

Christ's Advent, Part IV- The Return of the Christ

Call to Worship: Psalm 2

Hymn #727- *When the Roll is Called Up Yonder*

1st Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2

Hymn #582- *My Hope is Built*

2nd Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Hymn #678- *Christ Shall Have Dominion*

Introduction

Having already considered the “foretelling of the Christ,” the “coming of the Christ,” and the “death and resurrection of the Christ,” this morning, we conclude this brief advent series by considering the “return of the Christ.” And to this end (and perhaps very appropriately so, as we prepare to enter the New Year), we will cast our eyes ahead, toward what remains in the completion of God’s glorious plan of redemption, when the Christ returns to consummate His glorious kingdom.

It is my prayer, brethren, for all of us, that God, by His Spirit, would so move in our hearts this morning, in consideration of what is certainly to come in the near future, that we might live in the light of Christ’s glory, more so, in the year 2020, than we have ever done up to the present.

I. The Context

Continuing where he left off in his Gospel, Luke begins Acts, following the resurrection of Christ, and just prior to His ascension to the right hand of God. And we are told in verse 3, that following the resurrection of Christ, the Lord spent forty additional days with His disciples, instructing them about the Kingdom of God, as they would now be commissioned to lay the foundation of the church (And it is worth noting, as well, that the Lord, following His resurrection, was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, many of whom were still alive when Paul recorded this witness for us in 1 Corinthians 15:6). And so, as our Lord was preparing for His ascension, He left His Apostles with these final instructions to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit should come down to baptize and empower them unto their Apostolic ministry. And then, they were to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth. And God, by the Holy Spirit, would

authenticate their preaching with miraculous signs and wonders, so that the foundation of the church would be firmly laid.

Finally, there on the Mount of Olives; the very place where the Lord could reflect upon His recent anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord bid them farewell, and ascended up into heaven right before their very eyes. And as the Apostles stood there, gazing up into the sky, we are told that two men in white apparel (presumably angelic beings), who were standing next to them, had told them that the Lord Jesus, who had just ascended, would return again, in the same way that He had just left them. Once the great work of building His church is complete, He would return again, and bring this world to its necessary end, in keeping with the divine will.

Having considered then, the context of this text, let us now move on to ponder, in greater detail, the return of Christ, toward which, we still look, with eager anticipation.

II. The Return of the Christ

Where then do we stand in the present? We yet await our Lord's return. The Apostles have successfully laid the foundation of the church, in the face of horrendous opposition and persecution. And the gospel has been spreading throughout the entire world since then, and continues to do so, in the present. And within the next five years or so, it is believed that there will be some Scriptures translated into every known language in the world.

All of this is going on, in the present. And brethren, we need to be aware of this, and we need to be actively involved in this, and we need to conduct life in this church, planted here in Merrick unto the glory of Christ, with this understanding ever present in the forefront of our minds. We are not called to live the American Dream. Yes, we have been blessed abundantly in our country, with freedoms and enjoyments which the world has never known before. But, such things don't define life. Our lives must ever be lived out in the broader context of what God has been doing in the building of His church, until His Son returns to consummate His Kingdom. We have to think "big picture," brethren. We have to think "Kingdom of God," daily, and that is the worldview which must govern how we live and act daily. If we lose sight of this; and it is so, so easy to do so, in our present culture, then we've lost sight of everything that means anything in this life.

From a spiritual standpoint (and this must and will affect us physically), we are living at the “bound for glory” bus stop, awaiting the return of our God and King. And with Noah, we must both, prepare our family for that coming journey, while calling others into the ark of Christ, who yet remain lost in this fallen world. But, unlike Noah, we can expect greater results! For, the New Covenant kingdom of God has arrived, and the glorious Gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection on behalf of sinners, is to be proclaimed to all nations. And what then do we anticipate just up ahead?

1) The glorious union of the universal church of Christ, made up of all believers of all times, who have shared the same faith of Abraham, in the same Christ, foretold in the promise given to Adam and Eve right after the fall.

Those who have already died (whose bodies temporarily sleep, but whose souls are now present with the Lord), will meet together in the air, with those who yet remain alive when our Lord returns. There will be a gathering together of all saints, from all times, with Christ, when He returns. And we will all share in the new resurrection of the body. Those who have already died will experience a reunion with their new, glorified bodies, and those who are still alive, will be immediately transformed into a glorious, incorruptible state! [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]

And brethren, we will be declared innocent at the throne of judgment. And the Lord Jesus Christ will look upon us, in love. We will see the One who has so wondrously delivered and preserved us. And His brow will not be bent toward us! And we will be welcomed into His glorious heaven, forever, where there is no pain or sorrow or weeping or death or corruption or evil, or even the remotest chance of sin entering in. And there, we will dwell with God and Christ, forever! Can you imagine that! Forever! And this brief hiccup of a life will fade off into a distant past. What glorious plans does God have for us there? We don’t know. But, the same God who had designed this world, good and amazing, has that all in His plan book. And there will never be a dull moment. We will see dimensions and wondrous things and a glory that is indescribable in our present state! We will forever grow in our understanding of God, always learning, always awed, always having our joy filled to capacity, but never arriving or plateauing at a grasp of the fullness of His infinite glory. You think you know God now! I can’t fathom the greatness of a God who has done all of this! And yet, His glory infinitely exceeds the highest

heavens! We are going to see the Creator and Father of eternity, brethren! That's where we are heading, right now! Chew on that!

2) But, the reality of Christ's coming does not bring with it, such a joyful experience for most. Indeed, those who are not united to Christ by faith; those who have not bowed the knee to Him, here in this short life, will become the objects of His fierce wrath forever. He will gather His saints together, but He will destroy and purify this world by fire. And all who are alive, who do not know Him; and all who have already died under His condemnation, will be cast alive; consciously alive, into the lake of fire that is never quenched. And their worm will not die. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. There will be the pain of a ruined and broken conscience, full of eternal regret, and the felt experience of fire and brimstone; unending agony and terror. It is the very antithesis of the joy that will be experienced in heaven.

And all for what? To enjoy a flicker of fading, unfulfilling lusts in this life? What an absolute travesty and terror beyond all terrors! To be caught faithless and apart from Christ, when He returns to judge this world! The Scriptures describe this horrifying scene by stating that all unbelievers will wish the mountains could fall on them and prevent them from enduring the fierce wrath of God. They will wish that they had never been born. What a dreadful reality! And it is a reality! You see, that's the thing. This isn't a movie or a bad dream, where you can just wake up and say, "Whew, I'm glad that wasn't real." This is the real deal, friends! There will be eternal regret, and there will be no turning back. There are no second chances. You can't undo God's justice, and Christ's sacrifice is only effectual for this life. It has no redemptive power beyond the grave, nor was it meant to have such power. The grave is the point of no return, for all of us.

This is our perspective in redemptive history, where we stand and await the time of Christ's return. And just like the time of Noah, many will live as if it will never happen. But, it did then, and it will happen again. And we all must be ready. And this is not to mention the fact that even if Christ doesn't return during your life time, you will most certainly die. And the time of your death may be sooner than you think. It is certain. It is not that far away, even for the youngest of us. But, it may even be sooner than you realize. Death takes thousands by surprise every day.

III. Summing it All Up

We can sum up the entirety of the matter this way, then. History as a whole does not center upon our piecing together of events in some purposeless fashion. History is the unfolding of God's great and glorious plan of redemption, where He is about the business of glorifying His own worthy Name. And He must and will succeed.

In the beginning, God existed eternally, before a single thing was ever created. And then, at some point, God created this world good, and everything in it. And the world that He had created good, had fallen in Adam, our first father, bringing a curse upon the entire world and our human race. And right from the outset, God had a plan to redeem a people out of this fallen world, in the Christ. And the Christ was foretold, right there, from the beginning, just after the fall. And the Christ entered into this world in the fullness of the times, in keeping with God's divine will. And the Christ died and was resurrected on the third day, accomplishing redemption for His people. And He ascended to the right hand of the Father, declaring that He would soon return, following the completion of the building of His church. And the church has been built, and continues to be built, as the Good News of His redemptive work continues to be proclaimed throughout the whole world. Sinners, who repent of their sins, and believe into this Christ, are reconciled to God and freely granted eternal life in Christ. And every single person in this entire world stands in either one of two places; either presently condemned in Adam, or presently justified and redeemed in Christ. And when Christ returns, the redeemed will experience the resurrection of the body, and they will live forever with Christ, and with the people of God, in heaven. And those who are not in Christ, will also experience a resurrection of the body, but unto eternal condemnation in hell.

Friends, if I could somehow say this in some sanctified sense: This is the summation of everything important that is wrapped up in this existence. Now, you can factor in a lot of other trimmings and distractions, but when you peel everything down to the core of what counts, this is it. And so, the only question that remains is, where do you stand?

IV. Concluding Words

Brethren, 2020 is upon us, and it might be a good time for us to take an inventory of our lives. It might be a good thing to ask the question, “What has my walk with Christ looked like, in the year 2019, which itself, has just breezed right on by. We are reminded again, that, even as our Lord had ascended to heaven in the presence of His watching disciples, He will, likewise, descend again to the earth. And He will close out this world, as we presently know it. And nothing material will mean anything then.

Let us be ready, with our lamps filled with oil, busy about the work of our Heavenly Father, building His church, edifying one another, and seeking out those who are presently damned, with the only power that can rescue and resurrect them; the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

And, those of you who are outside of Christ, know that you are, as you now stand, presently under the wrath of God, and should His patience run out, He will call you out of this world and into eternal judgment. Please, don’t die in your sins. Plead with God to save you through the shed blood of Christ; submit to Christ as your Lord now, and embrace Him as your only Savior, before it is too late! Die, *in* Christ, with Christ as your advocate and not as your Judge!

Amen!!!

Benediction:

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. - Revelation 22:12-17