

The Supernatural Hope

by A.B. Simpson

The blessed hope is the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, which will bring a supernatural transformation to believers, the material world, and the providence of God.

Scripture: Daniel 7:27, Zechariah 14:9, Matthew 24:30, John 14:3, Romans 8:19-21, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 11:10, 2 Peter 3:12, Revelation 20:6

Topics: "Second Coming Of Christ", "Supernatural Hope"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the supernatural hope of Christ's return, urging believers to look forward to the glorious appearing of Jesus as a remedy against the skepticism of modern thought. He critiques the evolutionary mindset that dismisses divine intervention in history, asserting that both nature and scripture testify to a future transformation and resurrection. Simpson illustrates this hope through biblical figures like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, who exemplified faith in God's promises. He concludes that this hope not only inspires Christian living and service but also serves as a powerful message to the world, calling for repentance and readiness for the coming King.

Transcript

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2: 13.)

"Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God." (2 Pet. 3: 12.)

In the opening verses of 2 Peter 3 the apostle speaks of a school of thinkers who should arise in the last days and should say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning." This is but another form of expressing the very doctrine which a certain school of philosophers and scientists are promulgating in this very day.

It is substantially the principle of the doctrine of evolution. Its vital principle is this -- the things that are have been evolved out of similar things in the past and they will go on developing into similar unfoldings in the future. There has been no real crisis suspending the natural order of things and there will be none. Therefore, such a harsh, strained doctrine as that of the interposition of the supreme Being directly in the future history of this planet, and His advent on the stage of earth in personal form does violence to all the finest instincts of culture and all the established principles of science.

It is the devil's own trick of trying to reduce everything in the universe to a rational basis and eliminate the supernatural not only from the past but from the future history of the human race, and making man and nature all sufficient and all in all.

Now, nature itself bears witness against this false assumption. The profoundest scientists themselves tell us that this world carries within its bosom the elements of its destruction, and that in the very nature of things there are causes at work leading up to a great final catastrophe in the very orbits of the heavenly bodies. Humboldt himself, the prince of scientists, predicted a great terrestrial collapse at some future period in the lapse of ages. As Peter tells us in this passage, even the recent past of our planet's history bears witness to a tremendous convulsion when the flood of waters swept the whole human race away, foreshadowing the greater fact yet to come to pass when the flood of flame will wrap the world in final conflagration. The story of the past has not been evolution but revolution and a still greater catastrophe looms before us in the vision both of nature and of prophecy.

Then besides, the whole framework of our human life bears witness that the present is but an imperfect foreshadowing of something greater and more abiding. All we feel and see and know today is but the embryo of a boundless future. The deepest instincts of our nature tell us of a larger sphere, loftier life and more abiding home. Here we have scarcely learned to love when the grave closes over the objects of our affections. Our plans are only made when the rude hand of death or change dissolves the vision and defeats the project. Life is full of broken columns and newly made graves. The very creation groans for some better day and some great Deliverer. Every voice within us seems to cry,

Beyond the flight of time,

Beyond the reign of death,

There surely is some brighter clime

Where life is not a breath,

Nor life's affections transient fires

Whose spark flies upward and expires.

There is a world above

Where parting is unknown,

A long eternity of love

Formed for the good alone;

And faith beholds our lost ones here

Translated to that glorious sphere.

Thank God the light of revelation is clear and cloudless respecting this blessed hope. Undimmed and increasing it shines from the dawn of revelation to the glorious consummation.

Away back at the gate of Eden the mystic figure of the cherubim was a type of redeemed humanity, first in its glorious Head and ultimately in all its members. The face of the lion spoke of its kingliness; the face of

the ox its strength; the face of the man its perfect humanness; the face of the soaring eagle its loftiness and union with the divine. All this was to be accomplished first in Christ and then in His redeemed ones. It was like a photograph placed at the gate of Eden showing the future glory of his race to poor broken-hearted Adam as he went forth a fugitive from the paradise that he had lost.

That is the vision God gives to every man who will accept restoration through the Lord Jesus Christ. Lost and sinful we may be, but some day we will be as glorious as our exalted Head.

Next we see this blessed hope as the theme which Enoch first preached and afterward exemplified. He was the first prophet of the second coming and when his ministry was finished God bore witness to it by taking him away to realize in his own person the glorious hope to which he had testified.

Noah and the deluge through which he passed set forth in figure some of the greatest truths connected with the Lord's coming. While Enoch represented the translated saints who shall be caught up before the storm, Noah represented rather the people of Israel who shall pass through the tribulation and come out, as he did, on the other side to inherit the new earth. The times of Noah were typical of the times of the Son of Man, and the whole story of his supernatural deliverance foreshadows the closing days of the Christian age.

Abraham in like manner lived under the power of this coming age. While he received the land of promise in covenant yet he himself was a stranger in it and he died in faith of an inheritance which he should afterwards receive. The very reason why he so sacredly cherished the only spot on the ground he owned in Canaan, the cave of Macpelah, was because it was the burial place of his beloved wife and the pledge of God's covenant of the future inheritance of the land in the glorious resurrection. God's promise to him was for a thousand generations and it is not hard to conclude that those promises must yet be far in the future in their ultimate complete fulfillment.

In like manner Joseph showed his faith in the supernatural hope by giving commandment concerning his bones when dying. He wanted his very dust to have a part in the future inheritance of the land when he, with the saints of Israel, should stand in his lot at the end of days.

Time would fail to trace this hope through the Psalms of David and the history of the Old Testament prophets. Suffice it to say that as the old dispensation came to its close amid the wreck of Israel and the utter failure of humanity to accomplish God's purpose, the light of the better hope began to shine amid the gathering darkness. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zechariah and, above all, Daniel looked out upon the distant future and saw and told the wondrous panorama of the ages and the glorious coming of Christ which was to be the consummation. Like the New Testament, the Old closes with a grand apocalypse of the future.

The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ was crowned at its highest point with a sublime object lesson of His own future advent. At the very time when He was turning from His marvelous work in Galilee, He took His disciples with Him to the heights of Hermon and for one bright lustrous hour He let the veil fall from the face of His deity and shed forth in all its effulgence His advent glory. In His own transfigured face and form they saw Him as He will come again, while in Moses and Elias they had the vision, first of the sleeping dead as they will be raised and then of the living as they will be translated. All this, Peter tells us, was a vision of the power and coming of the Lord Jesus intended to cheer his heart and comfort others in view of the dark tribulations which were just before them.

In His last discourse, however, He formulated the message of His coming with great fulness and, as He sat upon the side of Olivet the last week of His earthly life, He delivered with great definiteness and vividness the successive events of the Christian age and especially of its closing chapters. These wonderful discourses contain the substance of all later prophecies respecting the advent and are worthy of the profoundest study.

But after Pentecost the Holy Ghost unfolded this great truth with greater fullness. All the apostles are witnesses to it. Even on the day of Pentecost they clearly pointed out the connection between the Holy Ghost and the coming of the Lord. The two last promises of Jesus as He went away were the baptism of the Spirit and His own literal return. One of Peter's early sermons referred with great definiteness first to the "times of refreshing" which the Spirit was to bring from the presence of the Lord, and then to the "times of restitution" which the Lord Himself was to bring when the heavens which had received Him should give Him up for His final advent.

Paul wrote two of his epistles, the letters to the Thessalonians, with special reference to this great truth and again and again refers to it in all his letters as his own blessed inspiration and expectation.

Peter tells much of the "blessed hope" and James, the most practical of them all and furthest removed from mysticism or dreaming of any sort, tells the struggling and oppressed Christians of his day to leave their wrongs to be adjusted, not by trade-unions and labor strikes, but by the coming of the Lord. And John, nearest to the Master's heart, and latest to give out his last messages, closes the sacred canon and seals the Book of inspiration with the sublime Apocalypse which is one long bright vision of the Lord's coming and the events which precede and follow it.

The order of the New Testament is similar to the Old in its general scope and structure. There is first the narrative of facts; second, the teaching of the deeper spiritual truth; third, the prophetic revelation of the Father. God cannot trust us with the glorious doctrine of His coming until we are first established in the facts of Christianity and in the depths of the Spirit. Above all doctrines it is the least fitted to play with, to talk about, to lightly hold as a theory. We need to be deeply rooted and grounded in Christ before we can wisely grasp it or give it forth. But after we have received the Spirit in His fullness, one of His special ministries is to show us things to come, to open the gates of vision and unfold the prophetic Word.

Now, as the Holy Ghost has revealed this glorious hope, its supernatural character will appear in several particulars.

First, it will bring a supernatural revelation of Christ. If we accept the fact that the Lord Jesus once resided upon this earth as a supernatural man why should it be thought strange that He should revisit it and dwell upon it for a longer time as its sovereign Lord. Christians of every name believe that the divine Person that once trod this earthly scene is residing somewhere now in yonder heavens in His actual and visible personality. It would be but a slight transition for Him to return in person to the world where once He dwelled. Now, this is the common sense of the doctrine of the Lord's coming. "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven." Of course, His coming will be different in this respect, that the veil of humiliation which obscured His deity during His earthly ministry will be forever dropped and He will shine forth in all the majesty of His deity and His universal lordship.

That this must mean a literal and visible appearing should scarcely need to be demonstrated. The strange theory of later centuries, which has been accepted by so large a portion of the Christian church, has practically explained away the force and meaning of this blessed hope. According to this spiritualizing

interpretation the promise of His coming is substantially fulfilled in His personal indwelling in the hearts of His people and the triumph of the truths and principles of the gospel among all nations.

Now, in reply to the first, it is enough to say that the New Testament apostles enjoyed the indwelling of Christ as fully as any human being may expect to during the Christian age, and yet they constantly looked forward to an actual coming of Christ as the supreme object of their hope.

In respect to the other, it ought to be conclusive to remember that uniformly in speaking of Christ's coming the Holy Spirit represents the world at the time of His appearing as in no sense under the influence of the truth of the Spirit of God but really at the lowest ebb of sin and spiritual declension. If the Lord's coming is really the triumph of the truth what can we make of such passages as these? "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." So far from the horoscope of prophecy revealing a future of Christian progress and world-wide righteousness under the present dispensation, the prophetic vision portrays an age of increasing unbelief, worldliness and sin growing more aggravated toward the close, while the true church of Christ as a little flock stands in the midst of prevailing declension, witnessing for Christ and waiting for His appearing. That appearing is always represented as a clearly marked and unmistakable event, as manifest and as transcendent as the lightning which shines from one end of heaven even unto the other. It is a great supernatural fact and the central figure of it will be the person of Christ Himself revealed in all His glory not only before the admiring eyes of His saints but before the vision of a startled world.

Second, the believers shall be supernaturally transformed. This blessed hope is going to bring not only the glorified Christ but the glorification of His saints. Those who sleep shall be raised from the dead by a supernatural and instantaneous manifestation of the almighty power of Christ, and the living shall be changed immediately afterwards. The change which will come to both will bring a complete transformation into the perfect likeness of their glorified Head.

The event is described in the most transcendent language. He "shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto his body of glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

In his argument from analogy in 1 Cor. 15, the Apostle Paul gives us some hints of the transcending glory of the resurrection body. He tells us it will be a spiritual body and a celestial body. It will be substantially the same as the body that sank to the tomb and yet it will be unspeakably different. The resemblance will be similar to that of the bare grain which we plant in the soil to the beautiful plant which springs from it covered with blossom and abundant fruit. As the orange tree with its fresh and fragrant blossoms and its golden hanging fruit is to a little dry orange seed planted in the soil, so will the body of the glory be to this corruptible form which we lay down at death. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. . . . It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

The blessed truth of the resurrection and the glorified body is beyond the search of human philosophy and science. It is not a truth that can be learned by the ordinary processes of human knowledge. It is distinctly supernatural, and it must be accepted by faith as a doctrine of divine revelation.

And yet, even nature has some beautiful parables of it. The process of germination from the buried seed is a divine type of the resurrection. The exquisite silver jewel, which the chemist can dissolve in acid until it disappears from view and then by precipitating some new acid into the solution can bring it back again and cast it into the crucible, remaking it in some more beautiful form is another prototype.

This is man's rude anticipation of God's glorious supernatural redemption. The supreme illustration and confirmation of this stupendous truth must ever be the simple fact that Christ Himself, the Head of humanity, has died and risen from the dead, and His glorified body is the pattern and guarantee of our resurrection.

Third, the material world will have a supernatural transformation. Not only will man be changed, but his home will be the subject of a transformation quite as wonderful. The traces of sin and the memories of suffering and death will be obliterated. The cemeteries will disappear. The awful fact of death will be but a memory of the distant past and the cemeteries will not only give up their dead but will cease to separate and destroy. The wild and savage instincts of the lower orders of creation will be subjected; the lion will become gentle as the ox; the wolf will lie down with the lamb; the asp and scorpion will cease to sting; the feeble orders of the natural creation will no longer groan under the law that makes them a prey to the stronger.

The very law of gravitation will be changed and in the New Jerusalem the streets shall be vertical as well as horizontal and we shall pass up and down as freely as we pass to and fro, for earth's attraction will be forever broken and the center of gravitation shall be the Lord Himself. The barren desert shall blossom as the rose. Earth's climates will be changed and "neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat," nor the biting frosts and winters no more distress again in yonder summerland of love. Earth will be a heaven below. Paradise will be restored. The curse will be canceled and all that infinite wisdom, love and power can do to make this planet the paragon of nature will crown the glorious work of complete redemption.

Fourth, this blessed hope will bring a supernatural transformation in the providence of God and the government of the world and the universe. Man's government has been proved and tried and found a pitiful failure.

In the vision of Daniel the kings of earth are represented as a destructive power of so many wild beasts, but the glorious promise is given that the saints of the most High shall at length take the kingdom; "dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Christ Himself will be the sovereign Ruler of the world. Zechariah has told us in the most definite language "the Lord will be king over all the earth: in that day will there be one Lord, and his name one. . . . And it will come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem will even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

This is the very song of the redeemed saints: "You . . . have made us unto our God kings and priests: and we will reign on the earth." The very promise of the closing vision of the Apocalypse is, "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years."

Among earth's vast burdens has been the curse of corrupt government; her political and social systems will never be right until He comes whose right it is to reign. Christ's coming is the only remedy for the wrongs of society and the diseases of the body politic. Let us be true to the responsibility of Christian citizenship but let us ever remember that our citizenship is in heaven whence we are expecting earth's true King.

The new adjustment of this earth will affect all other worlds. There is a sense in which Christ's redemption is to reconcile all things both in heaven and on earth. Just what all this will mean is impossible even in the

light of Scripture to foretell fully. But beyond the millennial years there will certainly be a larger and grander unfolding in the ages of ages resulting at length in the new heavens and new earth, wherein righteousness alone shall dwell. And there will be the application in some way of the great principle unfolded and established in the story of human redemption to all the distant worlds of space and all parts of God's universal empire. Perhaps these constellations are yet to be distant colonies from this redeemed planet, and the vast dominions and principalities over which the saints will reign as the promised reward of their service and fidelity here.

The forms of human life during these coming ages are sufficiently outlined to make this at least clear that during the millennial age there will be three distinct peoples upon this planet. First will be the nations of earth which will still exist on the human plane as they do today excepting only that they shall be the subjects of Christ's kingdom and enjoy the blessed privileges of His universal reign of righteousness and peace.

The next will be the Jewish nation which is to continue in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and David for a thousand generations. This will be the supreme nation, and Israel from Jerusalem will exercise the world-wide influence of a sovereign city, governed directly by God Himself and fulfilling the high conception of ancient theocracy without its imperfections and mournful failures. David is to reign over his ancient kingdom as the direct vice-regent of Christ, and Abraham is to enjoy with all his seed the glorious fulfillment of the mighty promises for which he has waited so long, and Israel is to realize literally as a nation the yet unfulfilled vision of ancient Hebrew prophecy.

But there will be a third race, namely, the risen and translated saints who will reign upon the earth and yet possess a heavenly life and a spiritual body. Their government of the world will be under the immediate direction of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, their ever-present King. They will be the executive officers of this kingdom and their power may be similar to that of angelic beings now who have so prominent a part in the affairs of nature and are employed by God in controlling the affairs of nations and checking and counteracting in human affairs the hate of Satan and the objections and oppositions of wicked men.

The risen saints in the millennial age will have free and constant access to the material world and the whole system of human life, visiting men and often engaged in conflicts with them, but living on a far higher plane. Like the angels who came to Abraham and like the Lord Himself during the forty days, they will doubtless be able to eat and drink and sit down in simple loving fellowship at human tables and in earth's family circles, but they will not need the nourishment of food, refreshment of sleep or the supply of present physical wants. Their life will be supernatural and directly sustained from the Lord Himself. As Christ has told us, they will be in some sense like the angels who neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more, being the children of the resurrection. It may be that we will dwell with our glorified Lord not exactly on earth but perhaps above it in the New Jerusalem which may be the dwelling place of the saints during the millennial age as well as afterwards, a city let down from heaven, yet touching earth and in constant relation with its inhabitants.

We need, of course, to be careful of ideal or daring speculations respecting things which so far transcend our present range of thought and conception, and yet we know enough of our Lord's resurrection life during the forty days to inspire our hearts with the most delightful anticipations of the glorified life that awaits us so soon, and of which He has said to us respecting many a fond hope which perhaps we could not prove and yet which we dare to cherish, "If it were not so, I would have told you."

In conclusion, the supernatural hope of the Lord's coming is a present truth because, in the first place, it is a true antidote to the humanitarianism of our age. Self-sufficient man is building his tower of Babel and projecting his future Utopias of ambition and imagination. But over all these God is laughing from the heavens and saying, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Let men dream their fond and foolish dreams. Let them make their investments and calculations for centuries to come, but we look for "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Second, this blessed hope is the only explanation and key for facts of human history and providences and the problems and perplexities which they create. All the past becomes plain if we read it in the light of God's plan, and contemporary history is reduced to simplicity as we see in the center of all the movements of our time God's distinct purpose to prove earthly governments a failure, to overrule the affairs of States and nations for the calling out of His people from all lands, to preserve the seed of Abraham distinct from and supremely above all other races, and to put down the systems of iniquity which are hindering His purposes concerning Israel and the church.

Read in the light of prophecy, the rise and fall of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome can be understood; we can also understand the broken maps of Europe and the dismembered kingdoms of the past; we can understand the rise and decadence of Papal and Mohammedan powers; we can understand the supremacy of the English people; we can understand the growing strength of Russia in the north; we can understand the Turkish massacres, the Armenian horrors, the outbursts of Mohammedan fanaticism, the persecution of Israel, and enjoy the remarkable rallying of the nation around the standard of Zion and the hope of a speedy restoration of their national existence. We can understand the increasing commercial activity and strange wickedness of our age. We can see the deeper life of the little flock and the broader enterprise of world-wide missions. He that is Head over all things for His body, the church, is preparing the last great conflict and marshalling the forces of earth and heaven for the day of the Lord.

Again, this supernatural hope is the highest inspiration of Christian life and work. There is no truth more inspiring, calling us out from this doomed earth to fix our hopes and ambitions in the coming kingdom. There is no truth more sanctifying, impelling us to make sure not only of the white robe of holiness, but the wedding robe of the deeper love that alone can fit us for the meeting with our Bridegroom, and calling us to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost as the oil in our vessels which will save us from the folly and failure of the foolish virgins.

In like manner, it is the great incentive to diligent and faithful service. We are working intelligently with a well defined aim and a glorious expectation. We are not beating air and looking in vain for the conversion of the world, but we are cooperating with our coming Lord and giving the gospel as a witness to all nations as the one last condition preceding His advent. Christians are the men most intensely aroused to the necessity and importance of this great work because they understand the times and know what Israel ought to do, and are giving out in the last two movements of our age the message to the streets and lanes of the city, and the message to the highways and hedges and the outcast millions of the world.

And we believe that this blessed supernatural hope constitutes the most convincing and convicting message to lost men, and especially to the unevangelized nations of our time. There seems to be some special emphasis in the phrase, "The gospel of the kingdom," used in connection with witnessing unto all nations before the end comes.

It seems to be suggested at least that the messengers are to go forth with a specific warning of the immediate coming of the King. May it be that we have not used as definitely and emphatically as we might this great message of such world-awakening power.

We remember that when Jonah went to the Ninevites as an ambassador of heaven with a stormy announcement that within forty days the King of kings would deal in judgment with one of the wicked nations of earth, the whole nation from the king to the lowest slave were moved to fear and repentance, and in sackcloth and ashes sat and obtained the mercy of Jehovah.

We know that when Paul preached to the Thessalonians this must have been his message to them, for he tells them in his first epistles that they turned from idols to serve the living and true God and wait for His Son in heaven.

We remember also that in the last missionary picture of the Apocalypse, the angel who bears the everlasting gospel to all kindreds and nations and tribes and tongues, proclaims to them that the hour of God's judgment has come and calls upon them with the stupendous call to meet their Judge. This is the present truth not only of the church of God against the worldliness and skepticism of our Christian lands but especially the present truth which we are to go forth as ambassadors for Christ and deliver with divine authority and emphatic pointedness as His last message to the ungodly nations of the heathen world.

It is an encouraging fact that today the great majority of foreign missionaries at present on the field fully believe this.

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