

## What's Next? The Master is Coming

When I was in seminary I have to admit I was somewhat of an oddity. First I was a woman, second I was not in my twenties, and third and perhaps most unusual, I was and am part of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. One time Jon DenHouter, Armand Aronson and I all met by chance for a conversation at Calvin Seminary, and were pretty sure we made history as the largest gathering of Disciples at a CRC seminary. Not being of the Reformed tradition was usually no big deal at all, I was well accepted at Calvin, learned so much, and am grateful for the time there, but occasionally something would strike me to show me the variety and diversity of beliefs in the Body of Christ. One of those times was when a very serious young seminarian asked me what my congregation believed about the second coming of Christ: were we post tribulation premillennials, pre tribulation or dispensational premillennialist, post millennials, or amillennialists? I think I disappointed him when I said we simply believe Jesus is coming back when God directs. We remember that the Master is coming back every week through communion, and we look forward to that day.



What about you? Do you think about what's next in your life story? Last Sunday I spoke to you about the two possible endings to this part of your life journey, you will either die or Jesus will come again. Last week I spoke about life after death, and again I remind you of the words of Jesus on the cross to a thief crucified at his side: ***“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** Luke 23:43 – and we looked at 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 – Paul’s letter of Good News – that there is life after death, that we go on with Jesus Christ. But do you think much about Christ’s return?



The second coming of Christ is **the** great expectation of the church. The Master **is** coming back. We who follow Christ are meant to live expecting Him. And the Bible is full of good news that the Master is on His way back to us:

- For those of you that like numbers: Over 1800 references appear in the O.T., in the N.T there are more than 300 references to the Lord’s return- or one out of every 30 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 N.T. books refer to this great event, and for every prophecy on the first coming of Christ, there are eight prophecies saying the Master is coming back.
- Jesus Himself said in John 14:3 “I will come back and take you with me that you also may be where I am.”

- And in Matthew 24:30, he said, “The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky... They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”
- In Acts 1:10-11 at the ascension of Jesus into Heaven as His disciples stared heavenward, two men dressed in white stood beside them and said: “Men of Galilee... why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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.”

So why don't we talk about this more? The Master is coming back! Seems like this is very prominent in the Bible. And isn't the next life – what's next – a pretty huge deal in our personal faith? Don't we want to know what's going to happen next?

I think the reason we don't pay much attention to this is that our culture has shaped us to think only about today and the here and now. We rarely look forward to the future, evidence of this can be seen all around us: few people are saving money for retirement, few people actually have personal goals for the life or their relationships, and we expect instant answers in all things rather than making plans and remaining persistent. But as followers of Jesus, we are called to look forward, to look ahead, and to look for the day of Jesus' return. The Master is coming - and it is going to be exciting.

I am using the translation *The Message* today because I think it gives us fresh language to think about something we haven't paid much attention to, so here is a letter from Paul on what Christ's return will be like: **1 Thessalonians 4:13**  
*And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead and buried, we don't want you in the dark any longer. First off, you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus. And then this: We can tell you with complete confidence—we have the Master's word on it—that when the Master comes again to get us, those of us who are still alive will not get a jump on the dead and leave them behind. In actual fact, they'll be ahead of us. The Master himself will give the command. Archangel thunder! God's trumpet blast! He'll come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise—they'll go first. Then the rest of us who are still alive at the time will be caught up with them into the clouds to meet the Master. Oh, we'll be walking on air! And then there will be one huge family reunion with the Master. So reassure one another with these words.*



So let's pause here and see what Paul has written: Jesus will come down from heaven, there will be the voice of the archangel – not certain which one – but Michael is the one the church recognizes here, those who have already died and whose souls have been with Jesus in heaven will rise up first, and then so will we. We will be airborne – caught up in the air as the NIV describes it – in the clouds – and up in the air we will all meet Jesus.



In Jesus' day, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, and neither did the majority of the population. Death was viewed with horror – life ended in the grave- there was no rising up- so this Christian teaching of life after death was a strong contrast to what the majority had heard. I struggle how to make this comparison today: Cancer has touched most of our families in one way or another. Imagine if you heard a new medication or treatment that ended cancer – period. You would jump on it – we all would. That is the best example I can come up with to show how remarkable this teaching was to the people at the time it was first taught. The horror is over, life does not end in the grave, instead there is light, and life, and hope.

And this final resurrection is physical, not unlike what we saw last week in the resurrection of Lazarus, and then even more so by the resurrection of Jesus himself. Being saved by Jesus means your soul or spirit lives on, and He restores your body as well. Our resurrection bodies will not be identical to the ones we have now, but they will be closely related to them. Think about it – Jesus was recognizable to His disciples by the scars in His hands and side, it was still Him, still the Jesus they knew. Last week I hope I gave you a glimpse of what that will be like for you: You'll still be you, but even more so. You'll be the real you. And on that day we will look at each other and say "I always knew you could be like this! I saw glimpses of the real you, flashes of it, and now here you are!"



What I am trying to say is we will still be us – but changed. Believers who are still alive when the Master comes back will be changed and transformed, so that their physical selves become everlasting, like Christ's resurrected body. Scripture tells us if we are alive when the Master comes back we will be transformed into His likeness. Paul writes to us, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet..." he then goes on to mock death – where is your victory, death? – Where now is your sting, now?? (1 Corinthians 15). Think about these words – an eye twinkle - it is fast. Think of a flash – of a light bulb, a lightning

strike – it is quick. You will, when the Master comes back, go from being earthy to celestial. The only things I can think of here on earth to help us understand this is birth – going from darkness and muted sounds, to light, warmth, people, the ability to move and grow in new ways, into a world of color and sound and smells and feeling. The only other way is to compare a caterpillar to a butterfly. But these examples fail because our transformation will happen instantly – no birth pains this time, no long time in a cocoon. Bam – you’re new, you are eternal, you are exactly and forever the beautiful you God made you to be.



And it gets even better because all Creation will be healed and restored. In the Garden of Eden, all things were as God intended and it was VERY GOOD. We were given responsibility to take care of God’s creation but we totally messed up with sin, and the consequences have been terrible for the planet – what was perfection has been slowly decaying. Animals have gone extinct, water, air and land have been defiled. The world we live in is a far cry from what God made and gave to us. Paul looked forward to Jesus’ return encouraging us saying “the time would come for God to restore **everything**, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” (Acts 3:21) When Jesus returns all creation, not just us, but all creation will be healed.



When the Master comes back, he also brings judgement. Like a shepherd separating sheep from goats, God will look at each one of us - our lives and the lives of all who have ever lived – and God will judge what’s next for each person. Too often, let’s be honest here, way too often, we take on this role ourselves. We think we are right and condemn those who don’t see things like we do. Be careful. Be really careful not to judge. Scripture tells us that not everyone who calls Jesus Lord will be with him in His Kingdom (Matthew 7:21). To not be part of the Kingdom of the Master is hell, and we will save that subject for another time. Let’s leave it that those in Hell are there because they refused or ignored God’s love.



The Book of Revelation describes the new heaven and the new earth that the Master’s return will bring. It is going to be more than we can imagine as well as everything we have ever heard, and the best thing will be is that we will see Jesus face to face and will be able to walk with God as we were invited to do so back in the Garden of Eden. I look forward to this – and more than a few of you have told me you’re ready for the return of the Master - you’re looking forward to what’s next. So when will it be? Back to Paul’s letter to the people of Thessalonica:

***5<sup>1-3</sup> I don't think, friends, that I need to deal with the question of when all this is going to happen. You know as well as I that the day of the Master's coming can't be posted on our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would. About the time everybody's walking around complacently, congratulating each other—"We've sure got it made! Now we can take it easy!"—suddenly everything will fall apart. It's going to come as suddenly and inescapably as birth pangs to a pregnant woman.***

1248, 1689, 1914, 2011, these dates and dozens more all represent the times that people predicted that the second coming of Christ would occur. In Matthew 24:36 we read that no one but the Father, not even Jesus, knows the exact time of Christ's coming. So we need to wait faithfully and expectantly.

Paul continues: ***4-8 But friends, you're not in the dark, so how could you be taken off guard by any of this? You're sons of Light, daughters of Day. We live under wide open skies and know where we stand. So let's not sleepwalk through life like those others. Let's keep our eyes open and be smart. People sleep at night and get drunk at night. But not us! Since we're creatures of Day, let's act like it. Walk out into the daylight sober, dressed up in faith, love, and the hope of salvation. God didn't set us up for an angry rejection but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ. He died for us, a death that triggered life. Whether we're awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're alive with him! So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.***



You are sons of Light and daughters of Day – you live in the wide open spaces of God's grace. Keep your eyes on the sky – the Master is coming, in the same way that He left. Our hope for the future is to see Jesus Christ, a sight beyond our human comprehension and then to experience being in His presence forever, surrounded by His love, power and holiness. Heaven will be the most dynamic, exhilarating experience conceivable. It will be a time of great praise as the hymn Amazing Grace says: "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun." So what's next? We wait and watch. As a follower of Jesus, one way or another, you will rise up. So speak encouraging words to one another, Paul tells us. What a great idea! And then as you watch and wait, build up hope. In an elder meeting this week one of you said that this church is acting like a church – and is a place of hope again. Let do what Paul says, build up hope so no one is left out, no

one is left behind when the Master comes. Paul ends this passage saying: ***I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.*** And to that I say amen.