

The Lord's Second Coming

by John Nelson Darby

The Lord's second coming is connected with the Christian's life and ways, and is a new thing introduced into the earth, transforming the Christian's relationship with God and their walk in the world.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Hebrews 10:19

Topics: "The Second Coming of Christ", "Living in Expectation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of the Lord's Second Coming in the life of a Christian, illustrating how it transforms our relationship with God. He explains that through Christ's sacrifice, the veil was torn, allowing believers to enter into a direct relationship with God, a privilege not available before. Darby highlights that the anticipation of Christ's return should shape our conduct and spiritual growth, as it is tied to our hope and ultimate conformity to Christ's image. He encourages believers to live in the light of this hope, fostering holiness and readiness for the Lord's return. The sermon underscores that the Christian life is characterized by a constant expectation of Christ's coming, which influences our actions and faith.

Transcript

The coming of the Lord is connected itself with the whole life and ways of the Christian, and we will now look a little into this.

I turn to it not simply to bring proof of His coming, but to see the way in which it is connected with all the thoughts and with all the feelings of the Christian's life. Read the close of 1 Thessalonians 1.

The more we search into the scriptural history of Christianity, the more we shall see it is a totally new thing introduced into the earth. The coming of the Lord had been prophesied of, as we know, but that is a very different thing. The Son of God having come, everything is put upon an entirely new footing.

Thus, God never abode with Adam; He placed man in the garden of Eden, but He did not dwell there. It was no question of righteousness or of holiness. Adam was neither righteous nor holy, but he was innocent - a very different thing. He gained the knowledge of good and evil by eating the forbidden fruit. Then he was turned out of Paradise, and the world continued under probation, during even the time of Christ's life, up to the cross, to see whether the first man could be recovered or not, and only proving that he could not, that no means at God's disposal could recall man back to Him.

But the while, when God came and revealed Himself more directly in Israel, and set up something in the world, then there came out these two great facts, viz., that God did not come out to man, and man could not go in to God.

The veil was there, and God was behind the veil, and it was death to man to go near Him.

That was a solemn thing. If man kept God's law, he got a blessing, but still God did not come out to him. Once a year the high priest went in; the Holy Ghost thus signifying that the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest. And so we find that God did not come out, but declared Himself in thunderings and lightnings to alarm consciences at Sinai.

He sent the people a law, but He never came out to them Himself, and carefully shewed that man could not go to Him. Man had got away from God, and could not go in to God.

189 The very thing we have in Christianity is exactly the opposite. After it had been proved that man, as man, was irrecoverable, then God did His own work, and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, so that consequently we have now boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. God did come out in Christ, and Man, in Christ, has gone into the glory of God.

This is a total change in the footing and relationship of man with God.

Of course, when this is all declared, man is doubly guilty if he rejects it. It is no promise of something that should be, but it is the fact God has come out to man in grace, and Man has gone into the glory of God in righteousness.

This is altogether a totally new thing.

And this is where the Christian stands.

There is no going back to the tree of life in the garden, no attempting to meet responsibility, but it is the grace of God that bringeth salvation - a totally different thing.

While God came into the world as man (in Christ, I mean), He was totally alone; "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone."

It may be current teaching, that He was connecting Himself with man, that is, in humanity as man is, but it is utterly false. "Once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." It was morally the end of the world. And now that God's work of redemption has been accomplished, a Man is sitting down in His glory.

This is a totally new thing.

Until Christ was here, an obedient Man on earth, there had never been a man to whom heaven could be opened; but then it was; and the Holy Ghost as a dove came down, and God the Father owned Christ as Son; and then He stood entirely alone in this world. It was in grace, but still it was alone, until at the cross redemption was accomplished; and then He could say, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

The "old man" was rejected; and now, having accomplished His own work by Christ alone, God can have the veil rent, and heaven opened, and the Holy Ghost sent down upon those who believed.

It had been the Holy Ghost working in the creation. I believe in the immediate agency of God in everything in the world. Then Christ said, "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God." All that is true; but it was consequent upon the accomplishment of redemption that the Holy Ghost came at Pentecost. And this is Christianity. The Spirit was working in the world until then; but when Christ had perfectly accomplished redemption and Man was sitting on the right hand of God in righteousness, then the Holy Ghost could come down, and dwell in those who believe. And thus the living associations of the believer are all in heaven; "our conversation is in heaven."

190 Instead of God not coming out, He has come out; and instead of man not being allowed to go in, he has gone in. And the Holy Ghost is given to us that we may realise these things.

Redemption is accomplished, and, in spirit, we go in. We have the certainty that if we die before the Lord comes, we shall go to be with Him; that is all settled; but the purpose of God is that we should be conformed to the image of His Son in glory. We shall get that when He comes, and never till then. That is what is always set before us. Even as to our present walk in holiness, we are identified with Christ, but there is no perfection for the Christian at all but being in the same glory as the Son of God.

Our passage through this world is no part of God's purpose; it is part of God's way, but His purpose is simply to put us in Christ, and for us to be perfectly like Christ in the glory which He has as Man. Of course, He cannot communicate Godhead, though we are made partakers of the divine nature; but we are to be like Him in the glory into which He has entered.

This is the purpose of God.

So, in His way, He does lead us through the wilderness, with senses exercised to discern between good and evil.

If you look for a moment at Exodus 3, and also chapters 6 and 15, you will see there is no hint of the wilderness at all. It is from Egypt into Canaan at once. God takes us out of the flesh, and puts us in Christ in heaven. These things as to Israel are written for our admonition.

The wilderness formed no part of God's purposes for Israel. And so the Lord takes the poor thief straight to Paradise; he never had any wilderness at all. Habitually we do go, more or less, through the wilderness, but in Colossians 1, what is true of the thief is true of all Christians - not that we are without discipline or exercise; but it is, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" - made us meet - fit - all the Colossians, i.e., all Christians, though no doubt they may be, and they are, in different states of spirituality and the like. We ought to grow every day; but we are all meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, that is, we are fit for it. I dwell on this, because people say they are justified and are redeemed, but they are not fit.

191 "Partakers" is never connected with growth, I mean, never dependent on it. It is, "Who . . . hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

We are not yet there, as to our bodies, of course, but I have redemption, I am reconciled, I am in Christ.

And then He says, I have a great deal to do with you; you are My child, My heir, and I have made you fit to be with Me; but there is a great deal to teach you. You are to be the epistle of Christ in this world as you go through it. And that is another thing. Then we come to the ways of God.

We are made partakers of the Holy Ghost after believing, and we are called upon to walk in the Spirit as we live in the Spirit.

All these things are ordained before the world unto our glory; not without Christ, but in Christ; and Christ is now sitting at the right hand of God till His enemies are made His footstool. "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." The word "for ever" is not the common word that is used for eternity, though that thought is there; but the word means "uninterruptedly"; so that there is no one moment that I am not in Christ, perfected before God.

It is speaking of our standing and condition before God by His one offering, i.e., it is continued for ever without interruption. And so there is no more conscience of sins.

There is no more testing verse than that, as to whether we realise what redemption is; I mean, as to our having "no more conscience of sins."

If I go into God's presence through the rent vail, I cannot do so without finding a living Christ there sitting on God's right hand, a perpetual living witness; He who bore our sins is now living there, after He has put them all away.

I have the consciousness of sin within me, but not of sins. So often people see at the cross the way of forgiveness; but if you put them in God's presence before the judgment-seat of Christ, they are not at ease and rest of heart. Then how are they made the righteousness of God?

192 What is wanted is, the true personal knowledge and consciousness of faith that we are accepted in the Beloved. It belongs to all believers, though they may not yet have got hold of it clearly.

After the day of Pentecost you never find a person owned as a Christian that is not certain of his salvation. Such an one may be deeply exercised, but he is not owned as in the Christian state according to God. There is no such thing in the New Testament. Yet people are content to go dragging on in a low condition on the earth without the certainty of their salvation.

At the time of the Reformation they went a little too far in saying that justifying faith was the certainty of a person's own salvation, and that if anybody was not sure, he was not justified at all. It went too far, because it was faith about a known state; and it was condemned in the Council of Trent as the vain confidence of heretics. It was something about self, and not about Christ. What is wanted, is not knowledge only; a person may have everything in his head, but unless his heart and conscience are clear, he cannot be solidly looking for Christ

The apostle puts it all together, clearly enough, in Titus 2 "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." It is the grace that has appeared, "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

This gives us, in three words, the whole Christian character; soberly, i.e., self-restraint in everything; righteously, i.e., as towards other people; godly, i.e., as towards God. Then follows, "looking for that blessed hope." You must have salvation first, before you can really get the second, the blessed hope.

Well, I wanted to give the groundwork in that way Christ is sitting down because He has finished His work; and the Holy Ghost is come down that we may know it.

There are two things which we may well learn to distinguish; the having a settled consciousness of the affections of those with whom we have to do; and the brightness of hope which brings activity into the soul.

I get both in Christianity.

193 I know the Father loves me, as He loves the Lord Jesus; John 17. I dwell in that favour which is better than life. I stand in God's own righteousness accepted in the Beloved. This gives my place in the settled affections of those with whom I have to do. This gives me rest of heart.

And then I get the hope that leads me out in activity, for I am waiting for Christ to come and take me.

The soul is settled in its relationship with the Father, and we know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and then comes that which gives the energy and activity for running the race that is set before us - we are going to be perfectly like Christ when He comes and takes us to be with Himself.

These give the thread of the whole practical life of the Christian.

"Justified by faith, we have peace with God," perfect peace according to the value of Christ's blood, and of God's own nature in righteousness and holiness; and then we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

When you come to the wilderness, there you have hope in the midst of wilderness exercises. Redemption has brought you into the wilderness, not into Canaan; still you belong to Canaan, although you are not yet in the prepared place of glory. For that you must wait until Christ comes.

The apostle might reproach us as he did the Hebrews: "Ye have need that one teach you again"; while the Thessalonians had been taught but a month or so, and knew a good deal more about the battle than most of us, for they had cast away their idols.

The Son of God had come and had been rejected, and now we are in the world that has rejected Him, a world that seeth Him no more, and out of which the Thessalonians had been brought. But, with Christ in their hearts, they were waiting for God's Son from heaven. That is what you do not generally find now, but they were converted to that; not to that only, but to that. Now it is made a bit of particular knowledge for Christians; but according to Scripture our conversion is with that in view.

At the end of the next chapter, you will see something further: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"

All Paul's ministerial delights were connected with this.

Not until then would his heart be satisfied, as to this, because not till then would they get what Christ came to give them.

194 This might be special in a sense with Paul, but it is a real thing for us, too.

So the Lord Himself will then "see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." When? Not now, but when He has them all with Himself and like Himself in glory.

In the next chapter, the Lord's coming is connected with holiness: "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may

stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Where are we to see this? Down here? Not at all, but at the Lord's coming.

So that conversion, Paul's ministry, and holiness are each and all connected and identified with the Lord's return. This was to run like a thread through the whole framework of Christian thoughts and feelings. It teaches us how to walk, in looking for the glory. Responsibility is referred to Christ's appearing, not to the rapture.

Our calling is to glory with Christ, we are predestinated to be conformed to His image, and that is the time when Christ will see of the fruit of the travail of His soul; that is to be the measure of everything; there will be progress till then, and attainment in the sense of progress, but not yet full attainment. There must, of course, be the spirit of holiness here, because we are Christians. If we are looking for full attainment to be reached in this world, we shall come short of scriptural holiness; for we are to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

As to our conscience and our acceptance, "As he is, so are we in this world." But what lies before us is perfect conformity to Christ.

Turn to Ephesians 5, and there you find, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word," - that is the present thing He is doing - "that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." The washing now, refers to the "glorious" presently; the washing in time is according to the presenting in glory.

"With open [unveiled] face, beholding . . . the glory of the Lord" - no veil over His glory now - we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory," that is, into His likeness up there.

195 Take another passage: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God," 1 John 3. Now are we the sons of God - that is settled - "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. And every man that hath this hope in him [in Christ] purifieth himself, even as he is pure." I know I am going to be like Christ, and if I have this hope, I t purify myself now, as He is pure.

This is my standard of purifying as I go through the wilderness.

Paul had not two goals, one half-way, and the other coming on. With him it is, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." This side of that prize he knew no rest. That which Paul was running after was to be with Christ in glory. But that was not attained until he got there.

That for which we wait comes out distinctly in the end of the chapter: our body shall be changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body.

So with the Lord on the mount; the three disciples see Moses and Elias in the same glory as Christ.

Meanwhile, He has gone to prepare a place for us, and He says that He will come again and receive us unto Himself.

When it is a question of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, you see another thing. The Thessalonians had got hold of the idea so fully, and were so looking for Christ's coming, that if a person fell asleep, they thought he would not there to meet Christ at His coming; and that was a grand mistake. Paul would not have them to be ignorant about it; he comforts them with this, that God would bring such with Jesus.

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, such also that will rise again; and when the Lord comes in glory, God will bring them with Him.

And so, whether it is death, or holiness, or ministry, or conversion, all is connected with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

196 If you look at James, where he is comforting the oppressed people, he says, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."

It is not merely that the Lord would come, but also the present expectation of His coming; they were not to grudge one against another, for, "behold, the judge standeth before the door."

In another passage, the Lord classes the servant who puts off His coming - he does not deny it, mind - with the hypocrites.

It is this that keeps our souls in the consciousness that we do not belong to this world.

But, in Matthew 25, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom; this shews to what they had been particularly called. But "while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."

The expectation of the Bridegroom's coming, that is, of Christ's coming, was lost. All went to sleep, those with oil in their vessels as well as the rest. And they trimmed not their lamps, for people do not want lamps to sleep by. But at midnight the cry was made, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Their original calling was brought to light again by the Spirit of God, and then they begin to trim their lamps, and to see if they have really got oil in them, and so on.

It is not a matter of spiritual judgment, whether or not we are to look for the Lord; but it is linked up with all that characterises the Christian, instead of being just a bit of knowledge to be specially attained.

The Holy Ghost has put us into our relationships now, the purpose of God being that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. Meanwhile, we are to be as men that wait for their Lord, that when He comes and knocks, we may open to Him immediately. Are we watching for Christ?

Now that the world has rejected Him, it is not merely that we are sinners, there is more. Man was a sinner, and God turned him out of Paradise; and since then the world has been destroyed by a flood. It had been tested and tried, and last of all God sent His Son, but the world would not have Him. God Himself in the Person of His Son came into the world in grace, and the world turned Him out.

197 When you come to the world and its government, there are two things to be seen - prophecies, some partly accomplished, and others not; and there is also the sovereign grace that has taken sinners - God-haters in that sense - and put them in the same glory as God's own Son. That is the One who has loved us, and given Himself for us, and who has promised to come and take us to be with Himself.

Ques. Would it form part of the preaching of an evangelist to speak of the coming of Christ?

Yes. It may be in connection with the "appearing" to a poor world that is careless.

Ques. People think you mean the end of the world?

Perhaps so; but at the end of the world, Christ does not come at all. When the world comes to an end, at the judgment of the wicked dead, Christ sits on the great white throne, and the world flees from before His face. It is quite right to preach the Lord's coming clearly. The common doctrine of a general resurrection and judgment-seat upsets justification by faith; that is its effect upon souls, though, of course, grace is stronger than theories.

If my fate is to be settled at the day of judgment, and I cannot tell till then what it will be, and if we are to appear there all together to have this settled, how can I have present peace with God?

The resurrection of the saints is like Christ's resurrection - out from amongst the dead. When the Lord told the disciples not to speak of what they had seen until He was risen from among the dead, they began discussing what that meant. Martha, too, says, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." But "from among" was a new thing to them.

Death could not hold Christ, because He was the Son of God; but Christ's resurrection "up from among" the dead, of what is this a testimony? Of God's perfect acceptance of Christ and His work, and so of ours in Christ. He is the firstfruits; and afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.

But they are raised in glory; how then are you going to judge people who are in glory? It is true we shall all give account of ourselves, but we shall give it when we are already in glory, perfectly like the Judge, conformed to the image of God's Son.

198 I do not know anything that has done more mischief to souls - I do not speak of heresies - than this notion of a general resurrection, and of all going together to be judged, in the common sense of it, because it leaves everything unsettled till the day of judgment.

Ques. It is very contrary to what is generally taught and understood?

That may be; but faith looks through to the end; and if this world is a dark world to me, and there is a candle at the other end, I see the candle. What I may have to go through to get to it is another thing. Still, it is there.

Ques. What about, "His wife hath made herself ready"?

The time was come, and she was in glory, and so that is when she comes out with Him. It is connected with her responsibility - hath made herself ready. Responsibility is always connected with the desert passage, never with heaven.

I am in Christ, that is a fact. I could not say, if I were in Dublin, I would do so-and-so, for I am here; but to say, if I were in London would be all right, because I am not there. And by the Holy Ghost I know that I am in Christ: "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."

There is no "if" at all. But when I come to go through the wilderness, then I get "ifs." It is God's way, but not His purpose, to bring us, through redemption, into all the circumstances of the wilderness and its exercises. So in Colossians, it is, "If ye continue." If the Christian does not continue, he will not be there; that may prove that he has no real faith, but that is another question. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know

them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish." There we have a promise. "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." What would be the good of telling them that in heaven where there is no danger? But here, there is danger, and so with the danger I get the promise that God will keep me. It is when I am redeemed that I am brought into this place of constant dependence. In itself, the fact of salvation has nothing to do with dependence. Christ has finished the work of salvation, and God has accepted it.

But I have a positive promise from God that I shall be kept by His power. Why kept? Because if He did not keep me, I should tumble in the wilderness; so I am in need of constant dependence, and of the infallible faithfulness of God along the entire road. And this you will find running all through Scripture. "God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no," Deut. 8.

199 Their clothes did not wax old; nothing failed them; the faithfulness of God was there for everything. So the priesthood of Christ comes in, and there is grace to help in time of need. That we find in Hebrews, but not exactly communion with Christ, nor the Father's name. Neither is He a Priest for sins, except in a special sense on the great day of atonement (chap. 2:17); it is always for help.

It all brings out the incessant, loving care of God.

There is an immense amount for us to learn. It is a great thing to learn that He counts the very hairs of our heads.

Advocacy is when we fail, and is for the restoration of communion.

On the cross He was the offering priest as well as the Victim.

Ques. Is He not high priest for our sins now?

No, and for the simplest possible reason that He has already put them all away.

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