

Apostle's Creed: From there He will come

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[0 : 01] So good morning again, Braymar Baptist. So for anyone who may not know me, my name is Kent Dixon. It's my privilege to be the lead pastor here at Braymar Baptist Church.

It's good to be back with you this week, believe it or not. People say that when they come back from vacation, meaning, yeah, no, you're not really serious. You'd rather still be on vacation.

But I am glad to be back. We're glad to be back. We had a good vacation visiting family and friends. And I believe Dr. Shepard, when he preached last Sunday, scared a few people because he mentioned, pray for the Dixon family as they travel and they're on vacation because they have health concerns.

So a few people rushed into my office early this week and said, what's going on? And so I came down with some sort of weird leg infection. So it's not contagious.

Don't panic. So I'm on antibiotics. Connor ended up in emergency last Saturday night. They tested for meningitis. Crazy stuff.

[1 : 03] So you want to hear the weird last week we had? I'm more than happy to tell you. And I'm also not going to bore you with it. So but I'll tell you that four adults compacted into a Yaris hatchback driving out to Vancouver Island and back for hours and hours and hours and hours and hours on end was certainly a faith building experience in a lot of ways.

And we still all like each other, which is kind of awesome. If you leave your phone in a Shell gas station in Airdrie, it is an hour or a two hour round trip from Red Deer back to Airdrie to get it.

Speaking of faith trials. Speaking of faith trials.

The living and the dead. And in some English translations, it's actually phrased from there.

He will come to judge the living and the dead. And in a way. There we go. In a way, it bridges from what Pastor Luan preached to you three weeks ago, if you can remember back that far.

[2 : 41] Jesus left. Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God. And then this phrase continues from there. Jesus is gone.

This is a continuation of that. Jesus is physically gone. But he will come back from exactly where he is right now in a physical way.

So up to this point in our exploration of the Apostles' Creed, it's addressed what Christ has done and is now doing. But this morning, we look to the future, which is quite exciting.

In his sermon a few weeks ago, Pastor Luan explored the fact that after Jesus rose from the dead, he ascended. He returned to be with his father, where he is seated at God's right hand.

As humans, we can be very literal people, can't we? Scripture tells us that Jesus, in his physical form, in his visible form, left this world, left our world.

[3 : 48] And knowing that, and knowing that he is not sitting physically here in the pews with us this morning, it can be easy for us to forget something that is very, very important.

I think we can often forget that Jesus is still with us. Jesus is still with us in his unseen form. He lives within us.

He is with us wherever we go. He is with us, my friends, right now. Let's let that sink in for a moment.

Jesus Christ is here with us right now. Not in some vague sense, not in some imaginary sense, but in a literal sense.

He is among us. He is Emmanuel. He is God with us this morning. So while Jesus was crucified as a man, died as a man, and was resurrected as a man, he no longer walks among us in human form.

[5 : 01] We can celebrate today and every day because Jesus Christ, our personal Lord and Savior, the Son of God, is alive.

And as the Bible tells us, Jesus will return again one day. He will return to earth in his very human, very physical, very visible form.

What a glorious day that will be. No amen? Amen. And that's not the end of the sermon.

It sounds like it could be the end, but it's not. Our world can seem like such a hopeless place at times, can't it? We see resources depleted and creation disrespected.

We see countries in conflict and political and military boundaries drawn. We see human beings struggling, seeking to meet a longing and a need for something more.

[6 : 14] With possessions, with money, with addictions, or other temporary fixes.

When we know that only a relationship with God can truly meet our needs. As Christians, we have something that our world can't provide.

Can you guess what that is? Hope. Hope. Hope. We have a hope that God not only sees us and will provide for our needs.

But we have a hope that Jesus Christ has conquered death for everyone who recognizes him as the Son of God, accepts his rule in their life, and seeks to follow his example.

And we can share that hope, my friends, with anyone and everyone with whom we come into contact. Because yes, Jesus died.

[7 : 21] But Jesus rose. And he will return. He is coming back. Have you ever waited for someone to arrive at an airport?

Quite likely it's someone you know and love. You have a connection with them and a relationship with them that is unique and special. And in most cases, you likely know what time their flight arrives, what airline they're arriving with, possibly even what gate they're at.

And I want us to pause and reflect on that for just a second. What are some of the emotions that you might be feeling if you were waiting for someone?

Audience participation time. Anticipation. Excitement. Impatient.

Impatient. As we talked about when I first started at Bremer, we love to wait, don't we? Absolutely not. We are not waiting people, and yet we are.

[8 : 41] When we meet someone at the airport, we might also bring a gift. And we're very likely ready to welcome them with open arms. We've missed them. We've missed them very much, quite likely.

We've been ready for their arrival, and we're prepared for that to happen. We're excited and maybe even a bit nervous with anticipation.

We have an existing relationship. But separation can bring change, and we can be a bit nervous about that. I remember times that we, I've gone away on business over the years and been away for a week or two weeks.

And then I come home, and there's a moment of reconnection. There's a moment of Michelle and I saying, okay, I was good on my own, and yet I missed him. I was good on my own, but I missed her.

So there's that reconnection moment. And as I was preparing for this sermon, I tried to frame my sense of waiting for Jesus to return in the terms that I'm talking about.

[9 : 43] Because we can relate to waiting for someone. But what does it mean for us, really? What does it mean for us to say that Jesus will return?

That he's, in the expression we use, coming back. There's no secret here. This is not news to us. That scripture is very clear about it.

Jesus Christ will return to earth in his physical body to be with his people. And hopefully this doesn't surprise you.

Hopefully this is not a big revelation. But there are more than 300 passages in scripture that refer specifically to the return of Jesus Christ.

Is that a shock? 300. More than 300. And that's in the New Testament alone. Both the Apostles' Creed and scripture tell us that Jesus will return to us from the place where he went when he left the earth in physical form.

[10 : 49] He will leave his place at the right hand of God the Father. And he will come back to us. To his people. And when Jesus returns, that will mean a great many things.

Not only for those who believe in him. But also for those who don't. There's a concept in the phrase that we're looking at this morning that hopefully makes Christians, and ideally all of humanity, take notice.

Because this phrase talks about judgment. And see, as I thought about that this week, this is where society can often form one of its strongest biases against Christians.

The conclusion that we are judgmental. That we are holier than thou. That we somehow see ourselves as better than those who don't know Christ.

But this morning I want us to consider something very important about the idea of judgment that will come when Jesus returns. Because my friends, this judgment will be for all people.

[12:12] Living and dead. Christian and non-Christian. As people who recognize and follow Christ, we don't somehow get a free pass.

Judgment will come to Christians. But as Christians. People who have already been accepted. But. People who have been called to account. For what they were given. And what they have done. And rebels will be judged as rebels.

They will be rejected by the master. Whom they rejected. First. But I also want us to recognize that this judgment will be God's judgment.

Not human judgment. There will be no juries. There will be no lawyers. No loopholes. No unfair or biased rulings.

[13:22] This judgment, my friends, will be fair. And it will take into account every aspect of our lives. And it will be final.

And it will be final. I say this not to scare you. But to convey the seriousness of what will take place when Jesus returns.

And we can also take comfort that this judgment will not be superficial. It will not be based on some inadequate or passing knowledge of us or our situation.

But by someone who knows us intimately. Totally. Completely. And some may ask, but why is this judgment necessary at all?

As author Michael Bauman puts it so well. Without some kind of judgment, the sinner and the saint would have identical ends. There would be no need then for pity, self-restraint, virtue, sacrifice, or even faith.

[14:32] Evil would run rampant. With that perspective, we thank God for judgment. We're assured that in the end, justice will be served.

It's a strong deterrent to sin and even an incentive for goodness. Christ's return to judge the living and the dead is a powerful motive for patience and courage during times of trials.

Now we're going to touch on a bit of a sensitive subject this morning. Not that we haven't already. But it's one that can cause some conflict among Christians in particular.

How will we know when Jesus is coming back? I'm seeing some little smiles.

I'd like to also phrase it in a slightly different way. Can we actually know in a specific date and time stamped way when Jesus is coming back?

[15:47] I want to caution all of us to seek a balance in our perspective on the return of Christ. And I can't stress enough.

I've said this to many people over the years. The fact that Jesus himself said in Matthew 24, 36, No one knows.

Do you hear that? No one knows the day or the hour. Not even the angels in heaven. They are waiting just like we are, folks.

Nor the Son. Jesus himself said he did not know. But only the Father. Let that sink in.

Because I believe that it's foolish for us to spend too much time trying to discern the details of something that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, said plainly, he does not know.

[16:57] And so if Jesus doesn't know, are we arrogant enough to believe that we can figure it out? I have some Christian friends, and I'm going to tell you none of whom are here today, by the way, who are living their lives so focused on the timing of the return of Christ that life is passing them by.

Opportunities to show God's love to others around them are passing them by. The early church was characterized by expectation, watchfulness, and preparation for Christ's return.

So I've been wondering why is it that particularly in North America, I think we'd agree, Christians largely seem to have stopped expecting, stopped watching, stopped even, I hesitate to say, preparing.

We still declare his miraculous birth at Christmastime. We still remember his death and celebrate his resurrection at Easter.

But Jesus' return, I feel has somehow dropped off our radar. Could it be that in our modern age, we're somehow embarrassed to declare that openly?

[18 : 29] Does that make us seem like we're nuts, so we're afraid to talk about it? Is virgin birth any less miraculous?

Is resurrection any less miraculous? Do we recognize that the early church saw Christ's return as imminent?

But, at this point, it hasn't happened by now. We've somehow begun to doubt, perhaps, what Scripture clearly declares boldly?

To go back to author Michael Bauman again, he wisely cautions us when he says, too many ignore the approach of our Lord, and will be caught off guard.

Do you know that it could happen now, or now, or tonight, or tomorrow morning while you're asleep?

[19 : 37] It could happen anytime. Scripture is very clear. Are we so wrapped up in our own pointless pursuits, Bauman says, that we're just missing it?

Are we expecting? Are we watching? Are we preparing? Matthew 23, or sorry, Matthew 25, verse 13, Jesus told his disciples, therefore, therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day, or the hour.

You do not know the day, or the hour. In Luke 12, verse 40, Jesus said, you must also, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour, when you do not expect it.

But I have a challenge for each of us. Are we so focused on watching for the signs, that we've forgotten somehow to keep our eyes on the road ahead?

Are we overly preoccupied with guessing, and seeking after signs and signals, that we believe somehow, clearly indicate when Jesus will come back?

[21 : 03] Are you looking for blood moons? Are you looking for jewels from heaven? These are just two things that I've heard.

Are you looking for signs, rather than focusing on the road? Are we so busy focusing on the then, that we are missing the now, and our calling in this world?

That kind of perspective can stem from everything, from being too focused, on an individualistic view of salvation. Let me explain that.

The perspective that, I accepted Jesus, I am saved, I am done, to seeing little point in doing our part, to protect the environment, to care about social justice issues, to speak up for people who can't.

Perhaps from the perspective that, eh, none of this really matters anyway. Have we checked out? Because I know Christians who have. And, but there's, we want to recognize, there's no question that it can be challenging, because we are people who have been called to live, in two worlds, without question.

[22 : 33] But friends, we can't be so focused on the return of Jesus, that we become blinded to our calling, to be salt and light, in a broken world. Nor, on the other end, can we become so complacent in our lives, that we forget that there's far more, to this existence, than this, this life.

And I thank God for that. Scripture is clear. Jesus was clear. The apostles, and the authors of scripture, were clear that Jesus, is coming back one day.

We must be watching. We must be prepared, and ready. But we must also live our earthly lives, every single day, mindful of the blessings, and talents God has given us, and the opportunities, he has put in our lives.

As I was preparing this sermon this week, I thought to myself, how will it go down? How will it happen, when Jesus returns?

Weepy pastor. What I thought to myself, what really, stuck out in my mind, was the father, simply looking to Jesus, and saying, son, it's time.

[24 : 17] Scripture cautions us, to live each day, as though today was our last. To be ready, not only in how we live our lives, but in how we're committed to our calling, to love God, and to love others.

And it's fitting that scripture concludes, in the book of Revelation, with the apostle John's, repeated reminder, of the return of Christ. Three times, in the final chapter, John wrote, I, meaning Christ, come quickly.

If Jesus said he was coming soon, and the early church believed that with complete certainty, then why does it seem like he's delayed his return for more than 2,000 years?

Well, that's because the reality is that he has. The return of Jesus has been delayed, as we read the reason throughout 2 Peter, chapter 3.

My friends, our God is a God of patience, and a God of kindness. He wants to give this sinful world, the opportunity to repent, and be saved.

[25 : 48] So my friends, join me in expecting, watching, and preparing for the return of Jesus Christ.

Not without purpose, but with a glorious calling of God to share the gift of salvation with our broken world. And I believe that we would all join John in the last prayer of the Bible.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Let's pray. Father, Father God, we come to you this morning thanking you for, again, for the sacrifice of your son.

We thank you for his death, his resurrection, and the redemption that comes with all of that. We thank you for the great sacrifice that you made through your son to redeem all of us, to redeem our world, to bring us renewed relationship, and reconnect us.

And so, Father, we recognize our dual nature in this world, our nature to be ambassadors of your kingdom, to be people who live in this world, but who are not of it.

[27 : 18] So, Father, help us to balance our perspective. Help us to be mindful, to be watching, to be waiting, and prepared in how we live and how we see opportunities.

But, Father, help us to not be blinded to those opportunities, to the way that you want to use us, to the way that you want us to be connection, connection points between you and those who don't know you.

And so, Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the truth that it brings us. And thank you most of all this morning that Jesus is coming back.

We pray these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.