

Paul's Prophetic View of the Second Advent of Christ.

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal holiness and faithfulness in preparation for the second coming of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 24:37, 1 Corinthians 15:51, Philippians 3:20, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 10:31, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 21:1

Topics: "Second Coming", "Personal Holiness"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about Paul's prophetic view of the second advent of Christ, cautioning against unbelief and spiritual pride. He highlights the sufferings of early Christians and the glorious hope of immortality that sustained them. Reade emphasizes the importance of valuing the Gospel above earthly treasures, the certainty of Christ's return, and the need for personal holiness in light of the impending judgment. He urges believers to persevere in faith, guard against spiritual pride, and continue in the truth of the Gospel to receive the promised eternal glory.

Transcript

PAUL'S PROPHETIC VIEW OF THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST.

HIS CAUTIONS AGAINST UNBELIEF AND SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

While drawing the features of our fallen race, the inspired apostle dipped his pencil in the darkest colors-but, when consoling the suffering Church, he, like the ancient prophets, presented to the eye of faith the brightest views of future glory.

Wrapped in mystic vision, Paul saw the blessedness of heaven, and rejoiced in the hope of glory soon to be revealed. With sacred delight he proclaimed the divine purpose and grace, which are now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. It was this glorious hope, this hope full of immortality, this blessed, this lively hope, yes, this good hope through grace, which supported the persecuted saints, and enabled them to take joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven, a better, and an enduring substance.

O! how cheering to the wearied traveler, is the rest of home; how delightful to the captive, is the air of freedom. Though painful, it will yet be profitable to reflect upon those trials which the early Christians so nobly underwent for Jesus sake.

Cyprian, the venerable bishop of Carthage, thus describes the sufferings of the primitive believers: "They were scourged, and beaten, and racked, and roasted, and their flesh pulled off with burning pincers, beheaded with swords, and run through with spears, more instruments of torment being many times used the man at once than there were limbs and members of his body; they were robbed and plundered, chained and imprisoned, thrown to wild beasts, and burned at the stake. And when their persecutors had exhausted all their old methods of execution, they studied and thought of more. Nor did they only vary, but repeat the torments; and where one ended, another began. They sometimes tortured them without killing them, and added this cruelty to all the rest, to stop them in their journey to heaven. Many who were importunately desirous of death, were so tortured, that they might not die- they were purposely kept upon the rack, that they might die by gradually, that their pains might be lingering, and their sense of them without intermission; they gave no intervals, or times of respite, unless any of them chanced to give them the slip and expire in the midst of torments. All which did but render their faith and patience more illustrious, and make them more earnestly long for heaven. They tired out their tormentors, and overcame the sharpest weapons of execution, and smiled at the busy officers that were raking in their wounds; and when their flesh was wearied, their faith was unconquerable. The multitude beheld with admiration these heavenly conflicts, and stood astonished to hear the servants of Christ in the midst of all this, with an unshaken mind, making a free and bold confession of Him, destitute of any external support, but armed with a divine power, and defending themselves with the shield of faith."

Can it be a matter of wonder, that the blood of the martyrs should have been the seed of the Church. To animate believers under all their sufferings, the blessed Paul lighted up their path to the lions and to the stake, by the fullest of assurances of their eternal glory.

Oh! that we, like them, may value the Gospel above every earthly treasure. The Gospel speaks pardon and peace through the blood of Jesus; the Gospel unfolds to our view a day of wonders; a day, which, like the pillar of the cloud, will give light to the children of God, while his enemies shall be enveloped in darkness. The glories of that day, when Christ shall appear in his majesty to judge the living and dead, were revealed to the favored Apostle in all their grandeur.

When writing to the Church of Corinth he was permitted to draw up the tremendous veil which hides futurity from our view- But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed. It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies. And then we who are living will be transformed so that we will never die. For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die. When this happens--when our perishable earthly bodies have been transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die--then at last the Scriptures will come true: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

With equal sublimity he makes known these wonders to the church at Thessalonica, "I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will

rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. So comfort and encourage each other with these words."

To the Philippians he also gave this animating hope, "But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything, everywhere."

What a revelation of grace and mercy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." A glorious brightness will illumine the morning of their resurrection, when they shall be called to swell the train of the all-conquering Messiah. But oh! how awful will be the gloom which awaits the resurrection of the wicked! If there be a glare of light, darting through the darkness of that momentous period, it will be the light of vengeance, emanating from the insulted Majesty of heaven, "for our God is a consuming fire." To the wilful abusers of divine mercy, there will then remain nothing but judgment and fiery indignation. The despisers of godliness will find, when too late, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Jesus has graciously forewarned us of the suddenness of his approach. "When the Son of Man returns, the world will be like the people were in Noah's day. In those days before the flood, the people enjoyed banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat and the flood came to destroy them all. And the world will be as it was in the days of Lot. People went about their daily business--eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and building-- until the morning Lot left Sodom. Then fire and burning sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. Yes, it will be just like this right up to the hour when the Son of Man returns."

Taught by the Spirit of Christ, Paul thus warns the churches, "The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night; for when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

The deluge came with fury poured out, sweeping away whole nations, until all the shrieks and groans of drowning millions were silenced in the deep. Equally overwhelming will be the second coming of Christ; "For the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe."

The earth, with all its idolized possessions, shall then perish in the general conflagration. At the very time, when worldly minds are in eager pursuit after wealth and honor- the day of the Lord will come. It will come as a snare upon all the inhabitants of the earth- it will come as a thief in the night. But oh! who shall abide, its coming, when the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and everything in them will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be exposed to judgment." Carnal men may ridicule the warning voice, but He, who cannot lie, has proclaimed, through His Word, this awakening truth; that, "God has also commanded that the heavens and the earth will be consumed by fire on the day of judgment, when ungodly people will perish."

Death and destruction will be the end of sin and sinners. But God is love. Every truth of His Gospel, when received in faith, has a sanctifying influence on the heart. These sublime revelations of the second coming

of Christ, were therefore employed by the Apostle as powerful excitements to the duty of personal holiness; "it is high time to awake out of sleep; the night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men." Peter, like his beloved brother, exhorted believers to the practice of universal holiness, "Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living! You should look forward to that day and hurry it along--the day when God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames."

Will the Church of Christ suffer loss by this awful devastation? Far otherwise. The sinner's downfall will be the day of the believer's exaltation. How cheering to every child of God, is the assurance and exhortation of Peter, "But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world where everyone is right with God. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life."

Oh! that the Eternal Spirit may awaken our solicitude and quicken our steps to the only Ark of safety. Jesus is the sinner's refuge from the coming storm. Abiding in him by faith, we shall be quiet from fear of evil, amid the melting elements, and a burning world. When the wicked are calling upon the rocks and hills to cover them, and to hide them from the face of Him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, the righteous shall lift up their heads with joy; for He, who summons the world to judgment, is their friend and Savior.

To the Apostles, the second coming of Christ was, therefore, a period of joyful expectation. When they would support believers under the pressure of affliction, they did not draw their consolation chiefly from the prospect of death, as being the termination of their bodily sufferings; but from the glorious appearing of their God and Savior, who would re-animate their sleeping dust, and complete their glorification in his eternal kingdom. They calmly reposed all their hopes upon the faithfulness of Jehovah; and knowing in whom they had believed, they could strengthen the weary pilgrim, by the sweetest assurance of final rest.

Filled with these bright expectations of future glory, founded on the promises of Jesus, the happy Paul animated the Philippian converts- "Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. I always pray for you, and I make my requests with a heart full of joy because you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again. It is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a very special place in my heart. We have shared together the blessings of God, both when I was in prison and when I was out, defending the truth and telling others the Good News."

Being well acquainted with the innate evils of the heart, his Epistles are models for ministerial faithfulness; in which, to guard us against false security and presumption, caution is blended with encouragement- warnings with promises- and fear with hope.

Many are the hindrances, and many the snares which beset us on our way to glory. The corruption of the heart- the subtlety of Satan- the power of temptation- the fear of man- the allurements of the world- are continually, in one way or other, opposing our journey heavenward. But Christ is our Savior. His wisdom is

engaged to guide us, and his power to uphold and defend us.

Happy then is the man, whom grace has united to the Friend of sinners. Because Jesus lives he shall live also. While in the body he lives by faith in the blood of Jesus- by faith in the power of Jesus- by faith in the promise of Jesus; and when out of the body, his perfect spirit shall forever dwell with Jesus.

Drawing back from God is drawing onwards to perdition. The further we depart from God the nearer we approach to ruin. How important then is the grace of perseverance. The distinguishing mark of true believers consist in their abiding in Christ, and evidencing that union by the fruitfulness of their lives. Mere outward profession is no certain indication of inward piety, neither is a long continued profession any safeguard against declension or final apostasy. Who would have thought, that Solomon, the wisest of men, who built so magnificent a temple for the worship of Jehovah, and who prayed so fervently at its dedication, would, in his old age, have been turned away after other gods, and been led even to build high places for the abomination of the Heathen! Surely he who trusts his own heart is a fool.

After many years of promise, the heart may discover its insincerity, should God be pleased to bring the professor of his religion into the furnace, either of prosperity or of adversity. Demas fell through the love of this present world. The stony ground hearer withered away, beneath the scorching beams of persecution. Nothing but the grace of God can keep us from falling, either partially or finally. Can we then be surprised, that the well instructed Paul, who preached the Gospel of the grace of God with such unmixed purity, should guard its possessors against the wiles of Satan, and the remaining corruption of their hearts?

Having explained to the Corinthians the spiritual privileges of the Israelites, he tells them- "Yet after all this, God was not pleased with most of them, and he destroyed them in the wilderness. These events happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did or worship idols as some of them did. All these events happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us, who live at the time when this age is drawing to a close. If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin." Then, for their confidence in the faithfulness of their Redeemer, he adds, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

In like manner the Apostle showed the Hebrew converts the danger of unbelief, as exemplified in their own history- "With whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with those who had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they should not enter into his rest, but to those who believed not? So we see that they could not enter in, because of unbelief."

With close self-application, he then presses this fact on their consciences- "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Let us labor to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief- for there remains a rest to the people of God."

Lest an undue fear of losing heaven should arise in their hearts from the awful examples which he had brought before them, and so cause their hands to wax feeble, and their feet to grow weary; how delightfully does he compose their apprehensions by a view of the tenderness and the all-sufficiency of Christ- "That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our

gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it." "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence, steadfast unto the end."

What a wonderful display of mercy and judgment is also revealed to us in the eleventh chapter to the Romans. The Apostle himself was so overpowered by the view of the divine sovereignty, that, like a person standing on the brink of some vast abyss, he exclaimed, "Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

The Jews, as a people, having rejected their Messiah, were to be cut off because of unbelief; while the Gentiles, embracing the offers of mercy through faith in the blood of Christ, should be grafted into the good olive tree- the Church of God. But, lest this grace should be abused through spiritual pride, the Apostle, with his wonted fidelity, guards them against an evil so offensive to God- "But you must be careful not to brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. Remember, you are just a branch, not the root. "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me." Yes, but remember--those branches, the Jews, were broken off because they didn't believe God, and you are there because you do believe. Don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. For if God did not spare the branches he put there in the first place, he won't spare you either."

Is then the promise made to Abraham come utterly to an end? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Can his truth fail? Paul answers these questions- "I want you to understand this mystery, dear friends, so that you will not feel proud and start bragging. Some of the Jews have hard hearts, but this will last only until the complete number of Gentiles comes to Christ. And so all Israel will be saved. As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

To the disputer of this word, who impiously cavils at the dispensations of Jehovah, and measures His dealings by the scanty lines of human reason, we would say with Zophar- "Can you solve the mysteries of God? Can you discover everything there is to know about the Almighty? Such knowledge is higher than the heavens--but who are you? It is deeper than the underworld--what can you know in comparison to him? It is broader than the earth and wider than the sea."

True humility is the basis of excellence in the Christian character. The humble believer will not dare to arraign the eternal God before the bar of his finite understanding. His language and feelings are those of the Psalmist, "Righteous are you, O Lord, and upright are your judgments;" while with the lowly minded apostle he asks with profound admiration, "For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back? For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen."

True humility is ever accompanied by a patient continuance in well-doing. How important to all who desire an interest in those blessings which shall terminate in eternal glory, are the words which Jesus spoke to the Jews who followed him- "If you continue in my words, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

To continue in the Word of Christ, we must first know it; and in order to know it, we must diligently study it. But as a distinguishing state of heart is required to the right understanding of the Word of Christ, which we have not naturally, we must be earnest in prayer for the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit. As newborn babes we must desire the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby. In the spirit of children, we

must receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls. With humility and teachableness we must sit at the feet of Jesus, and listen to his voice.

But, to receive rightly the word of God, we must abide in the doctrine of Christ. We must continue steadfast in the profession of the Truth. We must not be carried about by every wind of doctrine, but have our hearts established, and our hopes rooted and built up in Christ. We must walk with holy perseverance in the precepts of the Gospel, not running amiss like a broken bow, nor drawing back unto perdition; but going on with progressive step from grace to grace, until we appear before God in glory. If we are enabled, through the power of the Holy Spirit, thus to study, receive, and abide in the Word of Christ, evidencing our union to Jesus by the fruits of righteousness, we shall be privileged to enjoy the sweet promises of the Gospel; for our Lord has declared, "Then are you my disciples indeed."

How expressive is the word, 'indeed'. It implies, that all who seem to be disciples, are not disciples indeed. This was the case with some of those Jews who surrounded our Savior when he made this declaration- "They were offended at his doctrine, and walked no more with him."

Are no such instances of defection to be found among us? Do we never see some, who, having run well for a season, turn back again into the world? When Jesus appeals to our affection, as he did to that of his disciples, "Will you also go away?" can we reply with Peter's sincerity, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Stability in the truth of the Gospel, and continuance in well doing, are essentially requisite if we would be disciples indeed. To the persevering believer, Jesus has promised eternal glory, "He who endures unto the end shall be saved. To him who overcomes, will I grant to sit with me in my throne. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

The question, then, for self-examination is not so much what we were, as what we are. If we are now cold, indifferent, and worldly, it matters not how zealous we might once have been. Our former state of zeal and active exertion can yield us no present profit, except as it thunders in our ears, "Remember from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

The tinsel Christian may gain the admiration of those who regard the outward appearance, but he will never be approved of by Him who looks at the heart. O! may we never substitute knowledge for grace, profession for principle, words for practice, nor zeal for love.

When God teaches, he teaches to profit; and the effect of his teaching is visible to all, by the renewal of the heart unto holiness. Hence our Lord does not say merely, "You shall know the truth;" but, as if he intended particularly to guard his followers against resting in barren speculations, he subjoins, "And the truth shall make you free."

The truth, received into the heart, makes the believer free, from the condemning power of the law, from the pollution of sin, from the tyranny of Satan, from the fascinations of the world, from the fear of death, from the torments of hell.

Learn then, O follower of the lowly Savior, to bear contempt with cheerfulness, when contempt is poured upon you because you are a disciple indeed, and boldly confess your faith and hope in the atonement of Jesus.

It is easy, in a circle of Christian friends, to admire humility, and to talk upon the duty of bearing reproach with patience; but when we find ourselves really despised- when we are set at nothing, where we

expected to be honored- then is the time when pride and mortified self-love will rankle in our bosom, and when our utmost vigilance will be required to overcome these evil workings of the flesh.

At seasons like these, let us look unto Jesus. Let us consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds. Let us remember what he suffered for our sakes, though Lord of all, that we may be abased at the sight of ourselves, and lie in self-abhorrence at the foot of the cross. And for our encouragement to persevere, let us never forget his own gracious words, "Whoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven."

How blessed then is the Christian indeed. He follows the Lord fully; his every power is devoted to his service. He knows the truth through the teaching of the Spirit; he receives the truth in the simplicity of a little child; he continues in the truth, amid errors of every name; and abiding therein, firm unto the end, he obtains, at length, through the merits of his Savior, that crown of glory which fades not away.

O that we may be Christians indeed; the meek and lowly followers of the Lamb, bearing his image in humility, love, and purity, until we each resemble him in his perfection of beauty, when we shall see him as he is, in his eternal kingdom.

"And while on him we gaze,

And while his glorious voice we hear,

Our spirits are, all eye, all ear,

And silence speaks his praise.

Oh! might I die, that awe to prove,

That bliss of pure ecstatic love

Before the Great Three One!

To dwell in his eternal joy,

To find an ever sweet employ

In songs around the throne."

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