

THE COMING AGAIN

— OF —

OUR LORD

"I will come again" John 14:3.

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The "Coming Again" of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"I WILL COME AGAIN"—John 14-3.

That the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, has once visited this earth in human form, that he sojourned here for at least the space of 33 years, that he was crucified, died and buried, that he rose again from the dead on the third day and that he ascended into heaven, are cardinal articles in the belief of all calling themselves Christians. Such persons never weary of pointing to the literal and exact fulfillment of prophecy relating to these events, even when they involve apparent contradictions and even impossibilities. Yet we venture the assertion that none of these predictions are one-half so explicit or exact, neither are they one-half so numerous, as are those regarding His second coming. Yet there is a constant effort on the part of preachers and others to minimize and weaken the force of these prophecies. The subject is hardly ever alluded to in the preaching of today, and when it is, the language of Scripture is "wrested" entirely from its true and apparent meaning. Take as an example the words of our Lord Himself, "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. * * * Therefore

be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh," Matt. 24:42-44. There is not in the text itself, nor in the context, the slightest reference to death, but to an event known as the "coming" of your Lord or of the Son of Man. There is no ambiguity in the language itself, which is clear and explicit. The whole trend of the discourse forbids the idea of death, inasmuch as active service on the part of the servant is assumed *after* the coming. There is nothing whatever in the whole discourse to suggest the idea of death, and yet these words of our Lord are invariably applied to the death of the believer. Let us examine them with that meaning and see how they will bear us out. The meaning then is, "For in such an hour as ye *think not* ye shall die." Now, is this true as a matter of fact? Most certainly not. Except in cases of sudden death by accident or otherwise, death is anticipated. In the great majority of cases death is *looked for*, often for months; how then can it be true that "In such an hour as ye think not ye shall die"? But if we understand the coming of our Lord to mean death in the case of the believer, we must also so apply it in the case of the unbeliever, for the same language is used in the case of the unfaithful as in the case of the faithful servant, for "The Lord of that servant (i. e., the evil servant) *shall come* in a day when he *looketh not* for Him and in an hour that he is not aware of." The language in each case is identical,

and if we apply it to the death of the believer we must also apply it to the death of the unbeliever. There is no escape from this conclusion. Many other instances of similar perversions of Scripture might be given, but let the foregoing suffice.

It is hard to find an adequate reason for the hostility manifested towards a doctrine which finds such ample support in the Word of God. An excuse may be found in the mistakes and error into which some of the advocates of this doctrine have fallen, but surely it would be better to correct these mistakes than to seek to discredit the plain teachings of Scripture as to the fact itself.

There is no fact taught in the Scriptures to which there is more abundant testimony. Prophet, Evangelist and Apostle all add their testimony to that of our Lord Himself that He will come again.

It has been found by actual count that there are in the Old Testament 345 verses which teach the second coming of our Lord, and in the New there are 385, or one verse in 23, which sets forth the same truth. Surely a doctrine which is so abundantly fortified by the Word of God is not to be lightly set aside because some have adopted wrong views concerning it, or even because those who hold it differ amongst themselves as to some of the details. We do not act thus with other doctrines. There is scarcely a doctrine contained

in the Scriptures but men have differed as to its true intent and meaning, but they have not on that account ceased to teach their own views as to its meaning. On the contrary, they have been all the more earnest in doing so. It does not seem necessary to devote much time or space in the effort to prove what is so generally admitted, and indeed which cannot be denied, by any one who has any regard for the teaching of the Bible; rather would the writer seek to set forth what he conceives to be the Scriptural order and the practical bearing of the great event. And for the purpose of the former, i. e., the order, he would cite a few Scriptures under the following heads, viz :

- I. WHO IS TO COME.
- II. WHY HE IS TO COME.
- III. HOW HE IS TO COME, and
- IV. WHEN HE IS TO COME.

First—Who is to come. There need be no difference of opinion in regard to the true answer to this question. It is the Lord *Himself*, 1 Thess. 4, 16. It is not death. On the contrary, He comes to destroy death, Rev. 21, 4; and to bring life and immortality to light, 1 Tim. 1, 10. He is the Prince of Life, Acts 3, 15; while it is the Devil who has the power of death, Heb. 2, 14. He is not only the Prince of Life, but He is life itself, John 1, 4 and 11, 25. His coming is not death but life, 1 Cor. 15, 22-23. A common express-

ion used to describe death is, "He has sent His messenger Death." Death is not Christ's messenger, it is His enemy, 1 Cor. 15, 25-26. Death is always associated with Satan, life with our Lord. The disciples did not understand His "coming again" to mean death, John 21, 22-23. They had a better appreciation of His teaching and understood it to mean life. "Then went out that saying abroad among the brethren, that that Disciple should *not* die; yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die, but, If I will that he tarry *till I come*," which they understood as being equivalent to "He shall not die." His coming does not mean the destruction of Jerusalem, for that event is long past, while believers are enjoined to watch for His coming "until He comes." Neither does it mean the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, for believers are represented as *waiting for* His coming after that event, 1 Cor. 1, 7; 1 Thess. 1, 10. None of these events will fit the language in which the coming of our Lord is set forth. Blessed be His name, the language is plain and un mistakeable. It is "*This same Jesus*," Acts 1, 11. It is the *Lord Himself*, 1 Thess. 4, 13. It is the Son of Man, Matt. 25, 13.

Second.—Why He is to come. He comes to raise the sleeping (dead) saints, 1 Cor. 15, 23-52; John 5, 28-29; 1 Thess. 4, 16; and to change the living, verse 17; Phil. 3, 21; 1 Cor. 15, 51-52, and to take them home to heaven, 1 Thess. 4, 17; John 14, 4; 2 Thess.

1, 7. He comes (a) to reward his servants, 2 Tim. 4, 7-8; 1 Peter 5, 4, Rev. 22, 1-2; 1 Cor. 3, 8-13-14; Rom. 2, 6-7-10; Matt. 10, 42, and 25, 14; Col. 2, 18, and Luke 19, 12, and 2 Cor. 5, 9-10; Rom. 14, 10; and (b) to punish His enemies, Rom. 2, 5-8-9; 2 Thess. 1, 7-8-9; Luke 19, 27; Rev. 19, 15; Isaiah 63, 3-4; and (c) to judge the nations, Matt. 25; Isaiah 34, 1 to 8. He comes to remove the curse, Rom. 8, 21-28; Rev. 23, 3; Isaiah 11, 1-9 and 65, 25; and finally He comes to reign as King of the Jews, Luke 1, 38, and Acts 1, 6-7. I would call special attention to the latter Scripture. In every exposition of it to which I have listened or read, it has been assumed that the disciples, in asking the question, displayed gross ignorance (and their supposed low and carnal views have been severely reproved) in supposing that the Lord would establish a real Kingdom on the earth; because they failed to perceive that it was a Spiritual Kingdom which He was to establish. But there is nothing either in the preceding circumstances or in our Lord's answer to give any countenance to any such belief. They had often heard Him speak of the Kingdom He came to establish. He had even promised that they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, Matt. 19, 28; and the subject of their previous conversation had been the "Kingdom of God." What more natural then than that they should ask, "Lord, wilt Thou, *at this time*, restore again the Kingdom to Israel?"

The point of the question lies in the three words, "at this time." It is evidently assumed by all, and is indeed tacitly admitted by our Lord, that He would "restore the Kingdom." Their mistake lay, as we can see by our Lord's answer, in seeking to know the times and seasons, which the Father has put in His own power, and the fact that He did not correct their supposed mistake regarding the character of the Kingdom, is sufficient proof that they had made no mistake. How natural and appropriate it would have been for Him to say, as He said on a former occasion to the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures," Matt. 22, 29. We cannot conceive it possible that He would leave them to labor under so serious a mistake, when it would have been so easy to set them right.

When people venture thus to criticise the Disciples of our Lord for their supposed mistakes, they only display their own ignorance.

Third.—How is He to Come? When He comes *for* His saints He will not come to the earth, but the saints shall meet Him in the air, 1 Thess. 4, 17; but when He comes *with* His saints He will come to the earth and His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, Zechariah 14, 4; Jude 14, 15. He will come unexpectedly, Matt. 24, 42 and 25, 13; Mark 13, 33 37. He shall come in the clouds, with

power and great glory, Mark 13, 26; Rev. 1, 7; Matt. 24, 30; quickly, Rev. 22, 12; James 5, 8; Heb. 10, 37.

Fourth.—When He is to come. In seeking to answer this question, the objection will be at once raised, did not our Lord say, “Of the day and hour knoweth no man”? The writer is not forgetful of this saying of our Lord, nor yet that He told His Disciples, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power,” Acts 1, 7; but at the same time he would recall the fact that in answer to the Disciples’ question, “What shall be the *sign* of Thy coming?” He saw fit to give very minute and varied account of the signs which should precede that event. It should also be borne in mind that He very sharply reproveth the Pharisees and Sadducees for their inability to “discern” the signs of His first coming. “O ye hypocrites,” said He, “ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” If He was displeased with His own people, the Jews, for failing to recognize in Him the Messiah foretold by their own prophets, He will hardly look with complacency upon the refusal of Christians to even consider the signs of His second coming, which were given by Himself and His Apostles, and which are much more definite and numerous than are those relating to His first coming. There is a very essential difference betwixt fixing a date for our Lord’s coming, and in observing the signs which herald that

event. The special object which He appears to have had in view in revealing the fact of His coming again into this world, was to induce *watchfulness* on the part of His followers. In fact He founds His warning to watchfulness on the fact that "Of that day and hour knoweth no man." "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye *know not* when the time is * * watch ye therefore * * lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping; and what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch," Mark 13, 32-37. It must never be forgotten that "watching" is the duty enjoined upon Christ's followers. Now, were we able to fix upon the day and hour, or even the year, that object would be defeated, for it is not possible to be in momentary expectation of an event when we know the exact time for its fulfillment. But the habit of observing the signs of His coming would have exactly the opposite effect and would tend to induce greater watchfulness, and this is where the mistake is made by people who sneer at those who have lived in constant expectation of His coming, and died without seeing its accomplishment. They are supposed by such to have, in some unexplained way, wasted their lives, yet they have lived in constant obedience to the command quoted above, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch," while the attitude of the professing church of today is that of the unfaithful servant, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and in too many cases even that of the

scoffer, "Where is the promise (or sign) of His coming?"

The fixing of dates is always to be deprecated as being not only contrary to Scripture, but also as tending to defeat the object our Lord had in view in revealing the truth of His coming again, but the observing of signs is to be commended as tending to greater watchfulness. But if the fixing of dates for our Lord's coming is to be discouraged, so is also the fixing of a date *before which* He cannot come. Not long since the writer listened to a sermon on Matt. 24 : 36, in which the preacher condemned the fixing of dates, but he himself declared that our Lord could not possibly come for at least 100 years, and in conclusion he *comforted* his hearers with the assurance that Christ would not come during the lifetime of any of them, thus nullifying as much as he could the teaching, nay the command, of our Lord to "Watch."

I do not propose to point out or to discuss any of the signs of our Lord's coming as given in Holy Scripture; they are so numerous and so plain as to render it needless, indeed only those who wilfully shut their eyes and ears can fail to be impressed by them. I would only point to the fact that as we draw near to the close of both the Old and New Testaments these warnings increase both in number and solemnity; it almost looks as if the sacred writers, as they drew

near to the conclusion of their message, became more and more impressed with the need of warning. Take the last chapters of Malachi and Revelation, and who can fail to see that some awful event was impending. But if the Scriptures forbid the fixing of a date in years for our Lord's coming, I think they afford data by which we can fix it in its relation to other events, that is, if we cannot fix it absolutely we may relatively, to other events; indeed that is what the giving of signs was intended for. But there is one passage of Scripture which I venture to believe throws considerable light on the question of "When is He to come?" It is found in the 15th chapter of Acts, and forms a part of the address delivered by James at the Council at Jerusalem. "James answered, saying, Men and brethren, harken unto to me. Simeon hath declared (referring to Peter's account of the conversion of Cornelius) how God did at the first visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name; and to this agree the words of the Prophets, as it is written, (Amos 9, 11) 'After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up, that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.'" Now, let us examine these words closely, "After this." After what? After God had accomplished his purpose of "taking out of the

Gentiles a people for His name." "After this *I will return.*" Who will return? The Lord, who doeth all these things. Here we have a most explicit statement that after a certain event takes place the Lord will return, that event being the calling out of the Gentiles of a people for His name, or in other words, when the number of the elect, the Body of Christ, is complete, then will God remember His ancient people, the Jews, and begin again to deal with them in mercy. "After this I will return." What for? "And will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up." There can, I think, be no doubt that the tabernacle of David refers to the temple, and it is worthy of notice that James should quote this prophecy as referring to something yet future, although the temple was yet standing and there was nothing to indicate the probability of its ruin, unless, indeed, he recalled the prophecy of our Lord, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down," Matt. 24, 2. The destruction of the temple would, of course, imply also the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, and its rebuilding would, in like manner, imply their restoration to their own land, and hence we see in this prophecy a foreshadowing of the same events as are foretold in our Lord's words, "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles *'until'* the times of the Gentiles

be fulfilled," Luke 21, 24. Here now is a prophecy by one who cannot lie, which brings us right down to our own times. Is Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles now? The answer must be in the affirmative. Will it always continue trodden down? The answer to this must be in the negative. The word "until" shows that there will come a time when it shall cease, and then what will take place? "I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down * * * saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." Well might the Apostle add, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."

The same truths are set forth in that marvelous apostrophe of the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles, Rom. 11: 13, "For I speak to you, Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles," where he says, verse 25, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness, in part, is happened unto Israel, 'until' (the same word) the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," or to quote the language of James, "All the Gentiles upon whom My name is called." This, I think, furnishes a sufficient answer to the question, "When will He come?" He will come when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have been brought in, and when the purpose of God con-

cerning Israel's rejection is accomplished, and when Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden down by the Gentiles.

It only remains now to consider some of the objections which are commonly made to the reception of this truth.

It is said to be impractical, and unfits and discourages for Christian work and service, and it is especially said to "cut the nerve of missionary effort." It is evident that that result was not anticipated by our Lord when He delivered the parables of the "pounds," Luke 19: 12, for the reward was in direct ratio to diligence and faithfulness displayed, and the condemnation was awarded to the wicked and slothful servant who had not improved his opportunities for service; neither does it appear in His answer to Peter's question, Luke 12: 41, "And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord *when He cometh* shall find so doing. Of a truth, I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath." On this point I cannot do better than quote the words of that faithful servant of God, Dr. James H. Brookes. He says, "There is not a doctrine or duty in the whole range of Christian teaching and experience that fails to be touched and

tinged with the light of the promised coming. Even the most casual reader of the Bible must see what a prominent place it has in the discourses of our Lord, and how its light shines from almost every page of the Epistles."

Take for example the uses of it in the inspired communications to the Thessalonians, the first the Apostle Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to send to his brethren.

First, it is linked with Conversion.—“Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come,” 1, 9-10. When a soul turns to God from the idols it has followed it is converted, and the very next thing these heathen converts were taught to do was to wait for God's Son from heaven. This cannot mean death, for death was not raised from the dead, nor is it called Jesus, nor does it deliver us from the wrath to come * * *

Second, Service.—“What is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His *coming*?” 2: 19. The word *coming*, whenever it refers to a person, always means a *personal* coming, as when the Apostle says, “I am glad at the *coming* of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus,” 1 Cor.

16: 17. "Nevertheless God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the *coming* of Titus," 2 Cor. 7: 6. It is the same word that tells of the time and manner of our resurrection, "Every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His *coming*," 1 Cor. 15: 23. The Apostle kept that coming before him as the stimulus to faithful service, knowing that he would meet those saved by his agency in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that they would be the crown of his rejoicing in the great day of "Our gathering together unto Him."

Third, Holiness.—"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," 3: 12-13; or as he says again, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ," 5: 23. There can be no mightier reason for complete separation from all the enticing and entangling things of sense and time, and for thorough consecration, inward and outward, to our Saviour, than the tremendous fact that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that

he hath done, whether it be good or bad," 2 Cor. 5: 10. * * *

Fourth, Comfort in bereavement.—“ I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that 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 that 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 * * * 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,” 4, 13-18. Where else can the heart find comfort when almost breaking beside the grave of our dead? You may say that the spirit is in heaven. O, yes, but the spirit is not all of the beloved one, for the body, too, is precious, and can be seen in beauty and glory only at the Coming of the Lord.

It is also charged that the receiving and holding of this truth makes men enthusiasts and fanatics. I do not know that I am very anxious to deny the truth of this statement. I would rather be inclined to pray

that this truth were more generally accepted, so that some measure of enthusiasm, or even fanaticism, might be infused into the cold and languid life of the professing Church, so that when they read the blessed promise, thrice repeated in the closing chapter of the Sacred Canon, "Behold, I come quickly," they might say with heart and voice, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Let me in closing quote the eloquent words of Dr. Nathaniel West. Speaking of the pre-millennial coming of Christ, he says: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but this truth shall not pass away. God's throne is not more firmly established. The almightiness and everlastingness of God's Word are here. Monumental brass, marble and adamant will wear away, corroded by the tooth of time. The solid masonry of men, the rocks on which man's mightiest architecture has reposed, will become as the shifting sands, and his proudest structures crumble into dust, but this "Truth" shall stand for ever.

"Abused, like every other doctrine of Scripture, associated with delusions it abhors, error now seeking to enjoy its fellowship and now to repel it, wounded in the house of its friends, rejected by those who know the least about it, studied relatively by the few and distorted by the many, victimized to creeds, councils and special hate, it still lives and will continue to live for ever.

"The present age hates it. The self-deluded admirers of human progress turn their backs upon it. Socialists deride it. World reformers make light of it. The political Zionist hisses at it. The Church treats it with indifference, and oftentimes with opposition. Many good men, from motives of policy, avoid it, unable to refute it. It is not popular with the optimism of a false theology and a blooming anti-Christianity. But in multitudes of hearts it finds a home, and is welcomed as nothing less than the imperishable truth of God."

Robert Johnson
with the writer's best-
wishes Sep 2nd 1903