

“Jesus Will Come Again”

May 7, 2023

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Have you ever had the experience of looking forward to something, perhaps a big event, a holiday, a vacation, or an accomplishment of some kind? Of course, you have. Even if it’s just looking forward to Christmas or a birthday and getting gifts, you’ve looked forward to something. And then, when that something comes and goes, how do you feel? Sometimes you feel disappointed. Other times you may feel depressed. I remember feeling that way when I was a senior in high school. Every year I was in the high school musical, which was performed in March. Every year I put in a lot of time rehearsing and even building the set. And then when the performances were over, I felt sad. I think part of the sadness was because I wasn’t spending all that time with friends and classmates. But I also felt letdown because there wasn’t anything else to look forward to. I thought I would be able to enjoy having performed the lead role my senior year. I thought I would enjoy receiving some accolades. But, instead, I experienced what is called the letdown effect.

I wonder if Jesus’ first followers felt that way. When Jesus came the first time, they were thinking that the long-awaited Messiah, the anointed king of Israel who would make everything right had come. Now Israel’s enemies would be defeated. Now the Roman Empire would be sent packing. Now the whole world would be set aright. But that didn’t happen.

When Jesus came the first time, he came to die for sin. As Jesus said, in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹ He didn’t come to put an end to all evil. He didn’t come to be a conquering king who destroyed all his enemies. If this confuses some people today, it certainly confused his disciples.

When Jesus told his disciples that he would die, they didn’t understand why. Peter said to Jesus, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (Matt. 16:22). They thought he would be the Messiah, the promised king of Israel, not a sacrifice. They didn’t understand how the Messiah could die while also defeat his enemies. Furthermore, Jesus told them that he would go away to a place where they couldn’t go (John 13:33, 36–36). The disciples couldn’t understand why Jesus would die and then go away.

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

To understand why the disciples were confused, you have to know something about the Old Testament promises regarding the Messiah, the anointed one of God who would come and make all things right. (Messiah simply means “anointed one.” The Greek word for Messiah is Christ, which is a title of Jesus, not his last name.) The Israelites knew that someone would come and defeat Satan (Gen. 3:15). They knew that a descendant of Abraham would secure blessings for the whole world (Gen. 12:1–3). They knew that someone from the tribe of Judah would rule over the nations (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17). They knew that a descendant of David, the great king, would be that ruler (2 Sam. 7:12–16). They thought that when that king came, he would establish a kingdom of peace and righteousness. At that time, the Spirit would be poured out on God’s people and the earth would be restored. They thought this would happen all at once.

We can see why they thought this would happen if we look at some of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Consider Isaiah 9:6–7:

- ⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Here, we see that a child will be born, and he will be called “Mighty God” and “Prince of Peace.” (You may wonder why this passage can refer to the Messiah, Jesus, as “Everlasting Father.” Obviously, Jesus isn’t God the Father. But in the Old Testament, there are times when Yahweh is likened to a father who cares for his people.²) The government will be on his shoulders, he will reign, and he will bring peace, justice, and righteousness. But right now we don’t see a lot of justice and peace.

² Ps. 103:13; Isa. 22:21; 63:16; 64:8.

Let's look at one more similar passage. This is Isaiah 11:1–10. This passage refers to someone who comes from the line of Jesse, King David's father. This again is about the Messiah, and we know this is really about Jesus.

- 1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
- 2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
- 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
- 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
- 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

- 6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
- 7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
- 9 They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Once again, we have a picture of someone who will bring justice. His words will bring judgment (v. 4). He will bring about a new world of peace. This is illustrated by a wolf lying down with a lamb, and a leopard lying down with a goat (v. 6). Even an infant will be able to play near snakes (v. 8). No one will harm or destroy, and the whole earth will be full of the knowledge of God (v.

9). Obviously, we don't live in a world like that. Nor do we yet live in a world where all the nations flock to Jesus (v. 10).³

It seems that the Israelites didn't know that the Messiah would come twice. Yet, as I said earlier, the first time Jesus came, he died for sin. He also rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. The second time Jesus comes, he will put an end to all evil. Why did God make such a plan? I think there are two good reasons. One, God wanted the world to hear about what Jesus did. God was glorified when Jesus died on the cross, and he wanted the nations to hear about the Messiah. In other words, God wanted the gospel message to be proclaimed throughout the world. But if Jesus put an end to evil then, there would have been judgment followed by a new creation, where there is no more marriage and procreation. And that gets us to the second reason why Jesus didn't put an end to evil at his first coming. The second reason is that if he put an end to all evil the first time around, then there wouldn't be time for anyone else to repent and put their faith in him, and God wants people to do that (2 Pet. 3:9). And if Jesus put an end to human history as we know it two thousand years ago, you and I would never be born. So, we should be glad that Jesus didn't do that.

All of this means that when Jesus came the first time, he inaugurated his kingdom. Jesus' kingdom is real and present now, and if you're a Christian, you're part of it already. But obviously not everyone is part of that kingdom yet. There are many who don't realize Jesus is the ruler of the universe. So, we live in the time of the "already, but not yet"—Jesus' kingdom is already here, but the whole world doesn't realize this yet. People still rebel against the King. The earth is not yet full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. But one day it will be, when Jesus returns.

So, that answers one question regarding Jesus and his kingdom of justice and peace. But there are many other questions related to his second coming. I don't have time to answer every question and look at every text that relates to his return, but I want to address some of the major questions. Therefore, I'll ask and answer a few important questions concerning Jesus' second coming.

The first question that a lot of people want to know is, when is Jesus coming back? The answer is pretty simple. We don't know. I don't know. You don't know. The guy on TV who is

³ Though, of course, people throughout the world are coming to faith in Jesus. This indicates a partial fulfillment of this passage.

sure he knows doesn't know. I believe that the overall teaching of the New Testament is that Jesus' return will come unexpectedly. Jesus said that his coming would be like a thief in the night (Matt. 24:42–44; also 1 Thess. 5:1–3). The thief doesn't announce exactly when he's coming. So, we must be prepared. We prepare by having a right relationship with Jesus. Some people put off turning away from their sin and putting their trust in Jesus. They figure that's something they can do later, when it's more convenient, when the timing is better. But Jesus may return before then. Or he may return two thousand years from now. We don't know. Still, we could die at any moment. Accidents happen; people die suddenly and unexpectedly.

Jesus did say this in Mathew 24:36–44:

³⁶“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴²Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jesus said that his coming would be like the flood in the days of Noah. Noah and his family were prepared. Noah listened to God and he built the ark. But everyone else didn't believe that something cataclysmic was coming. They went on about their lives. The people who were not on the ark were taken away by the flood. That is how it will be when Jesus returns. The people who are taken in verses 40 and 41 are those who are swept away in judgment. It will be too late for some people to put their faith in Jesus.

Again, we don't know when Jesus will return. It could be today. It would be thousands of years from now. People in every generation have thought that Jesus would return in their lifetime. We shouldn't speculate about it. If we live for Jesus today and every day, then we'll be prepared.

Another question people have is, how will Jesus return? I'm not sure that the Bible tells us a lot of specific information regarding how Jesus will come. Remember, the Israelites had the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, before Jesus came the first time. In the Old Testament there

are many prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah. The prophets taught that he would be a descendant of David born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Yet when Jesus came, many Jews did not believe he was the Messiah. They couldn't imagine a descendant of David who was also a carpenter's son who lived in a small town (Matt. 13:55). They couldn't imagine a Messiah who didn't free the Jewish people from the Roman Empire's occupation of the Promised Land. If the first coming of Jesus was surprising, we might expect that the second coming is also surprising.

We do know that will return in bodily form and in glory. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he went up in a cloud. The disciples quite understandably stood in awe, staring up even after Jesus disappeared. Two angels said to them, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). When Jesus returns, everyone will see him. Revelation 1:7 says, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen." Those who denied Jesus will mourn because judgment is coming for them. Everyone will know who Jesus is when he returns, but that doesn't mean everyone will repent. In Revelation, we see that many people continue to reject God even as he pours out judgment on them (Rev. 9:20–21; 16:9, 11). What this tells us is that when Jesus returns, the whole world will know. There will be no missing it.

Here's another major question: What will Jesus do when he returns? Jesus will do many things. One major thing he will do is judge people. Those who rejected him will be cast into hell, while those who are God's people will be rewarded. Their salvation will be complete. We see this clearly in Matthew 25. In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46), Jesus will divide everyone who has ever lived into two camps. Those who responded properly to the gospel by receiving Jesus' disciples, "the least of these my brothers," will be rewarded. To those people, the sheep, Jesus will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). To those who have rejected the gospel, brought to them by Jesus' disciples, Jesus will say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41).

When Jesus returns, he will deliver his people from "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). God's wrath will be poured out on those who have rejected him, those who continue worshipping false gods, who continue living life on their own terms instead of coming to God. That may seem strange if you're not a Christian. But the truth is we were made to worship. And we all worship

something. If we don't worship the true God, we'll worship a false god. Idols aren't just little statues. They're anything that we ascribe ultimate worth to. If we love and cherish anything or anyone more than anything else, we are worshiping that thing or that person. An idol could be money or power, entertainment and convenience or a relationship, even an ideology. The apostle Paul, in Colossians 3:5–6, says to Christians,

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

In John 3:36, we are told, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

When Jesus comes, he will complete the salvation process of his people. There are passages in the New Testament that say that Christians are already saved (Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). There are passages that say we are in the process of being saved (1 Cor. 1:18). And there are passages that say that we will be saved in the future (1 Thess. 5:8; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5). When we first come to believe in Jesus, we are declared innocent of our sin. We are justified. Throughout the rest of our lives, we should grow to become more like Jesus. We should love God more, and love others more. We should grow in our trust of God and our obedience to him. That's called sanctification, the process of becoming more holy.⁴ When Jesus appears, we will be given resurrected bodies, bodies that cannot die and cannot sin. That's called glorification. So, when Jesus returns, he will complete our salvation. We get that sense when we read Hebrews 9:24–28:

²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

At his first coming, Jesus died as a once-and-for all sacrifice for sin. And we, too, will die, unless Jesus returns in our lifetime. After that, there is judgment. We only have this life to respond to

⁴ Tit. 2:11–14 connects sanctification with the return of Jesus, “our blessed hope.”

Jesus. But when Jesus returns, he will bring salvation to his people. In the meantime, we should prepare ourselves. Peter, another apostle, says, “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13). In this life, we should prepare our minds, be self-controlled, and wait for the grace that will be given to us when Jesus returns. God’s people will be given more grace at the second coming. We have no wrath of God to fear.

However, those who have rejected Jesus have something to fear. Those who have persecuted and afflicted Christians will be paid back for what they have done. We see this in 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10:

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. ⁴ Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Paul is writing to a group of Christians who are persevering through trials. They are enduring. And Paul wants them to know that the people who are afflicting them because of their faith will be afflicted by God. Those who do not “obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” will be punished. This is frightening. But those who believe in Jesus will marvel and they will be granted relief.

So, much of what Jesus will do when he returns is related to salvation and judgment. But that’s not all that Jesus will do. When Jesus returns, he will show us our true selves. And this is one of the more surprising things that will happen. The truth is that we are not the people who we will be in eternity. We will be transformed to be like Jesus. We sometimes hear that we should be true to ourselves. But the problem with that thought is that we can’t be the people we ought to be because of our sin. We wouldn’t, after all, tell an addict, “Be true to yourself,” if their current

self is addicted to something destructive. Instead, we should say, “Be true to the kind of person God wants you to be.”

The entrance of sin into the world, when the first humans rejected God’s word, brought four problems. First, human beings are separated from God. Two, we are separated from each other. Three, we’re separated from nature—life is difficult, there are natural disasters, work is hard. But the fourth problem, one that we don’t always understand, is that we are separated from the way we ought to be. We should be honest, honorable, selfless, loving people. But we find that we tend to shade the truth, we’re cowards, we’re selfless, and we often simply don’t care. In order to be our true selves, the people we were intended to be, we must wait for Jesus to return.

That concept is what we find in Colossians 3:1–4:

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

If you are a Christian, Christ is your life. And when he appears, then your real life will appear. You will then be true to your true self.⁵ John tells us something very similar. First John 3:2 says, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” You haven’t seen the real me yet. And I haven’t seen the real you yet. But when Jesus appears, what we will be will be made known. Jesus will appear, we will see him, and we will be like him.

The last thing I want to say is that when Jesus returns, he will make all things new. Until Jesus returns, there will be earthquakes. There will be wars. There will be riots, murders, abortions, terrorism, and all kinds of injustice. We cry out, “Our Lord, come!”⁶ Paul tells us that the whole creation is groaning because it has been subjected to frustration. The whole earth is not the way it should be because of sin. Paul writes, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). In other words, the universe is waiting for us to be what we will be when we see Jesus. And when Jesus comes, he will make all things new.

When Jesus taught the disciples about the future, he told them that they would sit on twelve thrones judging Israel “in the new world” (Matt. 19:28). The Greek word behind that

⁵ When Polonius says, “To thine own self be true,” in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* I.3.78, that’s what he means—being true to oneself involves taking the best course of action, the right course of action.

⁶ 1 Cor. 16:22, which translates an Aramaic phrase: *marana tha*.

means “regeneration” or “new birth.”⁷ The universe will be regenerated, or made new. Just as Jesus’ body was resurrected, so too will the world have a resurrection of its own. There will be no more natural disasters, no more diseases, and no more death. And there will be no more murders, wars, crimes, or any sin. It will only be God and his people. Jesus will make all things new.⁸

At the end of the Bible, heaven and earth will become one, as the world is restored, renewed, recreated. We’re told that this new creation is also a Holy City where God dwells with his people. And this new creation that is a city is also a bride, prepared to live with her groom, Jesus, forever. And during this description, at the beginning of Revelation 21, we also read these words:

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” (Rev. 21:3–5).

The new Jerusalem represents the city of God. In the end, it will be God dwelling with his people in a perfect world. The greatest part of this world is that we will dwell directly with God. Though we feel his presence, we don’t see God and we don’t live in the fullness of his presence. But in the new creation, we will know and experience God in the fullest sense.

One day, everything will be made right. All our desires for justice and beauty will fulfilled. If you’re a Christian, you have something tremendous to look forward to. Your best life—your real life—will start when Jesus returns. You will be with him forever.

Earlier, I mentioned that we often experience the letdown effect in this life. We look forward to things, but we are let down. We’re disappointed. I think that’s by design. If we were completely satisfied now, we wouldn’t have this great end to look forward to. Sometimes, we’re tempted to think all the good days are in the past. That’s because we experience so much loss. But we need to remember that the best days are ahead. The best is yet to come. That which is

⁷ παλιγγενεσία (*palingenesia*).

⁸ See Acts 3:19–21, which speaks of a restoration of all things.

broken will be repaired, that which is sad will be made untrue. All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

If you're not a Christian, I pray that you would consider what you've heard today. You may wonder where Jesus is, and why evil things happen. Jesus will come again to save and to judge, but when he does, he will put an end to evil. That means he will put an end to evil in the world, and he will put an end to the evil that lies within us. God punishes all evil. He punished the evil of those who put their trust in Jesus at the cross where Jesus died. (And when we are glorified, he will remove all the evil within us.) But those who have rejected Jesus are still under God's wrath, and one day that wrath will be poured out. Today is the day to put your trust in Jesus. Only then will you begin to find your true self.