

The Second Coming of Christ

by James Blaine Chapman

The Second Coming of Christ is a central theme in the Bible, connected to many vital themes, and is a future event that will bring about the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth.

Topics: "Second Coming", "Eschatology"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches on the importance, meaning, time, and manner of Christ's Second Coming as highlighted in Luke 17:22-37. The sermon emphasizes the significance of the theme by showcasing its prevalence in the Scriptures and its connection to vital doctrines like Christ's deity, repentance, holiness, resurrection, and Christian triumph. It delves into the meaning of the Second Coming, distinguishing it from death, calamities, and other events, and explains its purpose of gathering the holy living and resurrecting the holy dead for the marriage supper of the Lamb. The sermon also discusses the signs indicating the imminent return of Christ, such as the collapse of human governments, godlessness, apostasy, extreme poverty, and breakdown of the family, urging believers to be prepared and watchful for His sudden and universal return.

Transcript

SCRIPTURE LESSON -- Luke 17:22-37.

And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two

men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

This passage is not announced as a text, but is offered as a scripture lesson to bring before us the subject of the Second Coming of Christ. On a subject so far-reaching, it is necessary to select just a few things for emphasis that we may stay within the limits of what is expected of a preacher in the delivery of one sermon. We will therefore direct our thinking today to four propositions in connection with the theme: (1) We shall consider the importance of the theme; (2) We shall consider the meaning of the theme; (3) We shall consider the time of Christ's coming; and (4) We shall consider the manner and purpose of Christ's second coming.

1. The importance of the theme - Christ's Second Coming. We begin by saying that the theme is of great importance, and this is indicated:

a) By the unusually large place given it in the Scriptures. It is calculated that one-twentieth of the New Testament deals with the subject of the Second Coming of Christ, and the theme is not limited to the New Testament.

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament which did not have their fulfillment in the coming of Jesus as the Babe of Bethlehem, nor were they fulfilled during the stay of Jesus upon earth. Many of these prophecies have not even yet been fulfilled. The reason is that these prophecies had reference to the Second Coming of Christ, and not to His coming as the Saviour of the world.

We hold no brief for the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day, but we do remember that their Scriptures described the coming of a kingly one who was to abide forever, and was to extend His kingdom "from the rivers to the ends of the earth." So when One of humble birth, with no robes or throne or crown or kingly paraphernalia came among them and announced that He would stay for but a time, and then be crucified and taken back to heaven, how could they see in Him the object of their hopes?

It is true that the Hebrew Scriptures contained the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah in which the Messiah was described as a suffering Saviour, and there were many other passages in which His humility, meekness and even His death were depicted, so that the men of His day should have discerned the signs of their times, and should have seen in Him the promised One. It has always been easier for men to see a king on his throne than to see him in the service of the poor, and so while we do not excuse the contemporaries of Christ, we think it is fair to say that they had some reason for their reluctance in accepting the claims of One who did not fulfill all they had been taught to expect of the Messiah.

Chronology does not register clearly when one is looking down a straight line. Things far distant are likely to become confused with things close at hand. It is clear to us now that the Old Testament prophecies are in two distinct classes: those that had fulfillment in Christ's first coming to the earth, and those which had reference to His second coming. Those of the first class majored on His miraculous birth, His spotless life, His peerless teachings, His marvelous miracles, His atoning death, His triumphant resurrection, and His glorious ascension. Those which referred to His second coming dwelt upon His kingly functions, the glory of His kingdom, and the governmental and judgment aspects of His work. A summary of these two sections is made in Hebrews 9:28, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." That word "without sin," is used here as elsewhere in this and other epistles for "without a sin offering." Christ came once to be an offering

for sin and to provide the way of salvation for all men, and now to them that look for Him He is coming the second time without a sin offering unto salvation.

No one who sets value on our holy Scriptures will doubt for a moment that a subject which occupies so prominent a place in them as does the Second Coming of Christ is an important subject. If one were to take his Bible and cut out every passage that relates to the Second Coming of Christ he would come back with a book so mutilated that it would be unrecognizable. God must love this subject, seeing He has given it so large a place in His Book. Therefore we do well to love it too, and to give it a large place in our thinking and planning.

b) The importance of the theme is further indicated by its close connection with all the vital themes of the Bible. Unless it is also vital, it detracts from the category of doctrines with which it is so constantly and intimately connected:

(1) It is intimately connected with the doctrine of Christ's proper deity. When Jesus was being tried before the Jewish court, the high priest and others asked Him many questions to which He made no reply, but when the high priest charged Him to say whether or not He was the Christ, and when the high priest offered the challenge in the form of the legal oath, so that silence would be interpreted as a negative answer, Jesus answered, "Thou hast said." This was the form of positive affirmation, and to it Jesus added, "Marvel not at this, for ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with the holy angels with him." That proving occurrence has not yet taken place, but will when Jesus comes back to the earth in the glory of His Second Advent.

(2) This doctrine is connected with the doctrine of repentance. In Acts 3:19-21 Peter said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which was before preached unto you: whom the heavens must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

(3) It is connected with the doctrine and experience of holiness. In I Thessalonians 5:23, Paul's prayer is recorded in these words: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And in I Thessalonians 3:13 the purpose of the apostolic ministry is said to be: "To

the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God even our father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

(4) The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is connected with the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. The fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians has been well named "the Resurrection Chapter," for it does have more to say on the subject than any other passage of equal length in the Bible. Describing the order in which the dead shall rise, Paul says in the 23rd verse, "Every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

(5) The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is connected with the doctrine that Christ and right shall finally triumph -- The Doctrine of Christian Triumph. This is the burden of the Book of Revelation, the last book in our blessed Bible. The central theme of this wonderful book is the Second Coming of Christ, and with this central theme is connected in vital relation the promise that God will make "all things new," and bring us out at last in triumph over all evil. One cannot disconnect this promise of ultimate Christian

triumph from its corollary -- Jesus Christ is coming back to the earth the second time.

2. The meaning of the theme. We pass now from the importance of the theme to a consideration of its meaning; for even though we are convinced of its importance, the subject must be defined before we can be sure as to what our attitude toward it should be. Let us present this phase of the subject under two heads, and consider:

a) Some things the Second Coming of Christ does not mean:

(1) It does not mean the same thing as death, for in the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians it is said that when Christ comes He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet, and, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Corinthians 15:26). Now if death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and all enemies are to be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ and thereafter, there can be no way by which the Second Coming of Christ can be identified with death.

(2) It is not to be identified with any calamity great or small. It is not the sinking of the Titanic, some great armed conflict among the nations or some great natural tragedy like an earthquake or a tornado. In fact it is not a calamity at all. It is described in Titus 2:13 as "that blessed hope." It is the blessed hope of the people of God, and although they who are unprepared may think of it with dread, the whole creation beneath groaneth in travail for the deliverance that will come when Jesus returns to the earth again.

(3) It is not identified with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Read the Epistles and you will see that many of the most precious promises of His coming were given to people who were already filled with the Holy Ghost. Paul himself claimed encouragement in the promise of Christ's Second Coming; and surely he was within his rights when he testified to being sure he was in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:29). In the very nature of things men cannot be told to hope for that which they have already received.

(4) It is not the same thing as the spread of the gospel throughout the nations of the earth. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew the preaching of the gospel among all the nations of the earth

is given as one of the signs that the Second Coming of Christ is near at hand; and, since a thing cannot in reason be a sign of itself, the Second Coming of Christ must be something else and something subsequent to the preaching of the gospel among the nations.

b) What the Second Coming of Christ does actually mean:

On this point we quote just one passage of scripture, and that is Acts 1:9-11, "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

We do not confine our quoting to this one scripture for want of others to quote. We offer it as being sufficient. The matter could scarcely be stated more definitely and clearly. Even one who reads it for the first time will without hesitation say, "This means that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of man, the very same as He who was born in a stable, cradled in a manger and died upon a cross, is coming back to this world again in His personal and bodily form, glorified and deathless, but completely identified with Him of whom Moses and the Prophets did write, and with whom Peter and James and John and the others

used to eat beside the sea. This is what is meant by the Second Coming of Christ.

3. Now we come to the proposition of the time of His Second coming. Perhaps someone will immediately remember that the Scriptures say, "No man knoweth the day nor the hour," and he may say that on this account the subject is no concern of ours. But this is just the opposite of the divine intention in withholding the exact date. We know this from the Master himself. He said that because we do not know the exact time, it might be any time, and therefore we are to be ready and watching at all times.

Whatever may have been the date on the divine calendar, we know that we of this generation are closer to it than any that have lived before us. And if the hope of Christ's Second Coming has been an anchor to the faith of good people in years gone by, it should hold us stronger than ever it held them.

The Scriptures assure us that the coming of Christ is certain, but they also inform us that the time is imminent. Being imminent does not mean that it has always been fixedly near; it does imply always that it may be near.

A famous British preacher once addressed himself to each in a company of friends, saying, "Friend, do you believe Jesus will come tonight?" Taken aback by such a question, each friend in his turn answered, "No, I do not really expect Him tonight." Then the preacher solemnly quoted, "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

While we do not know the exact time of His coming, and must resist all temptation to "set dates," yet we are told in the Scriptures something about the conditions that will exist upon the earth at the time of His coming, and by a thoughtful observation of these signs, we may hope to avoid becoming children of the night; for by these we should be able to tell the approximate time of His coming. By the signs of the times we may know that His coming is near at hand, even as observers know by the budding of the fig tree that the summer is at hand.

a) Jesus tells us in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew that the time of His coming will be marked by the collapse of human governments. He says it will be a time of trouble among the nations, and a time when men's hearts shall fail them in that they shall not know, shall not even claim to know, what to do.

We do not care to speak in detail, and in times like these we should not permit ourselves to be critical, but thoughtful people everywhere must know that politics is in a bad way everywhere. The world has run its cycle politically. It started out with the absolute monarch, who, like Nimrod, held the power of life and death over his subjects, and ruled with an independent and iron hand. It then passed to the aristocracy, to the constitutional monarchy, and to the democracy. That is as far as it can go -- from one man to all men. All these forms have proved faulty, and we must now either start over, jump off the cliff into anarchy or go back to the God-rule which man rejected in Eden. Some think we will go on into anarchy. Let us hope we shall go back to Theocracy, the God-rule.

The world had run its cycle religiously when Jesus came the first time as Priest and Prophet. It has now run its cycle politically and it is time for Jesus the King to appear.

I called in the home of my new neighbor because I had heard there was sickness there. Not being at all acquainted, we allowed the conversation to lag for a time. It being national election year, the subject drifted easily to politics.

Cautiously my new neighbor said, "The common people cannot expect anything from the old Democratic Party. It was a good party in the days of Jefferson and Jackson, but it has sold out to the bosses and is now run to the advantage of the favored few. The common people have no stake in the success of that party."

I mused on the matter for a little time, and then replied, "I quite agree with you. No, the common people, of which certainly you and I are part, have no reason to expect any advantages from the Democratic Party."

My neighbor was silent for a decent moment that he might not appear insulting. Then he said, more cautiously than before, "And the old Republican Party, which was the people's party in the days of Abraham Lincoln, is sold out to the capitalists and is the tool of big business. A victory for this party would be of no consequence to the common people."

Here again I hesitated, and then said, "Well, I quite agree with you on this matter also." My neighbor was puzzled, for undoubtedly he had expected argument on one or the other of the propositions. After a little wait, and by this time suspecting the political creed of my new friend, I went on, "And there is no hope in the new Socialist Party. This party is made up of sore-headed Republicans and disgruntled Democrats, and the leaders are no better and no wiser than the groups from which they sprang. A stream cannot rise higher than its fountainhead, and there is really no hope for the common people in this new party."

Aroused to deep curiosity by now, my neighbor asked, "May I inquire as to what party you adhere?"

"I am very glad to tell you this," I replied. "I am a Theocrat."

The man was dazed and finally said, "I have been a student of politics and economics for a number of years, and I have to confess that I never even heard of this party before. Would you mind telling me about your platform and principal purpose?"

"I shall be very glad to tell you as much as I can," I answered. "The leaders of our party have discovered that politics in its various forms has broken down because it has not been able to find a leader who was both good enough and big enough to give the country and the world the kind of government that is needed. So we have bent our energies on the task of finding one to fill the place. And we are happy to announce that we have found Him and are now voting for Him in every election. We believe that when He is elected and inaugurated, He will find a way to straighten everything out and that we shall have an age of peace and prosperity in this country and in the world. Theocrats believe in the God-rule, and our hope is in the Second Coming of Christ, and we are glad to say that there are evidences that His coming draweth nigh, and that we shall have a regime that will satisfy the deepest desires and hopes of men."

After a brief pause, my neighbor asked, "What is going to become of these parties and of the governments of the world?"

"They are all destined to go to the junk-heap," I answered.

"But you do not appear to be agitated concerning this junking of parties and governments," said my neighbor. "What do you calculate to be doing when all this junking takes place?"

"I plan to be right and escape this wreck that is threatened; and when it is at its worst, I plan to be standing before the Son of man in the glory of His second advent."

My neighbor closed the conversation with the simple observation, "It must be very nice to possess such a hope as that."

It is nice to have such a hope, and with this in my breast, I look upon the wreck of nations about me, and yet rejoice that the day of the king's coming approaches apace, and in glad anticipation, I call out, "Amen! Even so come, Lord Jesus."

b) Jesus and His apostles asserted that the time of His coming would be marked by godlessness in the world and apostasy in the Church. Jesus himself said, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Paul said it would be a time when there would be the form of godliness in the Church accompanied with a denial of the power of godliness. Also it was said that men would love pleasure more than they love God, and that there would be indifference toward God and religion like the indifference of Noah's time.

These thoughts are painful, and we do not wish to dwell long upon them. He must be a hopeless compromiser who can fail to see in the world and in the Church all the things involved in these scriptural warnings. Backsliding and indifference are appalling. God has not failed, but men have failed God, and this dispensation threatens to finish in about the same way former dispensations have finished. God started man right in the garden of Eden; man finished by eating the forbidden fruit and being banished from the garden. God gave man another chance in Seth man finished by a deterioration that required a deep flood of waters to wash away its filth. God gave another chance in Noah and his family; man finished in the idolatry of the postdiluvian period. God gave another chance in Abraham and his family; man finished in the bondage of Egypt. God gave another chance in Moses and Exodus; man finished in the Babylonian captivity. God gave another chance in the return of Ezra and Nehemiah; man finished in the hollow hypocrisy of Phariseeism and sealed the fate of the old day by crucifying the Son of God upon a cross of wood. God has given another chance in this dispensation of the Holy Spirit, but man is going his own way, and it will be midnight in the world when the cry is made, "Behold) the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!" Yes, the lukewarm condition of the Church and the prevailing indifference of the world mark these as among the last days, and announce to us in loudest terms, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh!"

c) James points out (James 5:1-8) that the end times shall be characterized by extreme poverty and colossal riches. It is scarcely necessary to point out that the first "billionaires" of the world have arisen within the space covered by the memory of many now living. The rich men of the past could not have paid the income tax of our "captains of industry and finance. And yet with all these heaped up riches, our own land is cursed with poverty, and two-thirds of the people of the world seldom have enough to eat, and half of them sleep on the ground every night.

d) Paul marks out the breakdown of the family and home as another sign of the last days. Children are to be "disobedient to parents," and many are to be described as "without natural affection." With divorce on the increase, childless homes multiplying, and juvenile delinquency outstripping the figures of the worst prophecies, surely no one will say the times must wait for further deterioration before the end comes.

Conditions in the world, the Church, the home, in business and in social circles are all loud voices warning us that the end of the age is upon us. The world has been sick before; this time it is in the position of an old, worn-out man whose strength does not permit the application of remedies sufficiently strong to result in his recovery. This is the time to look for the coming of the Lord, and this is a hope that arises like a

rainbow on every storm cloud of the world's vision. Let us rejoice that the Lord cometh.

4. And now, at last, we come to the proposition of the purpose and manner of Christ's Second Coming. Actually two propositions are involved. But we state them as one because they are so closely associated.

We quote from I Thessalonians 4:13-18, "But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

While limiting ourselves to this one quotation, we call attention that there are many passages dealing with this subject, and we trust that you who are interested in the theme will not be content to pass without reading all that the blessed Book says on the subject. If you have read it all or think you have done so, read it all again. But from the passage before us, and from the other passages involved in the complete reading on the subject, we gather the following:

a) The manner of Christ's coming will be sudden, and by the great majority of men, unexpected. The occurrence is likened to lightning which flashes in the twinkling of an eye to its far destiny in the heavens. Christ's coming will be so globe-encircling as to seem to begin at every point at once. It will be midnight at one place on the earth, daybreak at another, and noonday at yet another when He shall appear (Luke 17:34-36).

b) The purpose of His coming is to gather out the holy living and resurrect the holy dead from earth and sea, reward all these with a part in the first resurrection, and bring them all to share with Him "the marriage supper of the Lamb," which is the initiation of the redeemed and glorified into the full joys of their heavenly estate.

c) Beyond His lightning-like appearing and the glorification of His Church, there are unfoldings of the divine plan that are interesting and appealing beyond measure. There is the return of Christ "with his church," after the marriage supper. There are the thousand years of peace. There are the great white throne judgment, and the ushering in of the timeless eternity beyond. All these constitute a field of prophetic study that is exceedingly rewarding, and, if Jesus tarries, at another time we hope to develop this thesis also. For the present we must let this mere mention suffice.

In our concluding words let us think a little of what the effect of the promise that all these things are to pass has been on others and should be on us.

I think I can see the influence of this blessed hope of the coming of the Lord on the early Church. First of all, it stirred the people to missionary passion and zeal and encouraged them to devote their money and earthly goods to the promotion of the gospel, for to those who expect the Lord to come the things of this world will soon be as though they were not. Poverty and riches matter little to one who expects soon to stand before his Lord. If He is to come soon, then little else matters than that we should spread the news of His salvation, and help gather out a people for His name. This should be the effect upon us today in even a greater measure than upon those of the First Century who cherished this blessed hope.

Then I think I can see that this blessed hope confirmed the saints in the midst of persecution and sufferings. They accounted themselves happy to suffer for Jesus; for they were taught that if they suffered with Him they should also reign with Him. When their backs were lashed, they counted it all joy. When they were pressed with poverty, they waited in patience for the Lord's coming. Should not we likewise find consolation in all our troubles in the fact that the day is far spent, and that Christ is at the door?

I know that the early Christians used the soon coming of the Lord as a basis for exhorting one another to be always holy in heart and in life. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (II Peter 3:11). And let us likewise know that only the "blessed and holy" are assured a part in the first resurrection. No matter how much we may learn about the Second Coming of Christ, all such knowledge will come to nought if we fail to meet Him at His coming with our hands clean and our hearts pure.

Individuals like John of Patmos and Paul in Nero's prison house took courage from the fact that the Lord would soon come and would change their mortal bodies into bodies like His own. John's own words were, "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. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth 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" (I John 3:1-2).

Jesus Christ is coming back to the world again in bodily presence like that wherein He went away from the top of the Mount of Olives. All signs indicate that His coming is near at hand, and the Lord himself taught us to be ready and watching always, lest His coming find us unprepared. The manner of His coming is sudden and universal, like the flashing of the lightning. The purpose of His coming is to take those living and dead who are ready to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and with this glorious occurrence to begin the closing acts of the ages of the world preparatory to the ushering in of the timeless eternity which is ahead.

The whole world of mankind may be pretty well included in two classes:(1) Those who are prepared for the Second Coming of Christ and are looking for His coming; and (2) Those who are not prepared for His coming and are not looking for Him to come. In which of these classes are you?

Are you prepared and watching for the coming of the Lord? If He should suddenly appear, would you be glad to hail Him? Are you so delivered from the world that if you should be on the housetop when Jesus comes, you would be content to go on off with Him to the marriage supper without so much as turning back to get your clothes? Are your treasures so fully in heaven and your hopes so fixed on Christ that you would not so much as look back, as did Lot's wife, if you should see the heavens suddenly light up with the glory of His presence? Do you wear the wedding garments so constantly that if the Master should come and find you in the field you would not need to go home for any adjustments whatsoever? When you hear His words, "Behold, I come quickly!" does your heart intuitively respond, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus"?

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