

Sermon 9: Revelation 1:7-8: The Second Coming of Christ

OUTLINE

- The certainty of His coming
- The nature of His coming
- The visibility of His coming
- The terror of His coming
- The desire for His coming

INTRODUCTION

How does God comfort His people when they are innocent and being persecuted and hunted to death? He reminds them of the final judgement when all enemies will be crushed all, debts will be paid in full, and the new creation will be brought to never be undone. All pain, injustice, sin, enemies, and all that harasses God's people and diminishes God's glory and reign will be gone. There are some very hard words coming in the book of Revelation that will require Christians to pay with their lives to be faithful witnesses. They will need their minds to be set on the final victory from the start of this letter. There are some terrifying revelations coming that show powerful enemies, permitted sufferings and costly obedience. These Christians need to be reminded that no matter how bad it gets, Jesus is coming again to set things right. We have looked at the three sets of three in the introduction which reminded us of the Trinity, Christ's person and His work for us, John now reminds these churches of the final judgement when Jesus comes again, v7-8, '7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

The certainty of His coming

John begins by announcing that He is coming. This is the thing that puts everything else into perspective. We can endure suffering knowing that suffering will one day be over. We can hold out against enemies who are attacking us knowing that the cavalry will be here to overthrow an enemy stronger than us. We can see through the apparent strength of this world's powers knowing that they will all have to bow the knee to Him. But how can we be so certain that He is coming again. It has been 2000 years and He hasn't come yet, how can we be sure?

Paul gives us the answer in Acts 17:30-31, 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'" Jesus resurrection is the proof that all will be resurrected for judgement. Not only is He the perfect judge who is sinless and will not err in judgement, not only has He been given all authority to judge, He has proven by

His resurrection that all can be resurrected by His power to stand before His throne to be judged according to their works.

If His coming is so certain then why have we had to wait so long? I have been asked this question many times and Peter tells us the answer, God's delay is a measure of His patience, of His mercy and of His kindness, not forgetfulness or incompetence. 2 Peter 3:8-10, 'But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.'

The nature of His coming

John tells us that Christ is coming with the clouds. There has been some contention over exactly what this means. There is the traditional view which sees Jesus coming on clouds just as He ascended in a cloud, Acts 1:10-11, 'And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." The trouble is that the wording comes from Daniel 7:13, "'I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.' If you look closely at the detail you will see that this prophecy is not foretelling the coming of Jesus to earth on a cloud but is foretelling His coming to the Father. This verse is making reference to His ascension and coronation when He received the name above all other names. Daniel 7:13 is not describing the Second coming but the ascension. Confusion is added to the matter when Christ tells us the Highpriest that he will see the Son of Man coming with the clouds, Mark 14:61-62, 'But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.'" Now whether Christ is referring to the judgement upon Jerusalem and this judgement is being described in prophetic imagery, or whether Christ is speaking of the final judgement we do not know.

This notion of Christ's coming being a judgement but not the final judgement has led some to suggest another reading of this verse altogether. Some say that this verse is only speaking about the judgement upon Jerusalem, that the clouds are figurative as in Deut. 33:2 and Isaiah 19:1, representing God's presence like the pillar of cloud, that those who pierced Him refers to the first century Jews being judged, and all the tribes of the earth they argue should be 'all the tribes of the land' being Israel. They do not allow for this verse to speak of Christ's second coming, but only His judgement upon Jerusalem. The dating of the book of Revelation helps us here. Revelation is credited to a 90s writing not to a pre-70 AD writing. Internal evidence points to Domitian's persecution, and early traditions confirm this. For this reason we can know that John is taking Daniel's vision and adjusting it. For Christ

has already ascended to the Father and this cannot be describing that moment. Likewise the book was written about 20 years after the fall of Jerusalem so it cannot be a figurative Israelocentric judgement. That leaves us with the final judgement and literal clouds.

The visibility of His coming

We are told that every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him. When Jesus comes again every person will be resurrected, those who are believers will either come with Christ as disembodied spirits and be united to a resurrection body, or if they are alive when He returns they will be changed into the twinkling of an eye. All believers will receive their new creation bodies that will never die again. Paul thinks that to be further clothed (glorified) is to be better than unclothed (the intermediate state), 2 Cor 5:4, 'For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened---not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.' Unbelievers are also resurrected from the dead to face Christ for judgement, Rev. 20:12-13, 'And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.' We are not told the nature of their resurrection bodies but since they have no part in Christ they cannot be glorious and free from sin.

It is because of this universal resurrection that there will be a universal visibility of Christ's return. So much so that even those who have been dead for 2000 years, those responsible for piercing Christ will see Him as well.

What is interesting here is that John is quoting from Zech. 12:10, 'And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.' What was predicted as mourning in repentance as they return to God in Jerusalem is now portrayed as a mourning in terror worldwide. It is likely that John is anticipating that at the final judgement those who did not mourn in repentance will mourn in terror. Those who did mourn in repentance, turning from their sin and finding their refuge in Christ, that day will be a day of rejoicing and confidence not wailing.

The terror of His coming

The fact that there will be mourning shows a great reversal. Christians weep and mourn in this life as we repent, as we weep over the lost, as we cry out in prayer and as we cry out for justice. But on that day we will be praising and it will be the unbelieving world that is presently laughing that will be wailing. It will be a terrible day, it will be the worst day that will ever be for those who do not believe. It is a day so terrible because of the wrath of the Lamb. Each one will have to behold the perfect holiness of God, the perfect power of God, the absolute justice of God against them in their sins. Revelation 6:15-16 puts it like this,

'Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'"

Because all are sinners, all the tribes of the earth will wail. There are no sincere Godfearers out there who will be swept into heaven because they responded to the light they had, there will be worldwide wailing, all the tribes of the earth will wail.

The desire of His coming

Despite the fact that the day of judgement will be terrible, John prays, 'Even so. Amen.' What sort of a prayer is this? Millions of people will be thrown into hell, is this a day we should long for? Yes, that will be the day when God is vindicated. That will be the day when all the enemies will be defeated. That will be the day when sin gets exactly what it deserves. It is the day of God's glory, and it is a day that we long for.

This introduction ends with v8, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" Who is speaking? The consensus is that it is Christ. We have seen the Father, who is eternal called the 'one who is and who was and who is to come' in v4. This is joined with 'the Alpha and Omega' the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet communicating the same fact of eternity. In Rev. 22:12-13 we have a similar repeat of these verses, "'Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'" In this context it is clearly Christ. This means that Christ is equal with the Father in nature and eternity. The significance of this reference is not merely to show God's predominance over time, this notion of God as the first and the last comes from Isaiah 41:4, 44:6-7, and 48:12-13. In those contexts God is challenging the idols and proving His own deity by His ability to foretell the future and bring it to pass with certainty. This name should recall the fact that God does not make idle promises but prophecies the future with pin point accuracy. The second coming of Christ is not a vain hope but a certainty because He is the first and the last.