

TRINITY LECTURE 2 - The Coming of the Lord

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Preacher: Peter Adam

[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much for the invitation to be here tonight. It's always a pleasure to come to Trinity and also for your welcome. Something awesome about giving the last talk on the end times.

Well, I must say I was delighted to think that the lectures this year would be on this theme of the end times. And I'd like to begin by reading from the first letter of Peter, chapter 1.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold, that though perishable is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Although you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[1 : 3 6] Well, how right to focus our attention on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus is now seated at the Father's right hand in glory.

There he reigns until all his enemies are put under his feet, including that last enemy to be destroyed, which is death. The Lord Jesus will come again to this earth, not in humility, but in glory.

He will come both as Saviour and Judge, We see this forward focus in two significant passages in the New Testament.

In Romans 8 we read of the whole creation waiting with great expectation, eager expectation for the revealing of the children of God. And in 1 Peter we're instructed, Set your hope fully on the grace to be given us when Jesus Christ is revealed.

So that forward focus, that forward hope, that forward expectation as we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ should be at the heart of our lives and should inform, refresh, invigorate and strengthen us in our time of waiting.

[3 : 0 6] Though we're well accustomed to use the phrase the coming of the Lord to refer to the incarnation of Christ or as we commonly do, we talk about his first coming and his second coming, the New Testament uses the word coming, the coming of Christ, the coming of the Lord, exclusively about what we call the second coming.

The word parousia is used 17 times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus Christ and each time it's about his return. So the word coming in the New Testament is about what we call the second coming of Christ.

As we've seen from Matthew 28, when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately saying, Tell us, when will this be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

Verse 27, the same chapter. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. As we've heard tonight, as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

They knew nothing till the flood came and stripped them away. So too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Or again, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, and then at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

[4 : 36] 1 Thessalonians 2, What is our hope or joy or crown or boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Or the prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3, May he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Or 1 Thessalonians 4, For this we declare to you, by the word of the Lord, that we here alive who are left until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who've died.

Or the same chapter, same book, chapter 5, May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Or 2 Thessalonians 2, As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.

What I'm trying to show you is that again and again the New Testament uses the phrase, the coming of the Lord, the coming of Christ, about what we call the second coming.

[5 : 52] James uses the same language, Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. So you also must be patient, strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Or 2 Peter chapter 1, We didn't follow cleverly desired myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or 2 Peter 3, That in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging in their own lust and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?

The final example, 1 John chapter 2, Now little children abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Similarly, we read two other references, I just picked two more, which refer to the coming of Christ, Acts chapter 1, This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

And the great promise of Revelation 1, Look, he is coming with the clouds. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And on his account, all the tribes of the earth will wait.

[7 : 02] So it is to be. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. So it's very curious that when we think about God coming to earth or the Lord Jesus coming, our natural inclination is to look back to the first coming of Jesus Christ.

But when the Bible talks about the coming of Christ, it wants to focus not on what happened 2,000 years ago, but what will happen at some time in the future.

Now you may not be aware of this, but Christians are very fashion conscious people. You'll notice that if you've looked at Paul tonight, or indeed you've looked at me.

You've thought to yourself, these Christians, they're very fashion conscious people. Because Christians follow fashions in the focus of their Christianity, in their Bible studies, singing, and the practice of the Christian life.

Just as predictably as all people follow fashions in naming children, choosing clothes, shoes, hair to cut, and so forth, language, and values.

[8 : 19] I shocked my Baba for asking for a Mohawk when I was last there. He told me they were out of fashion nowadays.

They're certainly out of fashion as far as I'm concerned. But it's remarkably unfashionable today for Christians to focus very much on the coming, that is, the return of the Lord Jesus.

One of the great things about reading the history of the Church and how Christians have acted over the last 2,000 years is you discover how formed by fashion Christians are. A hundred years ago, Christians were obsessed with the return of Christ and setting the date for that return, when it would happen, what would be the signs of its imminence, what would precede it, what would happen to believers and unbelievers, the suffering of those in hell and the joy of those with Christ in heaven.

Why is this focus less popular today? Why do we have to run a series on the end times? Well, here are some possible reasons.

We have recovered, I think, and rightly a strong focus in looking back in the attention we rightly pay to the cross and resurrection of Christ. We rightly point people to Christ and preach Christ and him crucified.

[9 : 39] We use the phrase about the cross of Christ, the finished work of Christ. We use that phrase to say, the cross is crucial, as Leon Morris used to say, and the work of substitutionary atonement was completed by Christ in his death on the cross as the Lamb of God carried away the sin of the world.

Christ is not still suffering for our sins in heaven. He remains a priest forever, but that is to intercede for us and apply to us the benefits of his one sacrifice made once for all on the cross.

However, it's also true that his work is not yet finished. He still reigns, he still hears our prayers, he still intercedes for us, he still addresses us through his words in scripture, he still pours out his Holy Spirit, he still calls people to faith, he still sanctifies and cleanses his church, and still applies to us the power of his redeeming blood.

And even then his work is not finished. One day he will return, he will come again, he will return to judge, to save, to destroy death, and to reign forever in glory.

Yes, we can talk about the finished work of Christ on the cross, for all the work that Christ is doing now and will do in the future is based on that work. Christ's victory, Christ's work now, is a fight from victory, not for victory, and the basis of his victory is his perfect atonement on the cross.

[11 : 22] But Christ is at work now, interceding for us, applying the benefits of his one sacrifice, and Christ will return to judge, to save, to destroy death, and to reign forever in glory.

in glory. So perhaps our strong focus on the cross of Christ and the resurrection of Christ, looking back in time, has meant that we've forgotten to also look forward to the return of Christ.

Of course, ideally, we'd do both, wouldn't we? We'd look back to Christ for the certainty of our forgiveness, and forward to the coming of Christ for the certainty of our salvation.

another reason why we don't focus on the future is that we, I think, are more introspective people, obsessed with ourselves and our present state of health and our feelings.

things. We have, in fact, followed the fashions of our society and focus on the present and not on the past or the future. We may well, as Paul has pointed out, focus too much on our present experience, our experience of heavenly joy now, and not realise this is just a foretaste of our completed joy when Christ returns.

[12 : 40] Another reason why thinking about the return of Christ is unpopular is because Christians today, I think, want to focus on the present issues of our society, on our responsibility as people made in God's image, responsible to God for the present and future welfare of our global village, the planet Earth.

It is difficult, I think, to combine this right sense of great responsibility with a focus on the future return of Christ. We worry that this focus on the future might reduce our sense of present responsibility.

Why care for our world if Jesus is going to return tonight? But, of course, what we have to do is hold together our present responsibility, our present stewardship, and also our future hope.

We may neglect the return of Christ because we are reacting against a Marxist critique of religion, that it dulls our awareness of our political and social reality by making us so heavenly-minded that we are of no earthly use.

We may try to prove this idea to be wrong by reacting as if it were true and focusing entirely on our present political and social duties. We may be reacting against a past over-emphasis in which the joys of heaven or the torments of hell predominated as a motivation for repentance, self-denial, and evangelism.

[14 : 15] But reacting against error is no way to find the truth. As I've tried to show you, the New Testament focus on the coming of Christ is what we call his second coming, his return, his future, our future, God's future, the future of our universe when Jesus Christ returns.

So why then do we need to recover our great hope in the coming of Christ? We need to recover our great hope in the coming of Christ because the full glory of Christ's work of atonement will only be fully seen when Christ returns, when he transforms our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, when the angels gather the elect from the four corners of the earth, when he perfects his church and presents his bride to himself, radiant and without spot or wrinkle, when he brings in the perfect reign of righteousness, when the arrogant and evildoers are humbled and judged, and when we see a new heaven and a new earth.

The full glory of Christ, the full effect of his finished work on the cross, will be seen in terms of Revelation chapter 7.

After this I looked, there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation and from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

They cried out in a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb. And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures.

[15 : 58] angels, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever.

Amen. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from? I said to him, Sir, you are the one who knows.

Then he said to me, These are they who have come out of the great ordeal. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple.

And the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more and thirst no more. The sun will not strike them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. We also need to recover our great hope in the coming of Christ, to focus on the coming of Christ, in order to help us to repent and change our sinful ways.

[17 : 14] I drive erratically, badly, bad-temperedly, and very quickly.

And the only thing which stops me driving badly and quickly is the fact that there are, I believe, things called speed cameras around. And every time I hit 90 in a 60k area, I think to myself, someone is taking my picture.

picture. So I slow down. Sometimes I go below the speed limit just to make up for the time when I went faster than the speed limit.

And if I go through a red light, sometimes I'm prone to stop at the next green light and wait there for a while, hoping they're taking my picture doing that as well.

In a way, it's a silly example, though I must say it has. Speed cameras have slowed my driving slightly. But I think, to be honest, we don't always serve God and repent and change our sinful ways for the best motives out of love for God.

[18 : 26] Sometimes we need lesser motives to help us to change the way in which we live. And we believers need to know that we'll one day appear before the Lord Jesus Christ and give an account to him for our lives and for our ministries.

And without the focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, I think we will naturally lead self-indulgent and selfish lives. We also need to focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to face death.

Death is the great reality. And we must face the death of our friends and family members. We must face our own death. There's a wonderful story of one of the early English evangelical leaders, Henry Venn.

He was caring for his five children. His wife had died up in Huddersfield. one night he promised that he would show them something very remarkable indeed. And so they went out with him and he took them to a very poor area of the city and they went into a very small little house and there was a man, a young man dying.

He was 25 years old. His name was Abraham. And Henry Venn said to Abraham, I bought my children because I want you to tell them how you are dying.

[20 : 05] He said, you're a young man, you are dying. Do you die with hope? He said, yes, I die with hope in Jesus Christ. Do you regret your death?

No, I do not regret my death. Do you have hope of eternal life? Yes, I have hope of eternal life. And what Henry Venn wanted to show his children was how to die well.

That even in poverty and facing an early death, you could die full of hope in Jesus Christ. It was said of the early Christians that they outlived and out died their contemporaries.

And we ought to show our lack of fear of death because of our confidence in the return of Jesus Christ and in his resurrection power.

We need to focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus in order to face death bravely and not nervously. We need to focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus in order to help us to continue to work at the reformation and transformation of the church.

[21 : 20] One of the most confident statements in the creed, I think, is we believe in the church. Because often as we look at the church, as we experience it around the world today, we might despair at its sinfulness and rebellion.

will Christ succeed in saving his people? Will he succeed in transforming his people? In purifying his bride?

The answer is yes. And that work of cleansing and purification will be completed at his return. We read it in Revelation chapter 21, don't we? When the bride comes down out of heaven, the church like a bride adorned for her husband.

Yes, we can focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to help us to continue to pray for the welfare and reformation and transformation of the church.

We need to focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus to persist in evangelism and mission here in Australia and around the world. There is nothing like the return of Christ to enthuse us to share our faith with our friends and neighbours.

[22 : 28] They don't have an infinite time before them to repent. Their time for repentance is limited. And the limit of that time is the return of Christ. So we must be vigorous and energetic in our sharing of our faith and encouraging them to repent and believe in Jesus Christ before it is too late.

We need to focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to persist in doing good. The hope of reward is a central feature of Jesus' promise of his return. for Jesus knows that we need that encouragement, that consolation to persist.

I was speaking at a preaching conference once and I was asked by an elderly minister if I thought the consolations of heaven would be sufficient to undo the trials and stresses of ministry.

It's a great question, isn't it? Will the consolations of heaven be sufficient to undo the trials and stresses and suffering and pain of ministry? But I decided I couldn't answer the question that night.

I gave the answer the next night at the next session. And I said that I was very confident that when the Lord Jesus said, well done, good and faithful servant.

[23 : 51] When he heard those words, well done, good and faithful servant, then he would think it had all been worthwhile. And we need to focus on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to sustain our hope.

I'm naturally a pessimistic person, which makes me always sound very wise. I always promise the worst outcome of any action. And when that happens, I can say, I told you so. When it doesn't happen, I just keep quiet.

But the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ can sustain our hope. Humanly speaking, there is very little to hope for in the future of the human race, as everyone is telling us.

We have a grim future. But we can have a hope if we trust in Jesus Christ and his return. Jesus promised his disciples that he would come again.

Let not your heart be troubled. You're trusting God. Now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my father lives. I'm going to prepare them for your coming.

[24 : 58] When everything is ready, then I'll come and get you so that you can be with me where I am. How will Jesus come? At that time, they'll see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

How many will see him when he comes? Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

What will we see and hear when he comes? The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

How visible is his coming to be? As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. What warning has Christ given so we won't be fooled about his coming?

If anyone says to you, here is the Christ, or there he is, don't believe it, for false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible.

[26 : 13] Does anyone know the exact time of Christ's coming? No one knows that day or hour, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

What warning has Christ given us that we might not be taken by surprise at this great event? Watch out! Don't let my sudden coming catch you unawares.

Keep a constant watch. Why is Jesus' second coming taking so long? Don't forget this, dear friends, that a day or a thousand years from now on is like tomorrow to the Lord.

He isn't really being slow about his promised return, even though it sometimes seems that way. But he is waiting for the good reason he is not willing that any should perish and is giving more time for sinners to repent.

While we wait for Jesus, how should we live? The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

[27 : 35] Why is Jesus coming back? Christ died once as an offering for the sins of many people.

He'll come again, but not to deal again with our sins. This time he'll come bringing salvation to all who are eagerly and patiently waiting for him.

Let me finish with some great words from the 17th century preacher John Donne. 17th century preacher John Donne. The true joy of a good soul in this world is the very joy of heaven.

And we go thither, not that being without joy we might have joy infused into us, but that, as Christ says, our joy might be full, perfected, sealed with an everlastingness.

18th century John Donne. For as he promises that no man shall take away our joy from us, so neither shall death itself take it away, not so much as interrupt it or discontinue it.

[28 : 39] But as in the face of death when he lays hold upon me, and as in the face of the devil when he attempts me, I shall see the face of God. So that in the agonies of death, in that anguish of that dissolution, I shall have a joy which shall no more evaporate than my soul shall evaporate, a joy that shall pass up and put on a more glorious garment above, and be joy super invested in glory.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.