

The Second Coming

Jesus Is Coming for You!

Some people will say that this core doctrine sounds pretty far-fetched, even loony, as if Christians have been reading too many science fiction novels. But the truth is, Jesus was entirely serious when He said the night before He died on the cross, “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3).

How? The angels who showed up at His ascension gave these details: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

In other words, this isn’t a myth, a metaphor for something abstract, or just a figure of speech. It’s a real, visible event that will shock the world at some future point. History will abruptly come to its climax with the Second Coming of Jesus.

Naturally, everybody asks, “When?!” People have been curious about this for twenty centuries now. The Bible gives no date; in fact, it says we won’t know the day or the hour in advance.

That opens the loophole for some people to be cynical and dismiss the whole idea as a hoax. But far better to take it seriously and be prepared to face the Lord with joy rather than sorrow on that awesome day. As the apostle Paul explained, “We will all stand before God’s judgment seat.... Each of us will give an account of himself or herself to God” (Romans 14:10,12).

The main question on that docket will not be how much money we made, how many good deeds we chalked up, or how many times we warmed a church pew. The most important question—the one that will make the difference between heaven and hell—will be what we did with God’s offer of peace, forgiveness, and new life as His follower. And this brings us back to Truth No. 1: the intense need—and incredible opportunity—for sinful human beings to be reconciled to God.

1. Jesus is coming again.

A. We will be instantly and radically changed. (*1 Thes. 4:13-17*)

A relationship with Jesus Christ changes us radically: our outlook, our thoughts, our actions, our priorities, and ultimately our spiritual destiny. Yet while we enjoy the incredible promise of eternal life in God’s presence, our bodies must die because of the corruption we inherited from Adam and Eve (1 Corinthians 15:53). Yet our bodies are still part of us—part of what God created to make us who we are. As a result, we must ultimately be raised and receive an incorruptible, glorified body. And this will take place in a dramatic instant of time when Jesus returns for every believer. This event, called the Rapture of the Church, is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. While the term “rapture” (literally meaning “caught up”) does not appear in Scripture, the reality of the event is beyond question.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about this event to help settle some confusion concerning what would happen to people who died before Jesus returns. His clarification is vivid: Jesus will descend from heaven as dead believers from every age rise to meet him with new, transfigured bodies. At the same

time, living Christians will rise, also receiving bodies fit for eternity. All, then, will be visibly united with Christ, taken to heaven, and reunited with previously deceased Christian loved ones. From that moment, all of us who serve the Lord will exist in God's presence for all eternity.

B. We will rise because Jesus rose. (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

After reading 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, one might ask: "Why would God do something so dramatic, even outrageous, in taking us from this world to the next? Why would graves need to be emptied, and remains—no matter how old or obscured and fragmented by time—need to be reconstituted? Why must there be a resurrection, a transformation?" The apostle Paul shed some light on this in 1 Corinthians 15. This passage is explained well by theologian Myer Pearlman in *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*: "To teach that there is no resurrection of the body is to strike a blow at the reality of salvation and the hope of immortality... If there is no resurrection of the body, then Christ, who took on a human body, did not rise from the dead. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then Paul's preaching is empty... There is no salvation from sin; for how do we know that his death was an atoning one—different from an ordinary death? And if the Master did not rise, what hope is there for those who trust Him?" (Pearlman, page 375). There must be a resurrection of the dead. It affirms the resurrection of Christ, which is the foundational event of Christianity. And at that resurrection we will all rise—those who have died as well as those otherwise destined to die in their mortal bodies.

C. All physical limitations will be gone. (Philippians 3:20,21)

When that moment of the Rapture occurs, we will all undergo an incredible transformation. Here in this world, we have to deal with the effects of sin, weakness, limitations, and ultimate deterioration of our bodies, in spite of the spiritual transformation that has occurred in our souls. But at that moment our bodies will be redeemed, taking on the same form as Christ's resurrected body. We will be relieved of the last limitations of this temporary, physical world, fully immortal and free to experience the presence of God unhindered by any obstacles or challenges.

2. His coming gives us an indestructible hope.

A. Death is not the end. (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)

In human terms death is the final, undefeatable enemy. Whether we're rich or poor, famous or obscure, whether our lives are overloaded with good deeds or stained with evil and hatred, we're headed for the same physical conclusion: We will die. But for those who've placed their faith in Christ, death is not the end. Our story does not conclude with the final beat of our hearts. That's the powerful truth of these verses. The sting is gone. Death is not a loss, but a gain (Philippians 1:21,22). This represents a profound change of perspective as well as position. Paul's reference in verse 56 was to our sinful state, exposed by God's law (Romans 3:20). Death, physical and spiritual, was the natural consequence. But Jesus changed that (Galatians 3:13). Death no longer holds power over us, when we are in Christ. Our greatest enemy is no longer relevant to our future.

B. There is no separation in Christ. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

While the sting of death has been obliterated by Christ, it remains a physical reality even for Christians—those of us who die before the return of Christ. And death is time of genuine sadness, grief, and pain, as we are separated from friends and loved ones. This is especially true when the death is unexpected, violent, or premature, such as in a tragic accident or the loss of a child. Circumstances like these leave us with difficult questions that can never be fully answered on this side of eternity.

However, 1 Thessalonians 4:18 provides us with a powerful promise: There will be a reunion in heaven. We will be reunited with loved ones who have left this world before us. Note how this verse defines a major purpose of the passage preceding it (that is, a pivotal passage on the return of Christ). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be comforted by this promise. They had suffered painful losses.

Loved ones had died. The good-byes were real. But they were not permanent. Neither are they for us when we are in Christ. It isn't difficult to imagine the great joy when believers of every age and era reunite in the presence of the Lord.

C. We're going to a far better place. (2 Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 21:4)

Second Corinthians 5:8 offers a great promise to us regarding what happens between the time of death and the rapture. Though we do not occupy our immortal bodies, we are in a far better place: the presence of the Lord. It is a place of rest (Revelation 14:13), yet an active place where we serve and worship the Lord (Revelation 7:15-17). All the harsh and painful realities of physical life are replaced by utter purity and perfection. This promise answers an array of questions and falsehoods regarding life beyond this world. There is no such thing as reincarnation. There is no purgatory. Death is not the end of a meaningless life. For the Christian it is the entrance into perfect, eternal life.

3. His coming will change our lives today.

A. We need to be watching. (2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:12,13)

At the end of his life, Paul referred to himself as having "longed" for Christ's appearing. This is a fervent passion God wants all of His people to share. We must actively look forward to the coming of the Lord. We aren't supposed to take a passive attitude, enjoying life while we can before everything changes in the world to come. God wants us to have our hearts set on where we are going, looking forward to Christ's return.

It's important to note that "watching" doesn't mean that we get caught up in the timing of Christ's return or obsessed with understanding every detail of daily events in order to speculate on how they fit into Christ's coming. But God's overriding concern is readiness. He wants us to be watching and anticipating the rapture event with a powerful sense of anticipation.

B. How, then, should we live? (2 Peter 3:10-13; James 5:8)

The rapture will usher in an incredible sequence of events in the last days, will culminate in the final judgment of the wicked and the ultimate establishment of the New Heavens and the New Earth. (See Revelation chapters 21,22.) Peter's question in verse 11 is critical: How, then, do we live in light of all these things? How are our lives changed? How does our perspective on life and eternity change? How do our priorities change? The answer is two-fold.

First, we stand firm (James 5:8). James was writing to Christians who had suffered for their faith, that they not be discouraged by circumstances or distracted by things of the physical world. In a similar way, Christians must stand firm against false teachings about Jesus, salvation, and the end times. Our world often tells us there are many ways to God, that living for the now is good, and that there are no absolutes in the spiritual realm. We must stand firm in what we know to be the truth.

Second, we develop a vision and a passion for leading others to God's gift of a transformed life through Christ. Peter wrote of "speeding" Christ's coming (2 Peter 3:12). This happens when we embrace the Great Commission of Christ to reach out to all the world with the gospel—among the last words He spoke before ascending into heaven following His resurrection (Acts 1:8).



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