

Essential Truths I: Living With God

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Second Coming

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth is one of the most important subjects for the Christian to know. The writers of the New Testament discussed it more than 300 times, and the language used was almost always imperative. Even the act of sharing in the Lord's Supper together is a reminder of two things – the Lord's death and the Lord's return. In **1 Corinthians 11:26**, Jesus told his disciples:

“...whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*.”

The first thing we need to know about the second coming of Christ is that it is *certain*.

Read James 5:7-8

The *New Testament in Modern English*, by J. B. Phillips, renders this passage with these words:

“But be patient, my brothers, as you wait for the Lord to come. Look at the farmer quietly awaiting his precious harvest. See how he has to possess his soul in patience till the land has had the early and late rains. So must you be patient, resting your hearts on *the ultimate certainty*. The Lord's coming is very near.”

Here are three facts that you should know about the second coming of the Lord Jesus:

- ➔ Jesus spoke about his own return (**Matthew 24:30; John 14:2-3**)
- ➔ Angels foretold it (**Acts 1:10-11**)
- ➔ The early Christians encouraged one another with it (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Revelation 1:7**)

The Word

God

Origins

Jesus

The Cross

The Blood

Resurrection

Repentance

Faith

Grace

Water Baptism

Holy Spirit

Temptation

Fellowship

Generosity

Kingdom of God

Worship

Prayer

Eternity


 Second Coming

The Call

The Return of Jesus

Read Matthew 24

This discourse by Jesus is a direct answer three questions asked by the disciples in **verse 3**:

- When will this (the destruction of the Temple – **verse 2**) happen?
- What will be the sign of your coming?
- What will be the sign of the end of the age?

In this passage, and in the parallel passages in **Luke 21** and **Mark 13**, Jesus gives his disciples answers to these three questions and gives clear signs of his return. According to the Lord Jesus, his coming will be preceded by:

- Worldwide war, earthquakes and famines (**Mark 13:8**)
- False Christs and false prophets (**Matthew 24:23-24**)
- Ecological disasters (**Luke 21:25**)
- Signs in the sky (**Luke 21:25-26; Matthew 24:29-30**)
- The return of Jerusalem to Jewish hands (**Luke 21:24**)
- An abomination in the temple of God (**Matthew 24:15-16**)
- The Gospel preached to every nation (**Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10**)

In **Matthew 25**, Jesus goes on to give three parables that illustrate the nature of his return:

- The parable of the ten virgins (**25:1-13**)
- The parable of the talents (**25:14-30**)
- The parable of the sheep and the goats (**25:31-45**)

Notice that in the first two parables, Jesus is emphasizing two things:

- “Therefore keep watch, *because you do not know the day or the hour* [of my coming]” (**25:13**)
- “*After a long time* the master of those servants returned...” (**Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10**)

Jesus himself declared that his return would be like “a thief in the night,” a total surprise to the nations of the earth.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Knowing the Season

We know a lot of things about the return of Jesus. We know that it will be like the lightning (**Matthew 24:27; Luke 17:24**). We know that he will return in the same way that he left* (**Acts 1:10-11**), with great power and glory (**Luke 21:27**) and in

* Scripture indicates that Jesus will return exactly as he left, his feet touching down on the Mount of Olives (**Zechariah 14:3-4**), the point of his ascension (note **Luke 24:50-51**) (Bethany was a village on the Mount of Olives – **Luke 19:29**).

full view of all* (**Revelation 1:7**). But what we don't know is exactly *when* Jesus will return.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**, Paul explicitly states:

“No, brothers, *about times and dates we do not need to write to you*, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

Ever since the first century, Christians have had a fascination with times and dates, trying to pinpoint the exact day on the calendar when Christ will return. Paul refused to enter into this kind of speculation, instead telling the Thessalonians that they “know very well” that determining the exact date of Christ's return is impossible.

The Message phrases **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3** quite eloquently:

“I don't think, friends, that I need to deal with the question of when all this is going to happen. You know as well as I that the day of the Master's coming can't be posted on our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would.”

Predictions as to the exact time of Christ's return have come and gone. People have pored over the Scriptures and over Hebrew calendars, making complex calculations based on numerology and esoteric revelations, without realizing that this is all in fact for one simple reason: God has never intended for us to know the exact time.

Read Matthew 24:36-44

Notice the strength of Jesus' words and the constant repetition of the theme of the unknown time of his return:

- ☞ “*No one knows about that day or hour*, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (**Matthew 24:36**).
- ☞ “Therefore keep watch, because *you do not know on what day your Lord will come*” (**Matthew 24:42**).
- ☞ “So you also must be read, because *the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him*” (**Matthew 24:44**).
- ☞ “The master of that servant *will come on a day when he does not expect and at an hour he is not aware of*” (**Matthew 24:42**).
- ☞ “Therefore keep watch, because *you do not know the day or the hour*” (**Matthew 25:13**).

Jesus gives two examples of judgment that came unexpectedly “like a thief in the night” upon the objects of God's wrath:

* There is a major error that has been commonly perpetrated in the Church, which the record of Scripture speaks out strongly against. This error is that Jesus will return secretly to a select few before revealing himself to the world. According to Jesus, this will never be (note **Matthew 24:23-27**; **2 Thessalonians 2:1-2**).

- The generation of Noah (**Luke 17:26-27**)
- The generation of Lot (**Luke 17:28-29**)

Read Luke 17:30

Both of these examples illustrate the suddenness and total surprise of God's judgment. Yet they also illustrate something else. In each case, there was at least one person who was fully aware of what God was going to do:

- The flood did not surprise Noah like a thief in the night (**Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6:13-22**). It was the people of his generation, who "knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away" (**Matthew 24:39**).
- The destruction of Sodom did not surprise Abraham like a thief in the night. God revealed the timetable of his judgment to the one he had chosen (**Genesis 18:16-33**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

Right after telling the Thessalonian Christians that there was no need to write about "times and dates" and that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," Paul makes this bold declaration:

"But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief."

In **verse 2**, Paul describes the nature of God's pending judgment on the world. He says:

"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them *suddenly*, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

The operative word in this verse is "suddenly." The Lord's return will be totally unexpected by those who are not looking for his coming. But notice also the simile that Paul uses – "as labor pains on a pregnant woman." While it is true that labor pains do come on "suddenly," for anyone who is watching the signs of pregnancy, the actual time of those labor pains should not come as a complete surprise.

An alert person will take note the *signs* of the pregnancy. While any father or mother will tell you, it is next to impossible to determine the exact *day or hour* of that the labor pains will come, it is possible to determine the *season* of birth.

Read Matthew 16:2-3

Although Jesus was speaking of his first coming, the principle applies equally well to his second coming. As believers in Christ, we are called to know "the signs of the times." We cannot know the exact day or hour, but we are to know the season of his coming.

God has not intended for you to be surprised by his return. It is *possible* for the Lord's return to come to the Christian as a thief in the night if he or she is not alert

– if he or she is spiritually “asleep” (**1 Thessalonians 5:5-8**). But you will know the *season* of his return if you “walk in the light” (**1 John 1:7**) and if you “keep watch” (**Matthew 25:13**).

Read Luke 21:34-36

The Great Delusion

One of the signs of the impending return of the Lord Jesus is the increase of wickedness upon the earth (**Matthew 24:12**). Behind this increase in wickedness is what Paul calls “the secret power of lawlessness” (NIV) and “the mystery of lawlessness” (NKJV).

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12

According to Paul, two things must happen before the return of Christ:

- The rebellion occurs
- The man of lawlessness is revealed

This “man of lawlessness” is also called “the lawless one” (**verse 8-9**), and is rendered by the *New King James Version* as “the man of sin” and “the son of perdition.”

Before the return of Christ, Scripture clearly indicates the rise of a man who leads mankind in direct rebellion against God. Today, he is often called “the Antichrist” – meaning that “one who opposes Christ.”

Read 1 John 2:18-22

The *Amplified Bible* renders **2 Thessalonians 2:7** in this way:

“For the mystery of lawlessness – that hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority – is already at work in the world, [but it is] restrained only until he who restrains is taken out of the way.”

End of the Age

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ will mark the end of this “present age” and the commencement of a totally new age (**1 Timothy 6:19**). At the second coming, a number of dramatic events will take place.

- The mystery of the ages will be completed (**Revelation 10:6-7; Romans 16:25-26**).
- The Bride of Christ will be revealed to the world (**Revelation 19:7; 21:2-11; Ephesians 5:25-27**).
- We will enter our full glory (**Philippians 3:20-21; Romans 8:19-21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-53**).
- The dead in Christ will be raised (**2 Corinthians 4:14; John 6:40; 11:25**).
- Living believers will be caught up into the air with the Lord (**Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:17**).
- Creation will be set free (**Romans 8:19-22; Isaiah 35:1-7**).
- Every enemy will be destroyed (**1 Corinthians 15:24-25; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:8**).
- Satan will be bound (**Revelation 20:1-3,7-10**).
- Judgment will be meted out (**2 Thessalonians 1:6-9**).
- God’s kingdom will come fully to the earth (**Daniel 2:44; Revelation 19:15-16**).

Paul's "mystery of lawlessness" can be equated with John's "spirit of antichrist" (**1 John 4:3**). Thus this lawlessness is not just a natural lawlessness, but a spiritual lawlessness directed against God himself. The rebellion is a rebellion against God's kingdom as the divinely constituted authority. Paul describe the essence of this rebellion as:

"[The lawless one] will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."

2 Thessalonians 2:8 reveals the ultimate doom of this man of lawlessness and the rebellion he leads against God:

"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming."

The Purpose of God

Read Acts 3:20-21

Peter says that the Lord's return is held back – that Jesus must "remain in heaven" – "until the time comes for the Lord to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

It is important for us to understand that the return of Christ cannot be divorced from the purpose of God. The two are inextricably linked.

God's purpose includes many things, but two primary ones have a strong bearing on the return of Christ:

- The Gospel will be preached to every tribe and nation (**Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10**)
- The glory of the Lord will be revealed in the whole earth (**Isaiah 40:5; Habakkuk 2:14**)

The Lord has planned to reveal his glory through his Church, and for this to happen, he must cleanse his Church from every impurity (see **Ephesians 5:25-27**). This cleansing is also closely linked to events that take place just before Christ's return – events such as turmoil and persecution (**Matthew 24:21**).

In the end times, there appear to be two opposites at work in the world: light and darkness, rebellion and harvest, sin and glory. In fact, it is the final clash of these two opposites that ushers in the return of the Lord.

Coming Soon

Read Hebrews 10:37

The Bible often emphasizes the soonness of the coming of Christ (**James 5:7-8**;

Revelation 3:11; 22:7,12). But what does it really mean when Jesus says, “I am coming soon”?

Read Luke 17:22

Jesus explicitly told his disciples that they would *not* see the day they longed for – the day of the return of their Lord. Peter later declared that Jesus “must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things” (**Acts 3:21**, NLT). We know from Scripture that Jesus will definitely return, and we also know that Jesus himself has said, “I am coming soon,” yet that coming has waited for almost 2000 years already. Just how does the Lord define “soon”?

Read 2 Peter 3:3-10

We may get impatient for the Lord to return, but God expresses great patience. In **1 Peter 3:20**, Peter says that “God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

In **2 Peter 3:9**, we discover the reason for God’s patience:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

And his patience is described graphically in **verse 8**, where Peter tells us that God views the passage of time very differently from us:

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day.”

Here we see two aspects of how God works:

- **His ability to wait** – A thousand years is like a day to the Lord. Think about it. 2000 years may have passed, but that is just like a couple of days to the Lord.
- **His ability to act quickly** – A day is like a thousand years to the Lord. When it comes time for the Lord to act, he will act swiftly and completely, and then “that day will close...unexpectedly like a trap” (**Luke 21:34**).

As long as the two aspects of God’s purpose – that the Gospel be preached to every tribe and nation, and that his glory be revealed in the earth through his Church – remains unfulfilled, God holds back on the coming of Christ.

Read 2 Peter 3:12

Now the Bible does clearly indicate that God has set a specific day for the return of Christ (**Acts 17:31**), yet it also indicates that we have the ability to “speed its coming” by cooperating with the purposes of God in and through our lives.

Alert and Ready

Read Luke 21:28

The reality of Christ's return should affect the way we live on earth now. We are called to live as people with our eyes fixed on the second coming.

Read 2 Peter 3:10-12

Peter asks the all-important question: In the light of the soon return of Christ, *what kind of people ought we to be?* And he gives us his answer:

“You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”

The truth of the return of Christ must change the way we view our lives. As Peter goes on to say in **2 Peter 3:13-14**:

“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, *since you are looking forward to this*, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

As with all things in the Lord, we cannot understand a truth in God's Word without responding to that truth. Every truth in the Bible evokes a response on our part. Revelation is followed by repentance, understanding by obedience.

Read 1 John 3:2-3

Perhaps no verse better summarizes the truth of the second coming of Christ, and our response to that truth, than **Revelation 22:20**:

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”