

The Teachings of Jesus

The Second Coming of Jesus

Lesson #13 for September 27, 2014

Scriptures: John 14:1-3; Matthew 16:27; 24:3-14; 24:4,44; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1. This lesson will focus on the promise of the second coming, some of the details of the second coming, and the reasons for the delay of the second coming of Jesus Christ.
2. Following His ascent to heaven, (Acts 1:11) His return to this earth has been a major focus of the disciples and, in fact, of all Christians. The second coming is mentioned more than 300 times in the New Testament. It is the reason why we call ourselves Adventists.
3. It has now been almost 170 years since the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844. What does that say to us about the promise, the hope, and the delay of the second coming? Did God plan for this delay? Jesus Himself gave several parables suggesting that there would be a delay. (Matthew 25) All the virgins were asleep! Has this delay caused us to sleep? That is certainly what Jesus predicted. But, the bridegroom will come! Unfortunately, He will come at a time when many will not be ready.
4. In the upper room, Jesus made it clear to His disciples that He was leaving them. However, He also made it clear that He was going to prepare a place for them and that He would return to get them. (John 14:1-3) The promises of Jesus that He will come again are very emphatic. In fact, there was no reason for His coming the first time if He does not plan to come again! Can His promises be trusted?
5. There are a number of prophecies given in the Old Testament and some in the New Testament which we call conditional prophecies. Those prophecies suggest that God is waiting for us to do certain things before He will respond in certain ways. Does that mean that His promises are not reliable? Of course, there are many, many prophecies and statements made by Jesus and the apostles and prophets that have, in fact, come true.
6. So, why is He coming back? In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God has stated clearly that the day is coming when He will judge His people and reward those who choose to follow Him and become like Him. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12) Do any of us deserve eternal life? What do we deserve?
7. But, passages like Matthew 22:11-13 make it clear that the judgment must take place before the second coming. The righteous are to be taken to heaven, (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and the wicked are to perish. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10) The righteous will be saved because of their trust in God, their willingness to do His will, and the transformation that has taken place in their lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 16:31; Mark 16:16; John 1:12) Our part in the preparation is to have faith and all that implies.
8. There has been much discussion among God's people about the second coming. It is very clear from places like Matthew 24 that there will be false christs and false prophets coming before the true second coming of Christ takes place. How are we supposed to know when it is the true Messiah who has come?

Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. . . . With anthems of

celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend Him on His way. ***The firmament seems filled with radiant forms***—“ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 640.3-641.0.

Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: “Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!” Throughout the length and breadth of the earth, the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.2. [Bold type and italics are added.]

9. This is confirmed by Jesus’s own statement recorded in Matthew 24:27. Compare Revelation 1:7 and Matthew 26:64.
10. At His first coming, Jesus appeared as a helpless baby boy to live a life as an apparently ordinary human being. But, when He comes again, He will be surrounded by heavenly angels; and His coming will be announced with the great sound of a trumpet. (Matthew 24:31; 25:31; Revelation 19:16) Satan will never be allowed to replicate such a coming!
11. If someone tells you that Christ has appeared and you have not seen these signs, you can be sure it is a false coming.
12. Jesus not only promised to come back again but also He gave us a number of signs to warn us how things will be at the end. It was not His purpose to give us a specific time or an exact date but rather to help us prepare for that great event. (Matthew 24:3-14, 21-26, 29, 36-39; compare Mark 13; Luke 21; and 2 Timothy 3:1-5.) Do any of these signs sound familiar to you?
13. Seventh-day Adventists have been famous for their talk about 1) The great Lisbon earthquake which occurred on November 1, 1755; 2) The dark day and the moon turning to blood on May 19, 1780; and 3) The falling of the stars on November 13, 1833. And what about the prophecy of 2300 days/years which ended in 1844? It is true that these events were followed by great political upheavals during that time. These events led to a renewed search of the Scriptures and the founding of several religious movements including the Millerite movement which was the predecessor to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
14. In any case, Jesus wanted to make it very clear to His disciples and to all of us who believe because of what they said that His coming is always imminent for His followers. It is never further away than our own death. (Matthew 24:32-33,42) With all of these warnings—some of them hundreds of years old—are we ready?
15. Could Christ find us unprepared when He comes? (Matthew 24:42-44) Surely, we do not want to be found to be like the unfaithful servant who was entrusted with his master’s affairs. (Matthew 24:45; Mark 13:34-37) What is the most convincing evidence that Jesus is coming back? Would it convince your skeptical friends? Your atheist friends?
16. But, it is so easy to become so caught up in our work, our daily activities of various kinds, and our personal pursuits that preparation for the second coming gets put off. (Matthew

24:48-51; Luke 21:34-35) What makes a person ready to take such prophecies seriously?

17. It is very important to remember that the Devil does not care if we believe in the second coming so long as we are not preparing for it! So, how can we be sure that we are ready? What has been the reason for the delay? Are we waiting for God? Or, is He waiting for us?

The long night of gloom is trying, but the morning is deferred in mercy, because if the Master should come, so many would be found unready. God's unwillingness to have His people perish, has been the reason of so long delay. *2 Testimonies* 194 (1868); *Evangelism* 694

The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional...

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward." *MS 4*, 1883 (*Evangelism* 695)

The wickedness of the inhabitants of the world has almost filled up the measure of their iniquity. This earth has almost reached the place where God will permit the destroyer to work his will upon it. (*7 Testimonies* 141 (1902); *LDE* 41.3)

The light that was to lighten the whole earth with its glory [Revelation 18:1-The latter rain?] was resisted and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world...

The law of Ten Commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 234,235. [These are comments about the 1888 General Conference at Minneapolis.]

Just as soon as the people of God are **sealed** in their foreheads—it is **not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved**—just as soon as God's people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming. (*MS* 173, 1902). *S.D.A. Bible Commentary* Vol. 4, p. 1161.6; *LDE* 219.4; *Maranatha* 200.2; *The Faith I Live By* 287.7; *1MR* 249.2; *10MR* 252.1.

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who

profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain. (*Christ Object Lessons* 69.1,2) [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

18. When the disciples put aside their differences and prepared themselves for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in preparation for Pentecost, their lives were so transformed that their enemies later said they had turned the world upside down in one generation. (Acts 17:6)
19. Of course, the world laughs at the idea of the second coming. They have tried to deny the fact that God has had anything to do with this world. In fact, they claim that God does not even exist. How should we approach such people?

Is it really true that we might be the reason for the delay? There should be no question in the mind of any Christian that the second coming of Christ will be a cataclysmic event and that things will never be the same again. But, Christians have been promised the opportunity to live with God for eternity; this should produce great excitement and joy on our part. And if the delay is because we are not ready, what are we waiting for?

20. Jesus is patiently longing for us to get ready. Of course, we know that there will be trouble sometime before the second coming actually occurs.
21. Why is it necessary for Christians to go through all the troubles on this earth to prepare them for living in a perfect place where there will be no troubles? (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)
22. We know that God is graciousness and forgiveness personified. He even forgave the men who were nailing Him to the cross. (Luke 23:34)
23. In Christian history, there have been various understandings of the second coming and its relationship to the millennium prophesied in Revelation 20. Following is a brief summary of the different teachings.

There are three basic theological positions regarding the timing of Christ's return.

The postmillennialists believe that 1,000 years of progress will transpire, leading to Christ's return. During the nineteenth century, when technological advancement was widespread, many accepted this belief. Diminished expectations, caused largely by extensive warfare, have nearly scuttled this belief altogether.

The amillennialist does not believe that there is a literal 1,000 years but understands this as figurative language. Therefore, the timing of Christ's coming with reference to the millennium is irrelevant to the amillennialist.

The final grouping, known as premillennialists, is divided into two subgroups—dispensationalists and historicists. The dispensationalists believe that God works differently with people during different time periods. From Calvary until the beginning of the great tribulation is one such period, labeled the church age. The secret rapture of the church happens at the conclusion of the church age, with Christ's second coming happening seven years later at the conclusion of the seven-year tribulation (there are minor variations within this group regarding the exact sequence). Sinners have another chance to repent during this seven-year tribulation period.

The biblical inconsistencies of this position are too numerous to detail in this limited space, but doubtless some are already apparent. The biblical position

is best expressed through historicist premillennial exegesis. This teaches that *Christ comes at the beginning of the millennium* (and after the tribulation or “time of trouble”) to redeem both living and deceased saints (through the first resurrection). The living sinners are destroyed by the brightness of that coming. They then sleep, together with all the unrighteous of history, until the end of the millennium when the resurrection of the condemned will take place. After that second resurrection, they are ultimately destroyed.

The manner of Christ’s return is mentioned in several places, clearly revealing its distinguishing characteristics. It is (1) public (*contrast “secret,” Rev. 1:7, 1 Thess. 4:15-18*), (2) simultaneously worldwide (*contrast “localized,” Matt. 24:5, 23-30*), (3) announced with earsplitting commotion (*contrast “secret,” 1 Thess. 4:15-18, Matt. 24:31*), (4) literal and personal (*contrast “figurative,” Acts 1:11, Luke 24:36-43*), (5) unexpected (*1 Thess. 5:2-6; Matt. 24:43, 44*), and (6) cataclysmic (*Dan. 2:32-35*). Regarding the manner and timing of Christ’s return, God gives us ample information that we might believe but not such abundance that we take it for granted. *Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, pp. 158-159.

Will we continue to procrastinate? Or, has the time come for us to wake up from our slumber and prepare for His return?

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