

The Call of the Bridegroom

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the imminent return of Christ and the call of the Bridegroom, and encourages believers to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

Scripture: John 13:1

Topics: "Christ's Return", "Eternal Hope"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the two great discourses delivered by Jesus before His death, highlighting the distinct differences between them. The 'Olivet discourse' focuses on Israel and the events leading up to Christ's return to establish His earthly kingdom, while the discourse in the upper room emphasizes the blessings flowing from His death and resurrection for the heavenly company. Chafer emphasizes the importance of understanding the imminent, personal, premillennial return of Christ, as revealed in Scripture, and the moral effect this hope should have on believers in living godly lives. The call of the Bridegroom for His bride is presented as a mystery, distinct from Christ's visible return to earth, and believers are encouraged to eagerly await His return with love and anticipation.

Transcript

IMMEDIATELY before His death Jesus delivered two great discourses which served to culminate His teaching ministry. Though spoken at about the same time and to the same disciples there is the widest difference between them. One, "The Olivet discourse" (Mt. xxiv. 4 - xxv. 49, and Lk. xxi. 20-24), was spoken from the very Mount of Olives where His feet shall stand when He returns to the earth (Zech. xiv. 4). In this discourse only His own nation Israel is in view, and His instruction to them is of the events leading up to, and accompanying, His coming to the world in mighty judgments as King of kings and Lord of lords, and of the establishment, at that time, of the long delayed earthly kingdom. These great events had been before the eyes of prophets and seers from Moses to Christ, and will fulfill all covenants and promises for Israel including a world-wide Gentile blessing through them. This discourse naturally appears in the Gospel of the King, and completes the testimony committed to Matthew.

The other closing discourse was given in the upper room and continued on the way to the garden (Jno. xiii. 1 - xvii. 26). The subjects He presents to the disciples are those blessings that flow out of His death and resurrection; for here He speaks as though His cross was an accomplished fact. Thus the disciples are not now addressed as of the nation Israel; but as of the heavenly company who, by that cross, have come into heavenly union with Him (Jno. xiv. 20). Matthew records that John the Baptist announced Jesus

as King: John records that he announced Jesus as "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin, of the world." Matthew has a nation in view, with its covenanted earthly kingdom: John has the individual in view, with the heavenly glory of the bride of Christ. In Matthew's Gospel the coming judgments and sorrows of earth with the following earthly glory are in view. In John's presentation the sacrificial atoning judgments of the cross and the heavenly glory are in view. In the one, the return of the King to the earth is presented: in the other, the call of the Bridegroom when He shall receive His bride from the earth into the mansion He has gone to prepare is recorded. One discourse is addressed to and concerns Israel in the earth: the other is addressed to and concerns the born-again ones of all nations who, by His grace, are already citizens of heaven. Each writer draws from the doings and teachings of Christ the particular materials required to present the picture divinely assigned to him.

No event, unless it be the cross, is more emphasized in Scripture than the personal return of Christ to this earth. This truth occupies at least one verse in twenty of the New Testament, and is not only the subject of the last words of Jesus to His own in the world, but is the subject of the closing words and promise of the Bible itself. John, who had been with Jesus on earth and in the glory, who had heard His promise to return again and who, in the Spirit, had witnessed those representations of the age-closing scenes as recorded in the Revelation, could say in answer to that final promise of Christ: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." John certainly had all the facts before him, and if any child of God does not find the same response in his heart to the last promise of Jesus would it not be well to discover the unhappy cause?

The general fact of a return of Christ has, of necessity, found its way into all evangelical creeds; but individual readers who have hesitated to believe the literal promises of unfulfilled prophecy, have invented numerous interpretations of this body of Scripture. As must follow, every false interpretation utterly fails, at some point or points, to adequately deal with all the facts of revelation. If Christ's promised return was fulfilled at Pentecost by the coming of the Spirit then the two Persons of the Godhead are confused and every New Testament writer is found to be a false witness in that they each, writing long after Pentecost, presented the return of Christ as a then future event.

If His return is said to be fulfilled in the death of a believer, because of the fact that he then goes to be with Christ, there is a sad ignoring of every predicted event accompanying that return and a hopeless confusion of what the Scriptures call the "last enemy" and "the blessed hope." If His return is represented as fulfilled by the results of evangelization, on the ground that Christ is said to come into the life of every saved one, then a process has been substituted for that which in Scripture is said to be visible, sudden and personal, and every recorded circumstance and event accompanying His return has been ignored, or forgotten.

If He is to return only after a millennium of a saved and sanctified earth, ushered in by the present form of Christian ministry and service, the numerous injunctions to be personally "watching," "waiting," "looking" and "loving" could well be taken as irony in the light of the fact that even a tendency toward such a man-made millennium is not discernible after two thousand years of God's dealings in grace with the children of men. If Satan, "loosed a little season" (Rev. xx. 3), can utterly spoil a full ripened millennium, what human agency can hope to establish that millennium while Satan still usurps the throne of this world (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4)?

Scripture plainly predicts the sudden and violent imprisonment of that mighty age-ruler by the power of the returning Christ before any universal kingdom blessings can be secured on the earth (Rev. xix. 11 - xx. 3; 2 Thess. ii. 1-10). It is not at all a question of whether the Holy Spirit, now present in the world, could bind

Satan and set up a kingdom in the earth, nor is it belittling to the work of the Spirit to point out that this is not the revealed purpose: rather, the whole question turns, and turns only, on what the revealed purpose of God is, which purpose must be determined in the light of every promise and event contained in the whole body of Scripture.

A system of interpretation which does not account for every detail of revelation fails, in so far as it does not so account, to expose the meaning of the Word of God. If the same liberty were taken in the interpretation of redemptive truth that is often taken in prophetic truth, the doors would be instantly flung open to every soul-destroying heresy of the present time.

The thoughtful reader of Scripture has observed that the passages usually supposed to relate to the return of Christ naturally gather into two classes, or groups, totally different as to time, purpose and events. In one class of passages it is not represented that Christ will appear on the earth, or to any but His own redeemed people. These passages affirm that at this appearing the bodies of sleeping saints will come forth from the graves and, together with saints living on the earth, are to be caught up to meet Him in the air and thus are to be forever with the Lord. In the other class of passages, His return is to the earth, visibly, suddenly, in power and great glory, accompanied with the national judgments and followed by the setting up of His kingdom in the earth. In this group of prophecies the

Lord is seen to bring a mighty army of redeemed with Him and they are to share with Him His kingly reign.

Very much must yet be fulfilled, according to Scripture, before the events connected with the visible return of Christ to the earth are to occur (2 Thess. ii. 1-10). In contradistinction, however, no prophecy remains unfulfilled which in its order precedes the coming into the air to call for His own (1 Thess. iv. 13-18), other than that the outgathered bride shall have made herself ready; and, therefore, that coming to call His own is the next event in the prophetic program. Of that day and hour no man could know; but all generations of saints have been instructed to "watch," "wait," "look," "love" and "be ready." These words are descriptive of the attitude of heart of a bride awaiting the return of the one on whom all her life and love is centered. Especially would this be true if she knew not the day nor hour when he would return.

This call of the Bridegroom for His bride is an event that should never have been considered even as an aspect of the second coming of Christ. It is a mystery, or sacred secret, and, as such, is but a part of the whole mystery of the body and bride of Christ. It is only one item in the program of the out-calling and final gathering of the church. No revelation had been given to the Old Testament prophets of that great age purpose, and certainly no hint had been made as to the manner in which she would be taken out of the earth into her heavenly bliss. On the other hand, the return of Christ to the earth in power and glory was seen by all the prophets from Moses to Christ. They beheld it as the consummation of all earthly blessings. The one, revealed only when the time for explaining the mystery was ripe, concerns a redeemed and heavenly people as to the manner of their final departure from this world: the other, foreseen by all the prophets, concerns Israel and the nations as to their judgments and final positions in a kingdom on the earth.

Of the first event it is written: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51. 52). This mystery, that not all should die, but that some should be changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump," was never before revealed. So again in 1 Thess. iv. 13-18. "But I would not have you to be 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."

The dead in Christ will be raised first and the living saints caught up, and together they shall all go on in clouds to meet the Lord in the air (see Gen. v. 24; 2 Kings ii. 11) and to be forever with the Lord.

In the two passages quoted above, Paul, by the use of the pronoun "we," has five times included himself as possibly to be among the living ones at the time of the Lord's call for His bride. This precludes a doubt as to the belief of the great Apostle in the imminent, personal, premillennial return of Christ. This hope was evidently his greatest motive for true character and service. So it has been to the great missionaries and soulwinners since his day.

A great moral effect was divinely intended in the promise of the imminent appearing of Christ. The church that has lost hope to the extent that she could say, "My Lord delayeth his coming," has soon been drunk with the wine of this world. It was this blessed expectation that was intended to teach 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" (Titus ii. 12, 13). Only an apostate age could doubt this promise, Peter tells us: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4).

The eternal blessings of seeing His face and the reunion with loved ones gone before are by this hope but a moment removed. It is therefore the "blessed hope" and the comforting hope. We did not turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for death; but rather to "wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). How natural for one who has really come to love Him to also "love his appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 8) above all the things of earth. The sweetest experiences foreshadowed in the bridal unions of the Old Testament and those experiences which are anticipated in the New Testament await that unannounced, signless and timeless summons to be forever at rest in His bosom of love: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jno. xiv. 1-3).

" I know not when the Lord will come,Or at what hour He may appear.Whether at midnight, or at morn,Or at what season of the year.I only know that He is near,And that His voice I soon shall hear."

If the pastor is mourning over the cold, unspiritual condition of his church, let him consider the warm, glowing love and devoted service that has always accompanied the right understanding of this "blessed hope." If the church is given to carelessness and worldliness, let him recall that for this there has been provided the "purifying hope." As under-shepherds shall we not go down on our faces before God and there question whether we have been giving these dependent ones their "meat in due season"?

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