who will reign with Him in the kingdom.

All gathered with Jesus on the mount. It was a little preview of the kingdom. And so Jesus not only said I'm coming, but He gave a fantastically dramatic illustration. And believe me it stuck in Peter's mind like it was nailed there. In 2 Peter 1:16, listen to what Peter said. He says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." Oh you know what Peter had been preaching, second comings, second comings, Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming, kept preaching that all the time. Some of you say oh Peter you've got all those old wives tales. All that Jesus is coming stuff. Where is the promise of His coming? Why do you believe all that?

He says, "We haven't followed any...any strange humanly divine...designed fairytales when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus." Watch. "We were eyewitnesses of His Majesty." What do you mean Peter? He says, hey when I'm talking about Jesus coming, I'm not talking about something I don't know anything about. I saw Him in His second coming glory.

Next verse, 17 "For he received from God the Father honor and glory." When was that Peter? When did you see that? "When there came a voice to Him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when were with Him," where, "upon in that holy mount."

Peter says, I'm not just shooting off my mouth, pie in the sky, I was there I saw a glimpse of second coming glory. Believe Jesus is coming. It's no fairytale. So you see Jesus embedded in the mind of Peter and for all time in the pages of Scripture the visible illustration of the fact that He's coming again in glory, right?

And so I say to you Jesus must return to earth because the statements of the Father demand it and the statements of Jesus Himself demand it as well as His living illustration. And Peter says don't take it lightly, "it's no cunningly devised fable. We saw His glory like it'll be when He returns."

The third thing that we said last week, we know that Jesus must come because the guarantee of the Holy Spirit demands it. The Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit continuously states Jesus is coming, Jesus

is coming through all the New Testament writers. And the Spirit incidentally is the one who wrote the New Testament as well as the Old Testament.

When New Testament writers wrote it was the mind of the Spirit guiding the pen. The New Testament is the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the person of Christ and to His second coming. Look at verse 19, same place, 2 Peter 1. Peter says hey, you know, how I know Jesus is coming, are you ready for this? You know how I know? "I saw His glory right there in that mount, I saw it." Second coming glory, but I love this. You say well, that's good Peter, that's your experience. For He says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy that He's coming." What is it? It's the Scripture. "We have a more sure word of prophecy under which you do well to take heed." Listen, if experience isn't your bag, how about the statement of Scripture?

Take heed in your hearts, skip to the end of the verse. The parenthesis should be in there. There should be a parenthesis beginning at the word as and ending with the arise. Let me read it without the parenthesis. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy unto which you do well to take heed in your hearts knowing this, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private origin. For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Peter says that I not only know Jesus is coming because I experienced his glory, but I know he's coming because the Holy Spirit gives testimony to it in the pages of Scripture, right? And the Scripture didn't come from any private origination. The Spirit gave it.

"And it's going to be like a light, verse 19, that shines in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise." You know before the dawn comes the day star. And before the dawn of the kingdom will come the morning star. And who does the write of Revelation say is the Bright and Morning Star? Jesus. Before the dawn of the kingdom must come the day star, Jesus.

And so Peter says if you don't believe my experience, believe the testimony of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. So you see the first three things we saw last week are these. Jesus must return to earth, the word of God, the promise of God demands it, the statements of Jesus and the visible illustration He gave demand it, and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit demands. We call all those three the person of God. Jesus must return because the person of God demands it.

The second large category is this, God's person demands that He return, so does God's program. God's program and under that one there are three, and then there's one other major point and other that one there are three and that'll give us the nine.

You know God has a program for this world, and God's program demands that Jesus return to earth. First of all, this is number four in the list of nine. The program for the church demands the return of

Jesus. The program for the church demands the return of Jesus. Did you know that the church age can't end until Jesus gets here? Did you know that?

And if He's not coming, we're not going and nothing resolves. Now to understand this, I take you to a fantastically important passage Acts 15. This is the Jerusalem council, it's a key dispensational passage. Now what has happened is this, the church in Jerusalem has exploded around the world and Peter comes back and he starts telling all the Jews in Jerusalem that the Gentiles are getting saved, see? Well, verse 14, "Simeon," that's Peter, "hath declared how God first did visit the nations to take out of them a people for His name."

Now Peter just gave the report that God has visited the Gentiles. And do you remember that Peter's first contact was Cornelius wasn't it? Acts 10. And Peter came back and say hey you guys, you know what God's doing? He's calling out a people of the Gentiles. First before anything else. And Peter had just given his report in verses 6 to 12. And then let's go on with it. Then James, the Lord's half brother, who was also the head of the church of Jerusalem, quotes a passage from Amos 9:11 and 12.

Let's look at verse 15. "And to this agree the words of the prophets." James is doing the talking. He says Peter just told us the first thing, now watch, verse 14, "the first thing God did is visit the Gentiles and take out a people." What's that? That's the gathering of the church, isn't it? The first thing that happened at Pentecost, God began to gather. Now Israel rejected, right? So God turned to whom? To the Gentile.

The first thing in God's economy, and we might look at our little...well, we can't look at it now, but anyway, the first thing in the chart...the first little area of the church age on your little paper in that age, God is calling out Gentile people isn't He?

All right, now watch, verse 15. And James says, this goes along with prophecy. "And to this agree the words of the prophets as it is written." Watch, here's Amos 9:11 and 12. "After this, I will return and we'll build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down and I'll build again it's ruins and set it up. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the nations upon whom my name is called saith the Lord who doeth all these things."

Now watch, I'll give it to you simply. Here is the order of events in God's plan. This is one of the most critical, dispensational passages in the Scripture. Watch the order of events. First, verse 14, "God visits the Gentiles and calls out a people for His name." That's the gathering of the church, right? The called out. Notice that, to take out. The church is the ecclesia, eckoletto. To call out. Then the second thing that happens, verse 16, "After this I will," what, "return."

The church is taken out before the return of Christ. First the rapture, seven years later, He returns. When He returns, what does He do? "I will build again the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down and set up again its ruins," so forth. Jesus calls the church out, and then He comes back and rebuilds the house of David. What does that mean? That means He sets up the kingdom and reigns as king in David's throne, right?

Now watch the plan, it's very simple. The third thing that happens. First thing, calling out of the church. Second thing, after this I will return. He takes the church, then he returns. Third thing, sets up the kingdom of David. Fourth thing, verse 17, "The rest of the men and all the nations shall come and seek the Lord." You know what happens during the kingdom when Christ finally sets it up? All the nations come before the Lord don't they?

There is this four-fold pattern. First the church is called out, then Jesus Christ returns, then He rebuilds the kingdom for Israel, then the Gentile nations come to His throne. There it is. Now watch beloved, "Nothing," now watch it, "nothing further can happen for Israel until the church is consummated." Did you get it?

Look at verse 14. He first calls out a people. Then verse 16, "after this," what, "I will return and set up the house of David." Do you know that God can't finish His plan with Israel until He finishes His plan with the church? Jesus must return beloved because the church age can't end if He doesn't return. And if the church age doesn't end, then there's no after this. And if there's no after this there's no kingdom either. You see?

Now the after this, those words do not appear in Amos 9. They're added by the Holy Spirit for clarification and accuracy right here. This is the plan of God. I can't see how you can understand that plan any other way than to be pre-tribulation, pre-millennial. And we'll get into what that means. That's not a disease. We'll find out about it later.

So we find then that God's pattern is very simple. He takes out a church, when He's done with that, He comes back and works with Israel, and then He sets up His kingdom and the Gentile nations come to the throne. Now presently beloved, we're still in verse 14 aren't we? Has He rebuilt the ruins of the house of David, not on your life. That's a spiritual revival. It hasn't happened. He hasn't set up a king in Israel Himself? No, He's still visiting the Gentiles and taking out a people for His name. And maybe before tonight's over some of you who are gathered right here will be taken out of the system, out of the world, added to the fold of Christians. He is still doing that all over the world, isn't He?

Still gathering the church. But you know, it's going to end. One of these days the last...I always think about this, where in the world is going to be the last one saved and then we go? And here's how the whole church age ends. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and we'll study this in detail in weeks to come. "I would not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning them who are asleep that you sorrow not as

others who have no hope." Those people who are dead, don't worry about them. "If we believe Jesus died and rose again, even so them who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep."

Now, here's how the church age ends. Are you ready? "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." He doesn't come to the earth. He just descends into heaven with a shout. "The voice of archangel, the trump of God, the dead in Christ rise first, and we are alive and remain caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord not on the earth, in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The church age ends when Christ comes down into the sky, makes a sound and all the saints, God just turns off gravity for Christians, whish, and away they go. Collected in the sky with Christ, and away they go. Now that is not His return to earth in the fullest sense. That's just the beginning of His return. He'll be back seven years later and His feet will hit the Mount of Olives and split it wide open. But that's the beginning of His return.

And that's the end of the church and people until that happens nothing else can happen, because in James' words, "first He's going to call out a people and He's going to take them out. And after this He will return to deal with Israel." It's like a wedding, you know. The church is called a virgin waiting for her husband in 2 Corinthians 11:2.

Under the New Testament symbolism custom to the oriental word world, a marriage had three aspects. Marriages were interesting. The first aspect was the legal contract. You know how it works, you young people will appreciate this, families got together and decided that they would marry their kids off to each other. Kids may never have seen each other. In other words, your father would sign a contract with some other father over here for his daughter for you. And guys that was it. Binding. And if you didn't happen to like what you got, it wasn't a whole lot you could do about it.

Now the father would also pay a dowry, and we've mentioned from time to time that the dowry would vary depending upon the virtues of the wife, anywhere from a couple of dozen sheep to a lame chicken. But anyway, it's depending on how desperate the father was to get rid of his daughter I guess.

But anyway, the dowry would be paid and it was contract that was phase one. There had to be payment made. Now the marriage was then legal, although there was no consummation of the marriage. Want to know something wonderful? When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He made legal payment for our marriage. And though the marriage has not yet been consummated it's binding, because He made a legal contract. And He paid the dowry with His own precious blood.

The second thing was what was called the betrothal. And this was a little ceremony where the bride and the bridegroom got together in the presence of witnesses and got a lot of presents. History says all kinds of gifts were given, still the marriage wasn't consummated. This was just a preliminary situation where gifts were given. And again, this is a beautiful parallel to the fact that you and I when we come to Jesus Christ the dowry is paid, the legal contract is settled forever, and not only that the betrothal takes place and God gives through Jesus Christ the gifts of the Spirit, right? The consummation has not yet happened, but we have all the gifts.

Finally, the third phase of the wedding occurs when the bridegroom and his friends go to the bride's house. They have the actual ceremony and the feast takes place. Beloved, we've already had the legal...we've already had the betrothal. We're just waiting for the marriage feast. And unless Jesus comes, there is no feast. There is no bride and bridegroom coming together. He must come as the bridegroom must come for his bride to consummate the marriage.

That's the plan of the church. God would never use a beautiful metaphor of a marriage and then leave us hanging forever with no consummation. Those of us who put our trust in Christ we are legally married to Him. We are secured by the engagement ring, the arrabon, the Holy Spirit. Christ has paid the dowry dying for us on the cross. Legally we are joined to Christ. We have been betrothed to Him in the sense the Spirit of God is given to us and all the gifts of the Spirit that belong to us and all we're waiting for now is the final moment when we enter His presence and the marriage feast begins.

And so I say beloved, Jesus must return for us because the program of the church demands it. There's got to be a marriage. Ephesians 5:25, listen to this, "Husbands love your wives." You say, Oh I love her. Listen to this one. "Even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." That's a pretty great love.

That's what the...that's the past tense. That's the legal contract. Verse 26, "That he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." That's the present tense. The Lord took as a bride, He keeps us clean. Continually cleanses us. You say what for? What is He doing? Verse 27, "That He might present us to Himself a glorious church not have a spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Sure He bought us and He keeps us in order that He might present us to Himself. There's got to be a rapture. We've got to enter into His presence to consummate the marriage. I really believe people that God's purpose for the church demands the return of Jesus Christ or the marriage doesn't come into consummation.

Now let me add a footnote. I think that the present state of the church leads me to believe that the marriage feast is coming pretty fast. You say what do you mean? Well, 1 Timothy Chapter 4, the apostle Paul said...don't try to turn to this, I'll just mention it. He said "in the last days there will be people who will depart from the faith, apostasy, giving he the seducing spirits and doctrines of demons." He said in the last days watch out. The church will be characterized by apostasy and demonism.

People, if there are two things that dominate the church today in 1973, they are apostates and people who are really being run around by demons. A preoccupation with demons. Apostasy, liberalism, all the garbage that's pumped out in the name of Christ. Signs of the end. 2 Peter Chapter 2, Peter said in verse 1, "There were false prophets, so in the last days watch out. False teachers bringing in damnable heresy's denying the Lord."

You know what the liberals always do, deny the deity of Jesus Christ, don't they? They always do it. In 2 Peter 3, they deny a second coming. You've got that going on every where. And so there are reasons to believe that church age is fast coming to an end and I say God's program for the church demands a return of Jesus.

Second, in this section, fifthly on the total list, the program for the nations demands the return of Jesus. The program for the nations. We talked about God's person demanding it, now we're talking about God's program demands it and God's program for the nations demands the return of Jesus. You say what do you mean, John? Just this, now get it. God promises in the Bible that He will not tolerate sin, right? Now in the Old Testament there were certain sinning nations which God destroyed, the Canaanite nation. He judged them.

You say well do you believe God's going to come in judgment? Absolutely, and I believe if I read my Bible in the very simplest terms, the Bible says that all judgment is committed to whom? The Son Jesus Christ, that's John Chapter 5. "All judgment is given unto Him." Now if God is going to judge the nations and Jesus is the judge, then Jesus has to return to judge those nations. So God's program for the nations demands a return of Jesus Christ.

Yes, God is a God of love, but He's also a God of judgment. Now I want to take you to a prophecy to prove this. Joel 3, Joel is right there. Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, just a little book in the middle of the minor prophets. Joel 3, verse 1, now this very fascinating prophecy. It's very instructive.

Listen to verse 1 of Joel 3. If you can't find it, look in your index. If you can't find still, listen. "For behold in those days and at that time," or in that time, "when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem." Now He's talking about those days and that time. Now He's talking about the time when he regathers Israel. He's talking about the future times. And He is talking in the context of Joel

about the period when He will regather Israel.

Now at the time that he is going to regather Israel, something's going to happen. At the time of the end, you know, you back up to verse 30, "there will be wonders in the heavens and blood and fire and smoke and the sun turn to darkness, the moon and the blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord." So he's talking about the second coming. In the great day of judgment. In that day, at that time, when I bring back Judah and Jerusalem. You know, when I gather them from captivity.

What's going to happen? Verse 9, look at it. "Proclaim this among the nations, prepare war." Now listen to me, "Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say I am strong, assemble yourselves and come all ye nations and gather yourselves round about." Now watch, in this prophecy there is to be a gathering of all the nations for war at the time of the end.

Now you and I know this as a battle of Armageddon. Wars are going to continue to escalate until Jesus comes. Trust it, the word of God promises it. Now watch verse 13. "Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come get down for the press is full, the vats overflow, their wickedness is great." Here are all these nations, all of them gathered together ready for a big war. Watch verse 14, "multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near, the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be dark, the stars shall withdraw their shining and the Lord shall roar out of Zion and utter His voice from Jerusalem and the heavens and the earth shall shake."

Stop right there. Now I hope you got that. What that said was this. God is going to gather nations and He's going to gather them into the valley of Jehoshaphat, verse 12. He calls it the valley of decision. And verse 16 says, the Lord is going to roar out of Zion.

Now, I want you to take another passage and explain what this is saying. Look in your Bibles at Matthew 25. All right, verse 31. Now remember Joel's prophecy was that nations would be gathered to be judged and God would roar at them. Now we come to Matthew 25 and just going to briefly look at this. "When the Son of man shall come," verse 31, "in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall gathered all the nations." Now here Jesus is talking and Jesus verifies the prophecy of Joel by saying Joel said the nations would be gathered, I'm saying the same thing. And I'm going to separate them one from the other as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats.

He's going to take the sheep nations, put them on one hand and say enter the kingdom which is prepared for you, verse 34. Now look down at verse 40. Pardon me, verse 41. "The others on the left depart from e you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And verse 46 sums it up, and we'll study this in detail in the future. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous and the life eternal."

Now watch, Joel said the nations will be judged, they'll gather for war. It's an interesting thing, you know what really happens? All these nations gather for war and as they converge on Jerusalem to fight war, they find out that they have been brought to the tribunal, to the judgment bar of God. They think they're coming to attack the Lord and Israel. They really wind up at the judgment seat of God. It's like going to war in a courtroom. The tables are turned on them.

And the nations are all going to be judged. And the nations that have responded to Messiah will enter the kingdom. The nations that have not will be sent out into everlasting punishment. This is the judgment God promises for the nations. Now in Revelation 14, this confirmed. In Revelation 14, the judgment is repeated again. And I just want to mention it to you, because it needs to be mentioned.

Revelation 14:14 the Son of man is the one who does it. Now watch, verse 14, "I behold a white cloud and upon the cloud one sat like the Son of man. Having on His head a golden crown, in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud. Thrust in the sickle and reap for the time has come for thee to reap for the harvest of the earth is ripe." And here comes Christ and He just reaps and the devastation is unbelievable, verse 20. "The winepress was trodden outside the city. Blood came out of the winepress six feet deep over two hundred miles."

Jesus is going to judge the nations. And Revelation 11:15 says "The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of Lord and of His Christ." Now listen beloved, God's program is this, on the earth, on the earth it says so in Joel, it says so in Matthew, it says so in Revelation. "On the earth the nations are going to be judged."

Who is the judge? Jesus. John 5, verses 22 to 29, Jesus has been given all judgment. Now if the nations are to be judged on the earth, and Jesus is the judge, then Jesus must what, must return to earth. The program of the church demands it. The program of the nations demands it.

And you know something, as I look at the world around us, and I look at the picture of the nations, it seems to me that the coming of Jesus must be very soon. I see all of the terrors of war escalating, population explosion, ecology, the rise of Russia, the rise of the kings of the south predicted in Daniel 11, the rise of the east, in Revelation, the army of 200 million, the rise of the revived Roman empire which Daniel saw. I see the rise of the United Nations, the world government so obviously seen by Daniel and the book of Revelation. I see the apostates...I see all these features indicating that soon Jesus must come to judge the nations.

And so Jesus must return then because God's program for the church demands it, His program for the nations demands it. Sixth on our list of nine, the program for Israel demands it. And we'll take this one and stop.

This is tied in with the former point very closely. Look at Romans 11, 11:25. Romans 11:25 says, "For I would not brethren that ye should be ignorant of this mystery. Lest you should be wise in your own conceits." Now watch, "Blindness in part is happen to Israel." You know that Israel is blind today? "Until the fullness of the Gentiles become in." Now watch, "Israel is blind until the fullness of the Gentiles become in and then all Israel shall be saved. As it is written there shall come out of Zion and deliver and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins."

Has that happened? Has it happened? Of course not. What is the fullness of the Gentiles in verse 25, that's the church. That just means the fullness of the body that God is taking out of the Gentiles. "When the church is done," watch, "and the fullness of the Gentiles is complete, the church is removed then all Israel shall be," what, "saved."

The church is taken out and then God deals with Israel and they're saved in that seven year Tribulation aren't they? Now this is God's promise to Israel. The fullness of the Gentiles refers to the church age. It began at Pentecost, it ends at the rapture. As soon as the rapture occurs, the blindness is taken away from Israel.

Zechariah says, "they'll look on him whom they have pierced, mourneth for His only Son." Israel's going to be saved. But you see Israel can't be saved until Jesus comes for the church. Do you see? He must come. The program of Israel demands it. People always say to me, John, does that mean that every single Jew in the world, at that time, alive is going to be saved? No, not every single one.

Look at Ezekiel 20, verse 33, "As I love saith the Lord, God surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, with fury poured out while I rule over you, over Israel. I'll bring you out from the people and gather you out of the countries in which you're scattered with a mighty hand of an outstretched arm and with fury poured out, I'll bring you into the wilderness of the peoples and there will I enter into judgment with you face to face."

He's going to gather them in the tribulation, but He's going to be for judgment. And I'll cause you to pass verse 37, "under the rod, and I'll bring you into the bond of the covenant, but" verse 38, "I will purge out from among you the rebels and them that transgress against me." Let me stop right there. No, not all the Jews are going to be saved, but the great nation is going to be freed from persecution.

When it says "So all Israel shall be saved," it implies that all the persecution will stop. It also means that as a nation they will be saved, but there will be some rebels who will be purged out according to Ezekiel 20.

This is the hope of every Jew my friend. You know that after He purges out the rebels it says in Ezekiel 35, and all through that whole passage, He sets up His kingdom. Every Jew waits for that. The return of Jesus is essential. It ends the church age. It deals with the judgment of the nations and it allows Him to set up the kingdom for Israel. He must return. The fullness of the Gentiles ends and then He comes and Israel is saved, delivered.

And so we see that the return of Jesus is essential in every way to God's program. The climax and fulfillment of His church depend on it. The climax and fulfillment of the nations depend on it. The climax and fulfillment of Israel depends on it. So Jesus is coming. God's person demands it. God's program demands it.

Beloved, I believe He's coming soon. All I have to do is look at Israel. God has gathered them into the land, planted them there, and Ezekiel said when you see that happen, the next thing is Israel's salvation. And that can't happen until Jesus takes the church out and comes again to set up His kingdom. Jesus is coming. I trust you're ready.

Let's pray. Father, we're thankful tonight that promise is clear, that Jesus is coming. Our Lord, we do praise you that we do not need to wonder about this, but that everything cries out Jesus is coming. Father may nobody leave this place tonight who isn't ready for His return. And Lord as we close our service tonight we pray that you'll speak to the hearts of those who have not yet committed their lives to Jesus Christ. Cause them to know that if He came tonight they would be left to suffer the horrors of the tribulation time. Draw them to the Son. They might put their faith in Him and go when He comes. We thank you that Jesus is coming that He's coming for us. We thank you that very nature of the Trinity demands it and the very program of God for the church, for the nations, and for Israel demands that Jesus return to take His church, to judge the nations and to redeem His people Israel and reign as their king. We pray in His blessed name. Amen.

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