

Articles and Sermons :: Christ Is Coming Again! by A.J. Gordon

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by A.J. Gordon

Christ's second personal coming is most distinctly revealed. We are not called to watch for a merely possible or remotely probable occurrence. Never are we admonished that we know not whether our Lord shall come, though we are admonished that we know not the hour of His coming.

On the contrary, the Scriptures are crowded with statements of the certainty, of the literalness, of the visibility, and of the personality of His return to the earth.

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thes. 4:16).

"I will come again," says Jesus (John 14:3).

And on the last page of Revelation we hear Him speaking: "I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.... Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:16, 20).

Still farther is the real and personal return of Christ enforced by the explicit descriptions of the event given in the Scriptures. It is not only the same Jesus—no substitute, no commissioned messenger, no typical event—but He "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). He went up visibly, from eager eyes that recognized Him as the veritable Lord, from outstretched hands that had handled Him as the Word of life, and as He was parted from them "a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9).

And so shall He return, visibly, personally, gloriously. "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him" (Rev. 1:7).

"Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). He shall come to save from the world those whom He is now saving in the world, to complete their redemption, to present them "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24), and to usher in the marriage of the Lamb. He shall come to right all wrong, to consummate all good, to remove the curse from our groaning earth, to wipe away all tears from off all faces, to silence pain and to swallow up death in victory.

No promise is more constantly repeated, as none is more sacred than our Lord's coming. If Christians shall cease to wait for their returning Lord, creation groaning and travailing together in pain will not. If those who He has redeemed with His precious blood do not rejoice with singing at every sign of His approach, then "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth" (Psa. 96:11-13).

You may believe in Christ coming in temporal judgment, coming in the crises of history, coming in the triumphs of Christianity, coming in death, but do you believe and confess "Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh"? Do you believe He is coming in that body of flesh and bones which He carried up into heaven? This was the confession of apostles and martyrs and reformers, and this is the creed that needs to be emphasized anew in an age so given to spiritualizing and attenuating the plain and literal facts of Scripture.

The Time of Christ's Second Coming Is Unrevealed

"Why should we watch for an event of whose date we are entirely ignorant?" is a question often asked. That is the ver-

y reason why, according to the Scripture, we should watch for it.

"Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35).

There is the same dogmatic uncertainty in regard to the time of Christ's second coming as there is dogmatic certainty in regard to the fact. The date is as truly an inspired secret as the event is an inspired revelation.

"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 of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36).

And it is because of this ignorance of the date of the Lord's appearing that we are so earnestly exhorted to watch. Or to reverse the statement, we may suppose that God withholds the revelation of this secret in order to train His Church in watchfulness and hope and vigilant expectation. What is known inspires confidence; what is unknown begets attentiveness.

If the date of Christ's return were as certain as the fact of it, the expectant watchfulness and carefulness, which He urged upon His disciples in view of the event, could hardly have been maintained. Had He told them, for example, that He would certainly come back, and that His coming would be exactly two thousand years from His ascension, how impossible it would have been for His Church to keep her lamp trimmed and burning in perpetual anticipation of His return, and her loins girded about in diligent occupying till He should come!

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments" (Rev. 16:15).

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning" (Luke 12:35). There is enough of certainty in this subject to feed the lamp of our faith; and enough of uncertainty to make us careful and solicitous, lest when the Bridegroom comes we be found among the foolish virgins, saying, "Our lamps are gone out!" (Matt. 25:8).

The chief point is that this hope have a living and abiding place in our affections and our thoughts. "Thought," says a Christian father, "is the sleepless lamp of the soul." It is a lamp, indeed, that burns with varying brightness—flaming up in moments of intense study and utterance, and dying down in sleep till there is only the pale glimmer that remains in dreams.

But it is a lamp that is never really quenched, for however profound the slumber, it only requires a word to wake us and to bring all our mental powers into instant activity. Thus must it be with the holy lamp of watchfulness—always trimmed and burning, but not of necessity shining always in full strength.

That is to say, we need not be every moment thinking of Christ's return, talking of it and preaching it. There should be ever in our hearts the calm certainty and the sober hope that keep us ready for this event at any moment. But this hope should rather minister to us than be ministered to by us. Instead of perpetually dwelling on it and reiterating it, we should be lighted by it in our busy toil of gathering the guests for the marriage-feast and doing the work which our absent Lord has committed to us. Ready always to give to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in us, we should yet show the value of our lamp by the holy service into which it guides our feet, and the diligent piety which it makes visible in our lives.

Incentive to Service and Consecration

God has made this hope of Christ's return the supreme incentive to service and consecration.

Are we exhorted to patience? This is the motive. "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:7).

Would we be inspired to diligence, we hear the Master saying to us, "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Would we discover the secret of purity, we find it written that "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Are we encouraged to endure trial? This is the motive, that we "may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the a

appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

Are we exhorted to abide in constant communion with Christ? It is "that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

And thus it is written in scores of texts. All our service and worship and comfort are keyed to this divine hope. The command is, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13); to observe the Lord's Supper "till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26); "Hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25); and "Judge nothing... until the Lord come" (1 Cor. 4:5).

Up, therefore, Christian! Trim your lamp. Let its beams shine forth to meet and mingle with the first advancing rays of the bright and morning star. And let its light meantime show you the way to every path of self-denial, to every work of faithful service and testimony, and to every avenue of holiness and purity of life.

Thus, with girded loins, with busy hands, with uplifted eyes and with radiant faces, may you be ready to meet your descending Lord, and to exult in His glorious appearing, saying,

"Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. 25:9).

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come" (Rev. 22:17).