

## **The Second Coming of Jesus – Signs of His Return**

The single most important event in human history until now has been the coming of Jesus the Messiah, who entered time and space to save us from our sins. By taking on human form (theologians call this “incarnation”), visiting our planet and dying on the cross, he opened up the perfect way of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Were it not for these actions we would all be separated from God for eternity.

The other major event will, of course, be the Second Coming of Jesus. The Bible repeatedly warns us to be ready for that day.

### *From Saviour to Judge*

The first time Jesus came into the world, his mission was to be our Saviour. Next time he will come as Judge. Same person, different purpose. The first time, most people missed him. Only a minority realised who he was. Next time, every eye will see him. Every knee on earth will bow before him. Every crown and government will be surrendered to him. He will rule over the nations with judgement and justice. The Bible says that he will judge the world according to God’s righteous standards (Acts 17:31). Every sin committed in secret will be brought out into the light (Luke 12:2). Jesus said that even idle words that people speak will be revealed (Matthew 12:36).

As Christians, we should look forward to the return of Jesus with great anticipation, because our sins have already been taken away and we have peace with God through him. The Bible says we will all give an account of our lives (Romans 14:9-13), but the final judgement for Christians will be for rewards, based on how we lived and what we have done for Christ. It will not be for sin – Jesus has already taken our sins and judgement on the cross. There is no condemnation to those who believe in him (Romans 8:1). In the context of eternity, the Second Coming should give us cause for as much joy as the first Christmas morning. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says that we (Christians) wait for God’s Son to come from Heaven. Nothing else is as important (or at least should be).

### *Signs of the times*

I find that people are fascinated with the future. My first job was in the Weather Bureau, where I watched observers and meteorologists working together to interpret the signs in the atmosphere, track climate change, study satellite photos and tell the community what kind of weather to expect. This was important during cyclone seasons, droughts and when planning special outdoor events. Often they got it wrong, with disastrous consequences. But they were only human.

If only we could read the signs and predict the future with accuracy. Most of our radio stations and pulp magazines feature horoscopes and tarot readings.

Millions of Australians regularly read the stars. We want to know what is going to happen and the extent to which we can change the future to meet our needs and desires. David Suzuki has written a book entitled "Re-inventing the Future".

Jesus had a lot to say about what the world would be like prior to his return. While there are elements of prophecy that are subject to faulty interpretation, conjecture and out-of-context flights of fancy, it is worthwhile briefly recounting what he said (especially in Matthew Chapter 24), and what the other inspired writers of the New Testament had to add concerning political, social and economic conditions that will prevail as we approach that Great Day. What are the signs of the end? What are the indicators we should be identifying and watching, so that we will not be alarmed about the direction of life in the Human Village, but see the hand and purpose of God at work to bring about the fulfilment of His Plan.

Politically, Jesus said there would be wars and rumours of wars. The people of his day lived in a part of the world continually beset by conflict. Wars and rumours of wars were common. Jesus was saying that the world will become even more dangerous. The governments of the world already spend more on arms than any other cause. The Bible talks about nations rising against nations, communities against communities, with world leaders concentrating power in relatively few hands. Increasing levels in military activity will eventually lead to people demanding peace at any price. Leaders who guarantee peace will be rewarded with the levers of control. When peace is proclaimed and human conflict appears to be at an end, destruction will come and there will be no escape (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Pacifism, militarism, peace movements, legislators, educators, scientists and international organisations will all fail in the end. The only event that will cause a cessation in human tragedies will be the coming of Christ. He will step in and establish his government.

Jesus and the Prophets also said there would be an increase in earthquakes, deadly diseases and famines, an escalation in human knowledge, research, information traffic, world travel, and great scientific advances. As knowledge increases, the wisdom to know what to do with it will be high jacked by anti-Christian agendas. There will be signs in the heavens, probably a mixture of man-made and cosmic events never before seen or understood. Jean Paul Satre wrote a book called "No Exit". He believed there was no way out. The Bible tells us not to be worried, but to look for the return of the Saviour. He is the ultimate Exit; out of the world, into God's presence.

Socially, the end of this stage of human history will see God virtually displaced in favour of man as God – but only for a period. The Bible says people's hearts will become harder than ever; they will love themselves and their possessions more than God and set themselves up in his place. Rebellion against God and revulsion against His people will become universal. Immorality, the collapse of the family, mental break-down, the cult of greed and every kind of sexual perversion and blasphemy against Christ will become the norm. Atheism will become the new religion. The State will increasingly regulate what we are able to say and think. Technology will be used to monitor those whose world views do

not fit; that includes evangelical Christians. Legislators in the West will implement anti-Christian programs designed to gut and disempower the proclamation of the Gospel.

There have been periods like this in past human history but nothing cataclysmic has occurred. This causes some to scoff and ridicule. Peter says that, more and more, people will decry the promise of Jesus' return. (2 Peter 2:3, 4). Why should we be concerned? I recently read a detailed account of the Black Death that swept across Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Between a quarter and a half of Europe's population perished. Many people thought it was the end of the world. Historians believe that in the history of man there have been less than 100 years without a major conflict somewhere. We've seen the worst wars in human history in the past hundred years, but we survived. So, what's different?

The time of which Jesus spoke will be characterised by more widespread, violent, barbaric, scientific clever and devastating wars, new virulent diseases and widespread human suffering. Don't let the unbelief of some make you sceptical. The signs Jesus mentioned are like pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle. When the puzzle is complete, the end will finally come. I don't know when this will occur. Only God knows. We need to be ready.

#### *How should we live?*

If we believe the words of Jesus, we should live as though this life is only a dress rehearsal for the one to come. Where we are a thousand years from today will depend on the decisions that we make about Jesus now. The Bible says that after death will come judgement (Hebrews 9:27). After judgement, eternity.

As believers we should look forward with anticipation to the return of Jesus (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13). We should seek and carry out the will of God, so that we will be pleased when he comes, not caught out doing something else (1 John 2:28). When he comes again we will be like Him (1 John 2:2, 3). We should remind ourselves that He will come, and adjust our lifestyles accordingly. He will not delay any longer than God's perfect timetable (Hebrews 10:36, 37). We should be patient and keep our priorities in line with His ways (James 5:8). Peter tells us that this is the hope that makes us different from unbelievers (1 Peter 3:15).

As Christians we don't need to panic or feel insecure about the future of the world. The Bible says that our reaction should be to "look up" because our redemption is closer than ever. Man was created to "look up" (*anthropos*), to God, not to become mired in pessimism and despair. Life without God is the death of hope and beginning of despair. Relationship with God is the only thing that gives us hope for the future. Our mission is to share this message with the world around us.

The Second Coming of Jesus is not a myth perpetuated by raving fanatics, hot-headed dusty prophets who spent too long in the sun and imagined things that were so startling they became apocalyptic. The author is the Holy Spirit, who

moved them to predict both his first coming and return. People talk about doom and destruction. But God knows everything: the past, the present and the future - your future. Our trust is in Jesus who died on the cross so that we could be forgiven, who rose again in power to give us new life, who ascended to the right hand of God to represent us there, and will come for us on that day. We should be motivated to reach those who don't know him and face a certain future judgement. We should review how we live and the attitudes that we have regarding the future.

Every prophecy relating to the first coming, suffering and resurrection of Jesus came to pass. The Bible closes with the promise by Jesus that he will come again, as surely as night follows day. It may be in our lifetime. Maybe later. We simply don't know. Let's live as though we believe the stage is set.

When the last NASA space shuttle blasted off into space it was powered by more than four million kilos of thrust, just to escape the downward drag of the earth. The return of Christ will provide us with enough thrust to escape the gravity of the earth and take us into the eternal presence of God (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). Let's make sure we are ready, that there is nothing in our lives to tie us down.

Come Lord Jesus.