

# Meaning of His Coming

by G.B. Duncan

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*The sermon explores the significance of Christ's second coming for Christians, emphasizing expectation, preparation, and transformation.*

**Duration:** 34:02

**Topics:** "Second Coming"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of faith and hope in the Christian journey. He addresses the doubt that some people have about Christianity and encourages believers to trust in Jesus Christ, who is on the victory side. The speaker also challenges Christians to reflect on how they have been using the resources and opportunities given to them by God, such as prayer, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. He urges believers to be active in sharing the gospel and leading others to Christ, reminding them of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The sermon concludes with the reminder that the growth of the gospel and the condition of the church may not always be as expected, but Christ spoke of the coexistence of good and evil until the harvest.

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## Transcript

God our Father, as we now seek to bring our lives once again into the light of thy word and truth, we realize that this is something we cannot do without the promised help of the Holy Spirit. So we ask that in thy mercy and in thy faithfulness thou would once again fulfill the promise of thy Son that when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. May that same gracious Spirit be our teacher and guide taking our minds and thinking through them thy thoughts, my lips and speaking through them thy words and thy truth, our hearts and lives and inclining them in obedience to thy will, this we ask for the sake of the same Jesus Christ, thy Son and our Redeemer.

Amen. This Sunday is the third Sunday in what the Christian church calendar describes as the season of Advent. I wonder how many of you realize that in addition to the purely secular calendar with its months of January, February, March and so on, many of whose names are derived from pagan gods, there is a Christian calendar as well that is called the Church Christian calendar of the Christian year.

And that begins at Advent, before January, leading up until Christmas. And there the Christian church, and that includes our own Church of Scotland, for in our book of the service, the Common Order as it's called, we have the various prayers that are offered by the Church worldwide at the different seasons of the year. And on the first Sunday of Advent, the second coming of Christ is referred to in the prayers.

I won't read again the prayer that we read this morning, but it's there. I wonder how many of you realize that the Bible speaks not only of Christ's first coming in humility, the coming that we are going to be thinking about particularly this coming weekend of Christmas, but the Bible speaks most clearly and most emphatically about a second coming, not in mercy but in majesty and in glory. During my last spell taking worship before work, I tied with the little group that meet there each morning to get just a brief glimpse of the meaning of the second coming of Christ and the message of his return by looking at some of the main and more significant passages in the scriptures where that wonderful hope of the Christian is referred to.

Tonight I want to take up again one of these passages and to expand it to help us to see just what is the meaning of the second coming of Christ for the Christian. This morning we studied what is the promise of his coming, and we asked three legitimate questions that anybody would want to ask. The first was when will he come, and the second how will he come, and the third why will he come.

But tonight I want to consider not so much the promise of his coming as the meaning of it for the Christian. So many of us here are Christians. What does this mean? For those who are not Christians it means something terrible.

I'm not going to deal with that. I wouldn't like not to be a Christian when Christ comes again. But there are two verses in the first epistle of John where John describes what to him would be the meaning of the second coming of Christ.

And I want to look at these two verses 1 John chapter 3 verses 2 and 3. Take in verse 1 if you like. Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not.

And then the two verses that really are the basis of our study tonight. Beloved now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure.

Now what do we find here in the mind of Saint John constitutes the meaning of his coming. And the main three fronts of what John has to say center around first of all what I call the expectation of his coming. In verse 2 we have this little sentence when he shall appear.

John does not write if but when. Here is the certainty of the expectation of Christ's second coming. And when we consider the expectation of Christ's coming there are two aspects that we have to bear in mind.

The first is how important this hope is. And its importance can be judged in the first place by the fact that it is given so large a place in the closing stages of our Lord's earthly ministry. It's in Matthew's gospel chapters 24 and 25 are devoted to this truth.

Now it's something we're all familiar with that special importance can be ascribed to the last words that a person has to say. If I knew beyond any shadow of doubt that I was fatally ill and that I would not live more than 24 hours I wouldn't talk in terms of trivialities. I would say things and talk about things that were vital.

Christ knew that the end was near. In verse 2 of chapter 26 he says he know that after two days is the feast of the Passover and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified. And it was in that awareness that he chose to speak again and at length upon this feast.

And this hope is important for faith. So many people have a sneaking kind of a doubt that the Christian and with the Christian God himself is somehow or other on the losing side. That by backing Jesus Christ we've backed a loser.

There's a chorus that some of us used to sing on the victory side, on the victory side. No fear can haunt me, no foe can daunt me on the victory side. With Christ within the fight we'll win on the victory side.

A tremendous chorus. And I know that it refers primarily to personal victory. But quite honestly many of us feel we're not on the victory side as far as the world at large is concerned.

That in backing Christ we're backing a loser. Rather like that man I remember somebody telling me about who fell asleep at an evangelistic meeting. And he woke up during the appeal.

And the evangelists had asked those that were wanting to become Christians to put up their hands. And it was at that precise moment that this man who had fallen asleep during the address woke up. He saw that the man sitting next to him had his hand up.

So without knowing quite what it was all about he put up his own hand. And then he looked around and saw that very very few hands were up. So he whispered to his neighbor, I don't know who we're voting for but I'm afraid we've lost.

So often Christians have got discouraged as they look at the impact or lack of impact on the gospel and the world. When they look at the condition of the church that it's totally ignored. They've gotten a hold of the idea that somehow or other the gospel is going to triumph until every person in the world is a Christian.

I want to say that is not of course the picture that Christ ever painted of how things would go. Instead he spoke of tares and wheat growing together until harvest. He spoke of leaven.

And leaven is always a symbol of sin. Of leaven being hid in a measure of meal until the whole lump was leavened. Christ did say that the gospel had to be preached in all the world as a witness before the end would come.

But he never said that the whole world would believe. But simply that the whole world must hear. God has quite other plans for the world than simply the preaching of the gospel.

That is his plan right now. But there's a more massive plan still. And the second coming of Christ in power, in glory, and in majesty, that second advent is part of that plan.

So I would say how important this hope is. For faith we oughtn't to be surprised that the world that has rejected God's revelation in Christ is sinking more and more, lower and lower, into the mire and into the muck of human sin. This is exactly what Jesus said would happen.

How important this hope is. And the second thing to note concerning the expectation of his coming, how ignorant our hearts are. And this is concerning the time of his coming.

Nothing is clearer from the word of God than this, that no man knows the time of Christ's return. We were considering this this morning when we tried to answer the question, when will he come? And I pointed out how in Matthew 24, from verse 36 on to the end of that chapter, no less than five times does Christ make it clear, of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father. John admits here a limitation in his understanding of what that second coming will mean.

It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but that does not affect the certainty and the expectation with which that coming is awaited, when he shall appear, John writes. The expectation of his coming. And this should be part at least of the meaning of this truth in your life and mine.

We should be expecting Christ to come. To me that's one of the most tremendous things in my faith in Christ, as I look out on the world to realize that what that old chorus says is true, that God is still on the throne. And that the question, the complaint, the charge that men bring against God, why doesn't God intervene, will one day get its answer.

Whenever the world gets in a mess, whenever there's a war on a worldwide scale, men always say, if God is omnipotent, why doesn't he do so? The answer is, he will. The expectation of his coming. So you and I as Christians should expect this, and be living with that expectation in our hearts.

When he shall appear. And then the second thought that comes to me as I consider the meaning of the second coming of Christ for the Christian is, first of all, the expectation of his coming should be there, and the second, the preparation for his coming should be there. In verse 3, every man that hath this hope in him, that is in Christ, purifies himself even as he is pure.

The second coming of Christ, which is the alternative to death, which every Christian faces, will, like death, terminate in its present form all the opportunities and responsibilities of Christian living and Christian service. It's said that someone once asked John Wesley what he would do, how he would spend the intervening time if he knew that he had but 24 hours left in which to serve his Lord, before having to render an account of his stewardship. To which John Wesley replied, how, madam? Why, just as I intend to spend the time now.

I should preach tonight at Gloucester, and again at five tomorrow morning. After that, I should ride to Tewksbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the societies in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with the family as usual, retire to my bed at ten o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory.

What a wonderful thing to say. Here was a man who was absolutely ready. Was his life and service terminated by death or by Christ's coming, it didn't make an atom of difference to the way he'd spend the next 24 hours.

Would it make any difference to you? The preparation for his coming. John Wesley was living a life in which he was always and already prepared to meet his Lord, either in death or if he should come. Seems to me that there are two things that I would want to be true about my life if Christ should come.

The first is, I would want to be found busy. In Matthew 24, 45, Christ speaks of the task entrusted to the servant. The faithfulness and diligence shown by the servant who, when his Lord comes, is found busy with the work entrusted to him.

In Luke 12, 35, our Lord says, let your loins be girded about and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when he will return. That when he cometh a knocker they may open to him immediately. In Mark 13, 34, our Lord speaks of the Son of Man giving to every man his work.

Paul says of the Christian that he has been put in trust with the gospel. 1 Thessalonians 2 and 4. What have we been doing about it? If God has entrusted to you and to me as Christians the gospel, what have you been doing with it? What about all the resources that have been made available to every Christian?

The ministry of prayer, the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the word of God, the truth of God. What have we done with all these? What have we got to show for it all? Are we busy? It was Dr. Sanster who once asked the question, when did you last lead a person to Christ? And then added, when did you last try? I would want to be busy.

And the Lord comes again. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 we are told that when the Lord of the servants returned it was to reckon with his servants. What use have they made of the opportunities he'd given to them? The personality that you have is something that nobody else has.

The people that you're in touch with are people that nobody else is in touch with. What have you been doing? How busy have you been? How many folks have you prayed for? How many folks have you invited? Right out there in the vestibule. We always do it every Christmas.

We print seven thousand leaflets to be given out. I wonder how many leaflets you will take. I wonder how many folk you'll invite.

The preparation for his coming involves being busy surely in his work. I would want to be busy and I would want to be holy. I would not want there to be anything in my life that would grieve the heart of love that there is in Christ.

I wouldn't want there to be anything that would evoke his displeasure. And this is the thrust of what John writes here. Every man that hath this hope in Christ purifies himself even as he is pure.

The ethical implications of the second coming of Christ, this truth is found again and again in the context of the promise of Christ's return. Romans 13, 12, the night is fast spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light.

And in the passage we read from 2 Peter, that incredible passage that before the discovery of the atom bomb must have been laughed out of court as being ridiculous. And nobody would laugh at what those words say. They're written 2,000 years ago.

The day of the Lord will come as a thief and the night in which the heaven shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up, seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved. What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless.

It's the preparation of love, surely is it not? Here's a girl and she's going out to meet her sweetheart. Tell me, does she not prepare herself with infinite care for that moment? I always remember when I was a curate in Broadwater, my rector had been ill in hospital and been away from home for several weeks. And then word came that he was coming back.

And all the preparations that went on, the whole house was spring-cleaned from top to bottom, and the rooms that he would be using received special attention. Fresh flowers everywhere. If I'd gone in and said, what on earth's all the fuss about? He'd say, well, Dad's coming.

I remember too, when as a young Christian I was not sure if it was right for me as a Christian to do certain things and to go to certain places of entertainment. The counsel I received was quite simple. If Jesus Christ came again and found you there, would you be happy to be found there? Again, I recall reading of someone holidaying, I think in Switzerland, being attracted by a beautiful house with its gardens and grounds beautifully kept.

One day the gardener was busy near the gate, and the visitor and the gardener engaged in conversation. The holidaymaker learned that the owner of the house had not been there for a long time, several years in fact. But the instructions that had been left were that the house was to be kept ready.

To which the visitor replied, well, you certainly have carried out the owner's instructions. It looks as if it'd be ready for him if you got word that he was coming tomorrow. To which the gardener replied, no, not if he came tomorrow, but we're ready if he came today.

John would agree with that. Preparation for his coming means that I would want to be busy, and I would want to be holy. The expectation of his coming, I find that here in these two verses, when he shall appear.

The preparation for his coming, every man that had this hope in him purified himself even if he is pure. And then the third thrust of the meaning for the Christian, the expectation of his coming, the preparation for his coming, and then finally the transformation at his coming. We know that when he shall appear we shall delight him, for we shall see him as he is.

And this thought had never grasped my mind before until I was weighing up the message for tonight, that the transformation will be twofold. First of all, a transformation in the Lord we love. We shall see him as he is, not as he was while on earth, but as he is.

We face this thought this morning at Christ's first coming to save. There was, I think we can say in all honesty, a partial revelation of the character and nature of God. It was a revelation in mercy.

It was adequate for faith, but it was not complete. At Christ's second coming there will be a perfect revelation. And having come to see the wonder and the glory of God revealed in mercy and in grace in the Christ of Bethlehem and Galilee, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Calvary, we will see a perfect revelation of him in majesty and splendor and glory and power.

Do you remember how Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 13 ends on this very note, now he wrote, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. It's like the difference, I suppose, between courtship and marriage. The experience of the girl into whose life a worthy love has come will know her lover well enough to trust her love and her life to him.

But she doesn't know him, as she will know him after marriage. Then she comes to know him in a closer, deeper, richer life than ever she'd known before. And if he's truly worthy, her heart will be overwhelmed with all that his love now has come to mean to her, and all that his love now longs to do for her.

The second coming of Christ is after all likened to a wedding, is it not? And heaven is the setting for what is called the marriage supper of the Lamb. With the church as his bride, a transformation in the Lord we love. All I know is that whenever I read in the Bible of men seeing anything at all of the glory of God, it shatters them.

Read about it, if you like, in the first chapter of the book of the Revelation. When John saw Christ, and we read, he fell at his feet as one dead. We shall see him as he is.

The transformation that is coming is going to be first of all in the Lord we love. We shall see him as he is. But the transformation that is coming will not only be in the Lord we love, but in the lives we live.

We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. One of the wonderful things about the second coming of Christ is the transformation in ourselves. We'll have a new body, a different kind of a body.

We shall be changed. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 15. Tremendous passage at the end of that.

Tremendous chapter on the resurrection of the body. Behold, I share your mystery, writes John. We shall not all, writes Paul, we shall not all sleep in death, but we shall all be changed.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye of the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy king? O grace, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We shall be changed. A new kind of a body and a new kind of a nature altogether, the deliverance we shall find from the fallen nature, the sin within.

Then and then only shall we be free. We shall be changed, says Paul. We shall be like him, says John.

The Bible has a for this, it's the word glorified. First of all justified, then sanctified, and finally glorified. Paul speaks of our suffering with Christ, that we may be glorified together.

He tells us also in verse 30 of that eighth chapter of Romans, whom he justified, then he also glorified. The transformation of his coming. And then and only then, thank God, we shall be free from sin within forever.

Our salvation will be complete. We're not free of that indwelling sin while we are here on earth. You come across some folk who claim they are.

I always wish I could just have five minutes with the wife or the husband, and I'd get a check up on that. That's not true. Not one of us is free.

There's nothing in the Bible, there's nothing in the Bible that tells us that the sinful nature within is eradicated. There is no blessing, there is nothing that you can get from God that will remove that. Not on earth, not in this life.

But when he comes, we shall be changed. Either at death or at his coming. We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

What then is the meaning of the second coming for the Christian? First of all, there will be the expectation of his coming in my heart. And then there will be the preparation for his coming in my life. And then there will be the transformation of his coming, of the Lord I love and of the life I live.

When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure. Is it any wonder that elsewhere in the The best bit of news that could ever come to a world that is rushing headlong to despair and into the dark.

But the final word is not in Moscow, it's not in Peking. The final word is not in New York, not in Washington, not in London, not in Paris, not in Bonn, not in Rome. The final word is not with man at all.

The final word is going to be with God. When God's time come, and only God knows that time, then when God's time come, he will. Won't you be glad? Won't you be thrilled? What a wonderful, wonderful hope that is, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, and we shall see him.

O God our Father, we thank thee for this wonderful truth that is in thy word, that undergirds our faith when we see things seemingly going so wrong. Help us to realize that there is a throne, not on earth as yet, but in heaven, that that throne is occupied and filled, that one day the royal edict will go forth, and human history as we know it will be brought to a halt and to an end, and a new era will be initiated. We cannot understand, and we do not know all that's involved in this, but we do know that one day he shall come.

Grant that we may be ready for that day. Help us to be busy, so that we'll have something to show. Help us to be holy, so that there's nothing in our lives to grieve, or to disappoint his love.

And prepare us for that day when we shall see him as he is, and we shall be like him, with a new body, a new nature, and a new life to live. Grant us to live knowing that he may come anytime now, perhaps tonight, maybe not for a long time, but help us to live every day as if it was the day when he shall appear. We ask it for thy blessed sake.

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