

SERMON

The Second Coming

Tonight as Sue has said we are beginning a new series. It is entitled Heaven and Hell, but is looking at broader than that. We are looking into the last things, what theologian called eschatology. What is eschatology? A dictionary definition would look like:

- 1. The branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind.**
- 2. A belief or a doctrine concerning the ultimate or final things, such as death, the destiny of humanity, the Second Coming, or the Last Judgment.**

[Greek eskhatos, last.]

This deals with what is happening when the endtimes come. Let us state one thing right from the beginning: no-one knows when it is going to happen. Jesus put it like this:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. "No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'”” (Mark 13:31-37 NIV)

But there have been many people who have predicted the end of the world. There were many who saw it as the year 2000, the change of the millennium, but it did not happen. There are those who indulged in numerology as it is called and study passages in the Bible, mainly from Daniel and Revelation as to when the end will come. However wrong things are forecast, but no apology is given. For the Jehovah's Witnesses Jesus returned, an event in the last days, in 1914, and the last time was in 1970. Both times Jesus failed to appear, but stories were put around that Jesus changed his place in heaven in readiness for his return.

No-one, not even Jesus whilst he was on earth knew when the entimes were to happen, when as he said” **Heaven and earth will pass away”** (Mark 13:31). So do not get drawn in by people who will tell you that it is in this year, or at this time. God knows and he ain't telling anyone!

The other problem with looking at the endtimes, the last things, looking at eschatology, can be because of similar people to two men called Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Anyone know who they are? They are the authors of the *Left Behind* series of novels, and there is now a film as well now. I must admit that I have only read part of the first novel, but I read enough to realise that Tim and Jerry were making assumptions, were adding bits on, were using their imagination. This is what writers of novels do. However their readers may not be so discerning and so instead of finding their theology from the Bible about what is going to happen at the end, they read the *Left Behind* series as gospel, as the truth, as theological writing.

Personally I put this in a similar camp to Frank Peretti and his books. Frank wrote about angels and demons and in the first two books mentioned there, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*, one had to sort out fact from fiction.

Beware of numerologists who tell you when it is going to happen and take care of where one's theology is gained from – is it the Bible or from novels concerning Biblical events?

Eschatology involves the endtimes, the last things, what is happening at the end of time. And one of the events that will happen at the end of time is the Second Coming.

Who can tell me where the Second Coming is in the Bible? It is really a trick question, because the phrase 'Second Coming' is not a Biblical phrase even though the Bible deals with the concept over three hundred times. As we read in John 14, Jesus said

“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.” (John 14:3 NIV)

I will come back, I will return. This is called by learned theologians, the *Parousia*. *Parousia* is a Greek word that refers to the second coming, or the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of this age to set up His kingdom, judge His enemies, and reward the faithful.

The word literally means, “a being alongside,” hence “appearance” or “presence.” We see the word used by Paul when he wrote

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when *he comes*, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-26 NIV)

The verb there *he comes* is *parousia*.

So the return of Jesus is predicted by Jesus and also when Jesus went into heaven we read in Acts 1.

“So when they met together, the Apostles asked Jesus, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "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 1:6-11 NIV)

Again notice the secrecy of the date when it will occur, but it will happen and even this passage gives us some clues as to what is going to happen when it does.

- **Personal** – It will be a bodily appearance.

“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.” (John 14:3 NIV)

This may seem obvious, but there have been those who have said that the Second Coming would be:

- The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.
- Others regard it as the coming of Christ into the heart at conversion – when you become a Christian.
- Another view taken by some is that the second coming is Christ’s coming for the believer at the time of death.

No, Jesus will return again in bodily form – it is personal. As Paul wrote

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16 NIV)

- **Public** – If, as we have just read, Jesus will be coming with a **loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God**, then we are talking about a pretty public affair. This is no quiet coming in some backwater as was the first coming of Jesus when he was born in a stable in a small town, in a small nation and no-one really believed that he had come. This time it will be a loud affair. Is this as some say due to it will be covered on international TV? Not so, in reality, because of something that will see later as another mark of the return.
- **Glorious** – the first coming of Jesus was as the hymn by Stuart Townend says

**FROM THE SQUALOR OF A BORROWED STABLE,
By the Spirit and a virgin's faith;
To the anguish and the shame of scandal
Came the Saviour of the human race!**

But now with all the trumpets and loud noise it will be a glorious affair. What a contrast to the first coming of Jesus. At the first coming the angels did sing to the shepherds in the fields but this time Jesus will be

- **Accompanied by Angels** – they will be with him at his side. When with the disciples Jesus predicted his own death on several occasions and on one occasion he followed it up by calling all the disciples and crowd to him and said to them

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:34-38 NIV)

Jesus will come in his Father's glory and with the holy angels – that makes it all the more public, all the more glorious – what a day that will be!

- **Sudden & Unexpected** – but why will the TV coverage, I think be poor? Because it is sudden, unless of course it is like another 9-11. I can remember that day taking a break from work and whilst making a cup of coffee I switched on the television to be greeted with the footage of the plane going into the twin towers. If someone happens to be around when Jesus returns with a camcorder, then it has a chance of appearing on national and international television.

The return of Christ is likened though to a thief in the night. You do not expect one and so when one appears it is sudden and unexpected.

So what has all this to do with us, today? There are more things to be said about the second coming of Jesus, and book after book have been written on it. Some I have mentioned, some I have read. Back in the seventies there was the *Late Great Planet Earth* by *Hal Lindsey*. Again though beware as it is written from his perspective on things. We will need to return to this subject and as we go through the series of Heaven and Hell, we will do that.

So what are we to do now with the knowledge we have now? We know that the second coming should be a matter of constant expectancy for us. We need to live our lives as if it is going to happen shortly by:

- Keeping accounts short with God – confessing our sins to him as they happen
- Telling others about him to try to get as many people into the kingdom as possible

We know that as Jesus came the first time, in the “fullness of time” so will the Second Coming be. Our task is not to try to determine the time of the Second Coming. Our task lies in the book of Acts, in a passage we have already read

“So when they met together, the Apostles asked Jesus, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "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 1:6-11 NIV)

Our task is to share the gospel message diligently until He returns. And as the time gets shorter, so that task gets ever more urgent.

PRAYER