

DEATH DESTROYED

- A. Introduction: Jesus' first message to His followers once He left earth and returned to Heaven was: I'll be back (Acts 1:9-11), and we're taking time to talk about Jesus' second coming. The Bible makes it clear that perilous times will precede His return (upcoming lessons). Knowing why Jesus is coming back and what His return will mean for humanity will help us make it through the increasingly challenging times ahead.
1. The term second coming of Jesus is not found in Scripture, although it is appropriate because His return will mark His second time on earth. Second coming is a broad term that includes a number of events which take place over a period of time.
 - a. People have a tendency to focus on individual events such as the tribulation and Antichrist and miss the overall purpose of the second coming.
 1. Because they don't consider these individual events and topics in terms of the big picture and God's plan for humanity, they draw wrong conclusions about what is happening and why which produces fear in people who have no reason to be afraid.
 2. So, we are discussing the second coming of Jesus in terms of the big picture (God's ultimate plan for humanity). Any mention we make of these individual people and events will be made in relation to their proper place in the big picture.
 - b. The fact that Jesus is coming back is supposed to be a source of hope and joy for us. That's what it was for the first Christians—people actually saw and heard Jesus when He was on earth.
 1. Titus 2:11-13—Paul the Apostle called Jesus' expected return our blessed (or happy) hope. He and the others of his generation lived eagerly awaiting and expecting the Lord's return.
 2. The first Christians were excited and eager to see Jesus return because they understood that He is coming back to complete God's plan of redemption—His plan to deliver His creation (humankind and the earth) from bondage to sin, corruption, and death.
 - A. God created people to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him and made this world to be a home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - B. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin through His death on the Cross so that all who believe on Him can be transformed from sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. He will come again to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for Himself and His family. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22; etc.
 3. The New Testament authors used the term last days or the last time for the years leading up to Christ's return (II Tim 3:1; I John 2:18). The last days began when Jesus activated the plan of redemption at the Cross (Acts 2:17-21). The last days will culminate with His second coming.
2. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus—men who walked and talked with Him, saw Him die, and then saw Him alive again. They were there when Jesus promised to return. We're taking time to see what they thought and wrote about the second coming of Jesus and have more to say tonight.
- B. Sometimes critics say that emphasizing Jesus' return is a form of escapism and that it is up to us to make this world a better place. But we can't fix this world because the root problem is spiritual—sin and the resulting curse of corruption and death that affected all of creation. It will take supernatural transformation by the power of God at the return of Jesus to fix this world. He will root out all sin, corruption, and death.
1. This is not escapism. It's living with the awareness that a plan is unfolding (God's plan of redemption) and it will be completed. Jesus' return is part of the good news (gospel) we are to proclaim.
 - a. The end result of Jesus' second coming will be: No more death, sorrow, crying, pain, or loss. Life on this planet will be restored to what it was meant to be before it was damaged by sin. Rev 21:1-5
 - b. Matt 28:18-20—Prior to returning to Heaven Jesus commissioned His apostles to go out and make

disciples of all nations—with the awareness that He is coming back to bring full salvation to this world. Full salvation includes resurrection of the dead and restoration of this planet.

1. Jesus said: Teach (people) to faithfully follow all that I have commanded you. And never forget that I am with you every day, even to the completion of this age (Matt 28:20, TPT).
2. The Greek word for age (*aion*) refers to a period of time marked, not by length of time, but by spiritual or moral characteristics. We're in the age when things aren't the way they're supposed to be because of sin, and this age is coming to an end when Jesus returns to complete the plan.
 - A. God's promise to His people who are living on earth in the years preceding His coming is not only that He is with us, but that He will get us through until He gets us out of this age.
 - B. Peter, an eyewitness who was present when the Lord promised to return and knew about the chaos before His return wrote: Through our faith, the mighty power of God constantly guards us until our full salvation is ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pet 1:5, TPT).
2. Because Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan of redemption, the second coming of Jesus Christ will impact the entire human race. Everyone who has ever lived will be affected by His return (many lessons for another day). Note these general points.
 - a. No one ceases to exist at death. From the moment we come into existence at conception we are eternal beings who will live forever. The only question is where, with God or separated from Him.
 - b. All humans have a physical and a non-physical portion to their makeup—the physical body and the inward, immaterial portion made up of spirit and soul (II Cor 4:16). At death the outward and inward portion separate; the body returns to dust and the inward part passes into another dimension.
 1. A full discussion of the nature of the inward man (what is spirit, what is soul) is challenging, in part because the terms spirit and soul are used several ways in Scripture—sometimes as clearly distinct concepts and sometimes interchangeably.
 2. Consider a simple definition for the purpose of our topic: Spirit is the portion of our makeup that can commune directly with God. Soul is our mental and emotional faculties, the seat of our personality.
 - c. Because of misinformation about the nature of the inward man some have the mistaken idea that at death your soul leaves your body. This suggests that only a portion of you goes to Heaven.
 1. But, Heaven is not populated with little floating dots called souls. When your body dies, you (minus your physical body) go to Heaven. That's the clear testimony of the New Testament.
 - A. Paul wrote: "Sometimes I want to live, and sometimes I (me, not my soul) long to go and be with Christ" (Phil 1:23, NLT).
 - B. He also wrote: "We live with a joyful confidence, yet at the same time we take delight in the thought of leaving our bodies behind to be at home with the Lord" (II Cor 5:8, TPT).
 2. Luke 16:19-31—Jesus talked about two men who died at about the same time. One went to Abraham's bosom (a popular name at that time for the place where the righteous go when they die) and the other went to Hell. Both of these places were (are) in another dimension.
 - A. We aren't going to discuss this account in detail because some explanation is necessary for certain statements that don't directly pertain to our point (lessons for another time).
 - B. The point for our present discussion is that even though these men were separated from their bodies, Jesus revealed that they still looked like themselves and recognized each other and people who were already there. Each still had memories of the life that they left behind, and both still expressed thought and emotion.
 - d. God never intended for us to be separated from our bodies through death. He did not create us to die. Death is present in the world because of Adam's sin. Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12
 1. In connection with Jesus' return, all trace of death will be eliminated. All who throughout human history have expressed faith in the revelation of Jesus given to their generation will be

reunited with their bodies raised from the dead and made incorruptible and immortal.

2. I Cor 15:23-26—But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised first; then when Christ comes back, all his people will be raised...the last enemy to be destroyed is death (NLT).

A. When the Lord returns, He will renew and restore the earth to what the Bible calls the new earth, and we will live here again in our bodies—this time forever. I'm not diminishing the joy of the present invisible Heaven. I'm saying that it is temporary.

B. (You can find out more about what life is like the present Heaven in my book: *The Best Is Yet To Come: What The Bible Says About Heaven.*)

3. Knowing that there is more to life than just this life and that the best is yet to come in the life after this life, helps us make it through this life's hardships. Living with the awareness that Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan is found throughout the New Testament. Consider a few statements.

a. When exhorting believers about communion Paul wrote: Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are retelling the story, proclaiming our Lord's death until he comes (I Cor 11:26, TPT).

1. In the context of persecution, related troubles, and the rewards in the life to come, Paul reminded Christians: Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord, no matter what happens...In just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay (Heb 10:35-37, NLT).

2. Paul exhorted believers to live a life of joy and do everything with the awareness that Jesus is coming back: Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon (Phil 4:4-5, NLT).

b. Peter made this statement to Christians who were facing persecution: The end of all things is near. So keep a clear mind. Control yourselves. Then you can pray (I Pet 4:7, NIV).

1. The Greek word that is translated end has the idea of coming to the point where previous activities cease. It's from a word that means to set out for a definite point or goal. The first

Christians knew that the unfolding plan of redemption will be completed when Jesus returns. 2.

Peter faced death looking forward to this world being restored—the new heavens and new earth, “a world where everyone is right with God, where righteousness will be fully at home” (II Pet 3:13, NLT, TPT). (Remember, new means something made new in quality and superior in character—not something that never existed before—this earth renewed and restored.)

C. Jesus was born into first century AD Israel, a people group that knew from the writings of their prophets (preserved in the Old Testament) that the Lord is coming to establish His visible kingdom on earth, restore the world to pre-sin conditions, and live with His people forever. Consider a few well known passages.

1. In 603 BC Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream that no one understood. At that time the Jewish people were living as captives in Babylon. God gave a Jewish prophet named Daniel the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:31-45). We could do many lessons on the meaning of the dream (not now). However, note the points that relate to our present discussion.

a. Daniel was shown that four empires would rule over Israel and then the Messiah will come. Daniel was the first to use the name Messiah for the coming Redeemer who will restore earth. Dan 9:24-26

1. The historical record reveals that Babylon (in control at that time) was replaced by the Persian Empire. The Greek Empire conquered Persia, and then the Roman Empire conquered Greece.

2. Daniel saw these same kingdoms in another vision at a different time and was given more information, especially about the last empire. Dan 7:1-28

b. In the dream and vision Daniel saw the end result—God coming to establish His kingdom on earth. In his vision Daniel saw details about the catastrophic events leading up to the Lord's coming.

1. Daniel was shown that during the reign of a particular earthly king in the distant future (the man we commonly call Antichrist) “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed; no one will ever conquer it. It will shatter all these kingdoms into nothingness, but

it will stand forever” (Dan 2:44, NLT).

2. Daniel also “saw someone who looked like a man (the original language reads like a son of man) coming in the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One (Almighty God) and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and royal power over all the nations of the world, so that the people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14, NLT).

A. When Jesus began His public ministry, Israel was looking for the Messiah based on these writings. The timing was right because fourth empire (Rome) was in control of Israel.

B. When Jesus used the title Son of Man for Himself He was claiming to be the divine figure Daniel wrote about who will come of the world to judge mankind and rule forever.

2. When Jesus came proclaiming the gospel (or good news) of the kingdom of God He had everyone’s attention: The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. Mark 1:15

a. For us, the word kingdom is old fashioned and has almost a fairy tale element to it. But the Greek word translated kingdom means reign or rule. First century Israel knew that the Lord is coming to take control of the world He created, restore it, and live and with His people forever.

1. When Jesus began His public ministry no one knew yet that His ministry would culminate in His crucifixion and resurrection, and that He would return to Heaven with a promise to return at some point to establish His visible kingdom.

2. The Old Testament prophets didn’t see clearly that there will be two comings of the Messiah separated by 2,000 years. Nor did they see that He would first come to sacrifice Himself for sin and then return later as the conquering Lord who takes control of the kingdoms of this world during the time of a revived Roman Empire (lessons for another day) night).

b. That didn’t matter to those who saw the big picture. Consider the reaction of one devout Jew who recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Luke 2:25-35

1. When Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the Temple to present Him to the Lord they encountered Simeon, a devout man “who eagerly expected the Messiah to come and rescue Israel” (Luke 2:25, NLT). God had revealed to him that he would see Messiah before he died.

2. He was led to the Temple that day, took Jesus in his arms and praised God: Lord, now I can die in peace! As you promised me, I have seen the Savior you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:29-32, NLT)

3. What good was it to see Jesus at the end of his life? Simeon didn’t cease to exist when he died. He temporarily left his body and now resides in the invisible Heaven, awaiting his return to earth at the second coming of Jesus to live in God’s kingdom on the earth restored.

D. Conclusion: Since Adam took the human race into the pigpen of sin death has reigned over humanity. Every ill that plagues humankind is a form of death or a consequence of sin—not necessarily your sin, but Adam’s.

1. That’s about to change: The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, but all who receive God’s wonderful gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17, NLT).

2. When Jesus returns our bodies will be made immortal and incorruptible (whether they’re in the grave or we’re still alive—lessons for another day) so we can live with the Lord forever on this earth. Life will be what it was always meant to be—no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. Rev 21:4

3. In the New Testament writings, no one’s focus was on the Antichrist or the tribulation. It was on the fact that the King is coming to bring His kingdom His reign to earth and destroy the reign of death forever (I Cor 15:26). That should be our focus! Much more next week!