

Hope in a Hopeless World

by William MacDonald

The coming of the Lord is a source of hope and comfort for the believer, bringing a glorified body, face-to-face meeting with the Savior, and reunion with loved ones.

Duration: 35:13

Scripture: John 9:4, John 14:1-5, Philippians 4:5

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of unity and avoiding quarrels over non-essential matters. He encourages the audience to consider the question, 'What difference will it make a hundred years from today?' as a way to settle disputes and focus on what truly matters. The preacher also highlights the hope of the coming of the Lord as a motivation for unity and a powerful appeal in preaching the gospel. He warns that when the Lord comes, it will be too late to serve Him or invest in the diligent study of the Word of God. The sermon also addresses the serious family problems and societal issues of the present time, but offers hope for believers in the promises of God.

Transcript

Could we turn in our Bibles on this last Lord's Day of the year to John chapter 14. John chapter 14. We're just going to read a few verses there.

John 14 verse 1. Let not your heart be troubled. You 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. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also.

And where I go, you know, and the way you know. Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

What a wonderful message of comfort from the lips of the Lord Jesus for his people. One of these days, the church is going to say, stop the world, I'm getting off. And 1987 could be the year.

Actually, it could be 86. It could still be 86. It could be 1987.

We live in a hopeless world, but for the child of God, there's hope. And the Bible speaks of it as a blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Think with me of the world we live in today.

A world of cancer. Think of the bodies that are wracked with pain as a result of cancer, of heart disease, of Alzheimer's disease, all the ravages of age. Think, if you will, of the flu that has struck here at Sun Valley and many other places.

I think of people today lying in hospital beds with all the IVs, all the shots, all the monitors, and all the rest. But dear friends, for the believer, there is hope. Jesus is coming again.

We live in a world of fear because of the nuclear threat. Literally, men's hearts are failing them for fear. International tensions on every hand.

We live in a world where man, with all his wisdom, knows how to make sophisticated weapons of war, but he does not know how to make peace. Well, that's amazing, isn't it? It says that in Romans 1, the way of peace have they not known. Why is that? Why is it that man does not know how to make peace? Well, that's the kind of world we live in today, but I want to tell you, there's a bright light on the horizon.

It's the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is at hand. Mike, in his prayer this morning, spoke of the family problems that are with us in the world today.

I don't suppose there has ever been a time when there have been such serious family problems. The divorces, the broken homes, children cast adrift. Think of the parents today that are brokenhearted over rebellious sons and daughters living it up on drugs and alcohol.

Think of the violence and the corruption that characterize our age. Really, in a sense, humanly speaking, the situation is hopeless. But for the believer, the future is as bright as the promises of God.

You can hardly turn on the radio without hearing of plane crashes. Tragedy. I was listening to the news last night.

There wasn't any good news. It was all sad. You could almost hear the sadness in the voices of the announcers.

Automobile accidents shattering life and limbs. Tragedy literally stalking the population. But isn't it wonderful? A Christian can look up and know that his redemption draws nigh.

We've just been through the Christmas season, and for most of us, it's been a joyous season, remembering the Savior's birth. But for many people in the world today, it's the saddest time of year. The time of extreme loneliness.

A time when the suicide rate soars. A time of separations. And a time of fears.

But it's a time of great comfort for God's children. And really, this is the hope that buoys the child of God in a world like this. The sure knowledge that the Lord Jesus is coming again.

And I should mention, I think I've mentioned before, that when the word hope is used in the New Testament, it doesn't carry with it any sort of indefiniteness. Hope in the Bible is absolutely sure because it's based upon the promise of God. And God's word is the surest thing in the universe.

So when we speak of the hope of the coming of the Lord, it's just as sure as if it already happened. What will the coming of the Lord mean? For the child of God, it'll mean a glorified body, and you and I cannot comprehend today how wonderful that will be. A body forever free from pain, sorrow, sickness, suffering, and death.

A body like the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus. A body that will be forever free from the ills and ailments of this life. The coming of the Lord will mean seeing the Savior face to face.

That's wonderful, isn't it? The Babe of Bethlehem, but more importantly, the man of Calvary. What will it be? That first glimpse of his face. To stand before the eternal lover of our souls.

To fall at his feet. That the story repeats and the lover of sinners adore. Our puny mind cannot take in today what that will mean.

The face-to-face meeting with the Savior. It will mean reunion with loved ones who have gone on before. And in fact, it will mean meeting the redeemed of all the ages, with a wonderful faculty of instant recognition.

That's marvelous, isn't it? Are there some people you'd like to meet? A lot that I'd like to meet. The prophets and sages of the Old Testament period? You mean you're actually going to meet them and talk to them? Yes, that's what it says. Many shall come from... You mean little me? Yes, that's what it says.

Many shall come from the east and the west and the north and the south and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the Father. And if you sit down with them, you're going to fellowship with them, you're going to talk with them. That's wonderful.

You have some family members who've gone on before you? You'll meet them. You say, well, I recognize them? Well, it says that. It says we shall know even as we are known.

We're certainly not going to know less in heaven than we know on earth, are we? I think that some people have the idea in heaven we'll just be nameless shadows floating around, but of course nothing could be further from the truth. We will be there in tangible bodies of flesh and bones, and we will be recognizable. Just as Moses and Elijah were recognizable on the Mount of Transfiguration.

You see, we'll have abilities that we don't have today. And we'll meet people of our own generation who've gone on before us. Won't it be interesting to meet Jim Elliott and Ed McCulley and Pete Fleming and those fellows who gave their lives for the Lord down in Ecuador? Won't it be interesting to meet George Mueller and Hudson Taylor and have them review God's dealings in grace with them? Won't it be interesting to see behind the scenes that God's working in your own life? How he arranged events to bring you to Christ and his marvelous preserving care down through the years, which I think we often take for granted.

The very fact that we're sitting here today means that we're really miracles of God's preservation and nothing less. So heaven will be meeting the redeemed of all the ages and fellowshipping with those whom we have known before who have died in Christ. It will mean home.

That's a nice word, isn't it? A lot of people have been coming home for the holidays. A lot of wonderful embraces at the airport. But this will be a home like no other home.

It's a home where no sin or defilement will ever enter. A home where there's no night, no war, no sorrow, and no death. What else will the coming of the Lord mean? It will mean that all our material possessions will instantly lose their value.

Does that distress you? That lovely home? Those cars? The jewelry? The clothing? The stereo? Things that men and women prize so highly right now, they'll all be left behind. In fact, if you and I are children of God today, the value of our material possessions is declining all the time. You wouldn't think so in California.

You'd say, oh no, my real estate's going up. No, really, it's going down. The closer we get to the coming of the Lord Jesus, the less value our material possessions have.

And when he comes, they'll be worth nothing to us. They'll completely lose their value. That's why Jesus said, make friends to yourselves of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitation.

The coming of the Lord will mean the end of any opportunity to obey the Lord in certain areas. There are certain things we can do in obedience to the Lord down here that we will never be able to do again. You say, like what? Well, first, it's like baptism.

The Lord Jesus instituted baptism as a way in which we publicly identify ourselves with him. When a person is saved, he goes forth into the waters of baptism. He's immersed in the waters, and what he's saying is, when Christ died, he died for me.

I died with him. When Christ was buried, he was buried for me. I was buried with him.

And when he rose again from the dead, he was all of my representative and my substitute, and I identified myself with him in all of that. There will be no baptism in heaven. It's just one of those things that you and I can do down here.

We'll never be able to do up there. Another is the Lord's Supper. It's really amazing how little the organized church thinks of the Lord's Supper.

Some think it's important enough to observe it once a year. In many, many cases, it's just tacked on to a preaching service, almost an appendix. They call the preaching service the worship service.

I don't know what they call the Lord's Supper. The Lord gave it to his people and said, Stop and eat this bread and drink this cup. You do so for the Lord's death until he comes.

It's something we can do down here we won't be able to do up there. I think of that sometimes when I'm tempted to stay home, maybe a sick headache or something like that. I won't always have this privilege of doing this.

I better take advantage of it while I have it. It's interesting to me that we sitting here today are closer to the coming of the Lord than any other generation in the history of the world, aren't we? I can remember as a boy, servants of the Lord coming and preaching about the coming of the Lord. And my, when they talked about it, it just seemed as if it was going to happen momentarily.

And I believe it is imminent, but I know today that we're closer to it than ever before. And as far as the word of God is concerned, it could happen today. We believe that there's no prophecy in the scripture that

has to be fulfilled before he comes for his church.

People say, well, doesn't the gospel have to go out into all the world before he comes? Well, first of all, that refers to his coming to reign on the earth, not the rapture. And secondly, in a sense, the gospel is going out from all the earth today. There's no place in the world today where you couldn't hear the gospel if you had the proper radio receiver.

There is a worldwide proclamation of the gospel today. And there are many indications that the coming of the Lord may be very, very near. For instance, all the events in connection with the nation of Israel.

When I think of the nearness of the coming of the Lord, my mind immediately goes to Israel. I realize that in my generation, the nation of Israel was reformed. An inconspicuous nation.

Did you know that Israel would sit five times into the state of California? Well, you know that the city of Jerusalem, which in some ways is a focus point of interest in the Middle East, is one mile square. The old city of Jerusalem. I'm speaking of the city of Jerusalem with the walls around it.

One mile square. That city will yet be the capital of the world. The Lord Jesus takes the scepter of universal dominion and reigns over the earth.

Events in the Middle East tell us that the coming of the Lord is near. Distress among nations. Earthquakes, violence, corruption on every hand.

Now, when the Bible talks about prophetic events, it never does so to tickle our imaginations, to tickle our fancy. Every declaration in the word of God has moral imperatives connected with it. In other words, when the Lord tells us something, there's always something practical for our lives in connection with it.

And I think that's what we should think about on the last Lord's Day of 1986. What practical effect should the truth of the coming of the Lord have on my life? First of all, it should have a purifying influence. It says, everyone that has this hopes that on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

The more I contemplate, meditate on the coming of the Lord, the more I should want my life to be a holy life. We live in a corrupt society. I'm amazed how in business today, even with Christians, there are tremendous opportunities and temptations to cheat.

To do things that are ethically wrong, to increase the profit. And unfortunately, many, many Christians are giving in to the temptation. It would be a good thing at the end of this year, the start of the new year, to say, by the grace of God, I'd rather die than lie.

By the grace of God, I'll be an embodied conscience. I will not do this accursed thing. If I really believe in the coming of the Lord, the coming of the Lord is imminent.

It will make me want to pray and work for the salvation of the law. Relatives, friends, and neighbors. What a solemn thing it is to be lost, isn't it? To be without God, to be without Christ, to be without hope in the world.

If I really love my neighbor as myself, I'll want to share my Savior with him. The opportunity will soon be over forever. The coming of the Lord should give me the motivation to persevere in spite of persecutions and trials and difficulties in life.

A lot of God's people are going through deep waters today. And some are just giving up. Some are saying, what's the use? They just collapse under the weight of it all.

But there's no need for that. The hope of the coming of the Lord should inspire us to persevere, to press on. I think some people have the mistaken idea that when they get saved, everything's going to be rosy.

Everything's going to be easy. There won't be any difficulties or trials in life. The Lord never promised that.

He never promised that it would get easier. He promised that it would get better. There's the path of the justice as the dawning light that shines more and more unto the perfect day.

And that's true. Even if you do have trials and difficulties in life, it still gets better. Walking with the Lord.

If I really believe that the coming of the Lord is near, I think it will cause me to reduce my holdings of material things. I don't know if I told you this this month, but you know, a young sister in our assembly came to me recently and she handed me an envelope. It had a family heirloom in it.

A brooch, a gold brooch. It had a ring with a diamond in it. This family is working very hard just to make ends meet.

They don't have any surplus at all. And she said, Would you please convert this into cash? She said, I want to send some of it to Zaire and some of it to Spain. And I was able to take it out here to Walnut Creek to Bill McConnell.

And I can't tell you the joy that came to that young sister to see her jewelry converted into cash and going to the mission field. That's it. I think people think that's a burden to do that.

I think it's one of the greatest joys in life. You don't get any pleasure out of money you have salted away, do you? You get fears out of it. You don't get any joy out of it.

What a joy it is to see our material things used in the work of the Lord for the salvation of souls. I think if I really believe in the coming of the Lord, if I really believe that if He came today, everything I have would be worthless to me, I'd want to invest in His work. If I really believe in the coming of the Lord, I think there may be some apologies I might want to make or even restitution I might want to make.

It would be terrible to meet Him and not have a clean slate, wouldn't it? And yet I know the stubborn resistance that there is in the human heart and how we fight against going to another person and saying, I was wrong. I'm really sorry, and I want you to forgive me. It's hard, isn't it? I'm working with some people right now, and that's just what has to be done.

Fighting it. It almost seems they'd rather die than say those words. They're Christians, and there are cases in life where we've wronged people and they've suffered loss as a result of it.

And to do the right thing, we'd have to make restitution to them. If I really believe that the coming of the Lord is near, I think I'd want to make that restitution. It's a wonderful thing in life when there's nobody in the world you can't go up to and shake hands with them and be cordial with them.

No strained relations at all. Incidentally, the holier a person is, the easier it is to get along with them. Did you ever know that? I think if I really believe the Lord is coming, it will inspire me to diligent service for Him.

A lot of people have good intentions of serving the Lord, but they keep putting it off. Pretty soon, their life is gone. I don't know if I ever told you, but years ago, Robert Little was speaking up in the assembly in Evanston, and a man came to him, an agent man, and he said, Dear Brother Little, I'd just give anything if I knew the Bible the way you know it.

And dear Brother Little looked at the man and at the wrinkles in his face and his white hair, and he said, Brother, it's too late. That will be true when the Lord comes through. It'll be too late.

Too late to serve Him down here. Too late to invest in the diligent study of the Word of God. Jesus said, I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day.

The night cometh, but no man can work. But I would say to any here, if you feel the Spirit of God working in your heart and you want to step out in service for the Lord, don't put it off. If you're a Christian woman here today and you have a husband, and that's what he wants to do, don't hold him back.

You'll be sorry if you did. I think the coming of the Lord should keep us in an attitude of expectation. We should be looking for Him.

We should wake up in the morning and think, Perhaps today. That's pleasing to the Lord when He finds His people looking for Him. John said, And now little children abide in Him, that when He shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

I think the hope of the coming of the Lord should make us bold to confess Him before men. It's amazing how bold people can be in other causes and how timid for the name of Jesus, isn't it? People are bold with regard to their political alliances. You can ask people their opinion on almost any subject in the world and they'll come out with it.

But we live in a world where the name of Jesus is banned. It's unpopular. And His people are often intimidated to speak forth that precious name.

The hope of the coming of the Lord should be an encouragement to moderation. You find this in Philippians chapter 4 verse 5 and it's interesting the different words that are used there. Philippians chapter 4 verse 5. It says, Well, it says in this version, Some versions say forbearance.

One version says sweet reasonableness. What does it mean? Well, it means we live in a world where people are often at loggerheads with one another. Even among Christians.

It's amazing the petty things that cause strife and division. I'm not speaking about fundamentals of the faith now. I'm speaking about non-essentials.

And what this verse is saying, Look, the Lord is about ready to appear and you're quarreling over those silly little non-essentials. It's ridiculous. Let your sweet reasonableness be known to all men.

When I'm tempted to engage in that sort of thing, I ask myself the question, What difference will it make 100 years from today? And I think that settles a lot of problems for me. What difference will it make? That would refer to quarrels in the home, wouldn't it? How you squeeze the toothpaste tube. Not the grand essentials of life.

The hope of the coming of the Lord really should be a motivation for unity. The Lord is at hand. I've told the story before of some men that were cast adrift in a lifeboat.

They had rations. They had a water supply. But day after day, the food went down.

The water supply went down. Pretty soon they started fighting with one another. They were ready to throw one another over the side.

There wasn't enough for everything. But then somebody spotted a ship and the disunity was all gone. As one man, they cheered the oncoming rescue.

They were instantly united. The Lord is at hand. I think the coming of the Lord should encourage an otherworldly attitude among his people.

Actually, the state of spirituality in the evangelical world today is very, very low. And even among ourselves, it's often possible to go to the breaking of bread and get up afterwards and talk about the latest football scores. It says, If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

That's it. Set your affections on things above. The coming of the Lord should be a reminder of coming review and reward.

Every day I should remind myself I'm going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. I'm going to give an account. The whole record of service of Christ is going to be brought out.

What will be important then? And I think finally, the coming of the Lord should be a powerful appeal in presenting the gospel. How many here in the meeting today were spoken to in your unsaved days by the fact that the Lord might come and it became you would be left behind? Raise your hand. Powerful appeal in preaching the gospel.

Dear friends, it's still as true as it was when you heard it the first time. And if there should be those here today who are not decided Christians, who cannot give a reason for the hope that is in them, we would encourage you. Look, Jesus is coming.

Trust him today and go with him. Reject him and be left behind for judgment. He that believeth not is condemned already.

He hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Shall we pray? Father, we do thank you for the hope that gleams before us, the hope of the coming of the Lord. Nothing will ever truly completely satisfy our souls until we see his face and are transformed into his likeness.

We pray that the hope of his coming might have its desired effect in our lives. Lord, that we might not go away from this meeting commenting on the message, but that we might go away saying, I must do something about this. I will do something about this.

Deliver us from being sermon tasters, Lord. Deliver us from being connoisseurs of evangelical messages. We pray that we might receive with meekness the grafted word and be changed by it.

We do pray for the enslaved today, Lord, what a solemn thing to be without Christ in one's sins and on the way to hell. We pray that you'll speak by the voice of the Holy Spirit convicting of sin and turning men and women to Christ. We ask in his worthy name, amen.

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