

The Doctrine of the Last Things

from *Great Doctrines of the Bible* by William Evans

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

I. ITS IMPORTANCE.

1. ITS PROMINENCE IN THE SCRIPTURES.

It is claimed that one out of every thirty verses in the Bible mentions this doctrine; to every one mention of the first coming the second coming is mentioned eight times; 318 references to it are made in 216 chapters; whole books (1 and 2 Thess., e.g.) and chapters (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 31, e.g.) are devoted to it.

It is the theme of the Old Testament prophets. Of course, they sometimes merge the two comings so that it is not at first sight apparent, yet the doctrine is there. (1 Pet. 1:11).

Jesus Christ bore constant testimony to His coming again (John 14:3; Matt. 24 and 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 21:22).

The angels, who bore such faithful testimony to Christ's first advent, bear testimony to His second coming (Acts 1:11; cf. Heb. 2:2, for the faithfulness of their testimony).

The apostles faithfully proclaimed this truth (Acts 3:19, 20; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Heb. 9:28; 1 John 2:28; Jude 14, 15).

2. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS BIDDEN TO LOOK FORWARD TO CHRIST'S SECOND COMING AS ITS GREAT HOPE.

Titus 2:13—"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 3:12. The one great event, that which supersedes all others, towards which the Church is to look, and for which she is to ardently long, is the second coming of Christ.

3. IT IS SET FORTH AS THE DOCTRINE WHICH WILL PROVE TO BE THE GREATEST INCENTIVE TO CONSISTENT LIVING.

Matt. 24:44-46; Luke 21:34-36—"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares ...

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." 1 John 2:28; 3:3. The test which the church should apply to all questions of practice: Would I like to have Christ find me doing this when He comes?

4. IT IS A DOCTRINE OF THE GREATEST COMFORT TO THE BELIEVER.

1 Thess. 4:14-18. After stating that our loved ones who had fallen asleep in Christ should again meet with us at the coming of our Lord, the apostle says, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Why then should such a comforting and helpful doctrine as this be spoken against? Many reasons may be suggested: the unreadiness of the church; preconceived views (2 Pet. 3:4); extravagant predictions as to time; lack of knowledge of the Scriptures. May not the guilt on our part for rejecting the second coming of Christ be as great if not greater than that of the Jews for rejecting His first coming?

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

1. A PERSONAL AND VISIBLE COMING.

Acts 1:11—"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." 1 Thess. 4:16, 17—"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven." Rev. 1:7. From these scriptures we learn that by the second coming of Christ is meant the bodily, personal, and visible coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth with His saints to reign.

2. ERRONEOUS VIEWS CONCERNING THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

a) That the Second Coming Means Christ's Coming at Death.

This cannot be the meaning, because—

Death is not attended by the events narrated in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17. Indeed the second coming is here set forth as the opposite of death for "the dead in Christ shall rise" from the dead when Christ comes again. According to John 14:3, Christ comes for us, and not we go to Him: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself."

John 21:21-23—"Peter seeing him (John) saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I

come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die; yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

1 Corinthians 15:50-57 declares that at the second coming of Christ we overcome, not succumb to, death. See John 8:51; Matt. 16:28.

The foolishness of such interpretation is seen if we substitute the word "death" for the second coming of Christ in such places where this coming is mentioned, e.g., Phil. 3:20; Matt. 16:28—"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

b) That the Second Coming Means the Coming of the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt but that the coming of the Holy Spirit is a coming (John 14:21-23), but it is by no means *the* second coming, and for the following reasons:

Many of the testimonies and promises of the second coming were given *after* Pentecost, e.g., Phil. 3:21; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52.

Christ does not receive us unto Himself, but comes to us, at Pentecost. In the second coming He takes us, not comes to us.

The events of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 did not occur on the day of Pentecost, nor do they occur when the believer receives the Holy Spirit.

c) That the Second Coming refers to the Destruction of Jerusalem.

Reply: The events of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 did not take place then.

John 21:21-23, and Rev. 22:20 were written *after* the destruction of Jerusalem.

From all that has been said then, it seems clear that the second coming of Christ is an event still in the future.

3. THE NEED OF RECOGNIZING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CHRIST'S COMING FOR HIS SAINTS AND WITH HIS SAINTS.

There is a distinction between the *presence* and the *appearing* of Christ: the former referring to His coming *for*, and the latter *with* His saints. We should remember, further, that the second coming covers a

period of time, and is not the event of a single moment. Even the first coming covered over thirty years, and included the events of Christ's birth, circumcision, baptism, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, etc. The second coming will also include a number of events such as the rapture, the great tribulation, the millennium, the resurrection, the judgments, etc.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE SECOND COMING.

1. SO FAR AS IT CONCERNS THE CHURCH.

1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-52; Phil. 3:20, 21, R.V.; 1 John 3:2. When Christ comes again He will first raise the righteous dead, and change the righteous living; simultaneously they shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air to be with Him for ever.

Eph. 5:23, 32; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:6-9; Matt. 25:1-10. The Church, the Bride of Christ, will then be married to her Lord.

Matt. 25:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10. Believers will be rewarded for their faithfulness in service at His coming. (See [The Final Reward of the Righteous.](#))

2. SO FAR AS IT CONCERNS THE UNCONVERTED NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS.

Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7; Matt. 25:31, 32; Rev. 20:11, 12; Isa. 26:21; 2 Thess. 1:7-9. A distinction must be recognized between the judgment of the Living Nations, and that of the Great White Throne. These are not the same, for no resurrection accompanies the judgment of the Living Nations, as in the case of the throne judgment. Further, one thousand years elapse between these two judgments (Rev. 20:7-11). Again, one is at the beginning of the Millennium, and the other at its close.

3. WITH REFERENCE TO THE JEWS.

The Jews will be restored to their own land (Isa. 11:11; 60) in an unconverted state; will rebuild the temple, and restore worship (Ezek. 40-48); will make a covenant with Antichrist for one week (seven years), in the midst of which they will break the covenant (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2); they will then pass through the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21, 22, 29; Rev. 3:10; 7:14); are converted (as a nation) at the coming of Christ (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7); become great missionaries (Zech. 8:13-23); never more to be removed from the land (Amos 9:15; Ezek. 34:28).

4. WITH REGARD TO ANTICHRIST, AND THE ENEMIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 19:20; 20:10. These shall be destroyed by the brightness of His coming; will be cast finally into the bottomless pit.

5. TO SET UP THE MILLENNIAL REIGN ON THE EARTH.

The Millennium means the thousand years reign of Christ upon the earth (Rev. 20:1-4). Some think that it is the continuation of the *Kingdom Age* broken off by the unbelief of the Jews at the time of the Apostles.

The Millennium begins with the coming of Christ with His saints; with the revelation of Christ after the great tribulation (Matt. 24:29, 30); at the close of the seventieth week of Daniel. For illustration, see Rev. 19:11-14; Dan. 7:21, 22; Zech. 14:3-9.

Then comes the destruction of Antichrist, the binding of Satan, and the destruction of the enemies of God's people (Rev. 19:20; 20:1-3, 10).

The Judgment of the Living Nations (Matt. 25).

The conversion and missionary activity of the Jews (Zech. 8:13-23; cf. Acts 15:14-17). Then, we may have a converted world, but not now, nor in this age; Israel, not the Church, then concerned.

The nature of the Millennium:

It is a Theocracy: Jesus Christ Himself is the King (Jer. 23:5; Luke 1:30-33). The Apostles will, doubtless, reign with Christ over the Jews (Isa. 66; Matt. 19:28); the Church, over the Gentile nations (Luke 19:11-19; Heb. 2:6, 7).

The capitol city will be Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-4). Pilgrimages will be made to the Holy City (Zech. 14:16).

The reign of Christ will be one of righteousness and equity (Isa. 11:4; Psa. 98:9).

A renovated earth (Rom. 8:19-31; Isa. 65:17; c. 35).

The events closing the Millennium are apostasy and rebellion (Rev. 20:7-9); the destruction of Satan (Rev. 20:10); the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15); a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21 and 22).

IV. THE TIME OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

We need to carefully distinguish between Christ's coming *for* His saints—sometime called the "rapture" or "parousia"; and His coming *with* His saints—the "revelation" or "epiphany."

In considering the matter of the "signs" of Christ's coming we need to pay particular attention to and distinguish between those signs which have been characteristic of and peculiar to many generations, and have, consequently, been repeated; and those which are to characterize specifically the near approach of the coming of Christ. Christians are not altogether in the dark concerning these facts: Luke 21:29-33—"So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (v. 36). Also 1 Thess. 5:1-8—"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (v. 4).

1. NO ONE KNOWS THE DAY NOR THE HOUR.

Matt. 24:36-42—"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (v. 36). Mark 13:32, cf. Acts 1:7.

The Scriptures tell us enough regarding the time of Christ's coming to satisfy our faith, but not our curiosity. These statements of the Master should be sufficient to silence that fanaticism which is so anxious to tell us the exact year, month, and even the day when Christ will come. This day is hidden in the counsels of God. Jesus Himself, by a voluntary unwillingness to know, while in His state of humiliation, showed no curiosity to peer into the chronology of this event. We should not nor ought we to want to know more than Christ did on this point. Can it be that "that day" was not yet fixed in the counsels of the Father, and that its date depended, somewhat at least, upon the faithfulness of the Church in the evangelization of the world? We know not certainly. The Revelation which Jesus gave to John would seem to teach that "that day," which was at one time hidden from Christ, is now, in His state of exaltation, known to Him.

2. YET, WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT WHILE WE MAY NOT KNOW THE EXACT DAY OR HOUR OF CHRIST'S COMING, WE MAY KNOW WHEN IT IS NEAR AT HAND. (Matt. 24:36-42; 1 Thess. 5:1-5.)

There are certain "signs" which indicate its nearness:

General apostasy and departure from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Luke 18:8).

A time of great heaping up of wealth (James 5:1-9).

A time of great missionary activity (Matt. 24:14). Consider the missionary activity of the last century. Is it not marvellous? Is it a "sign" of His coming?

The modern history of the Jews throws much light on the question of the nearness of Christ's coming. The following facts are interesting in this connection: The large number of Jews returning to Palestine; the waning of the power of the Turkish government, which has held Palestine with an iron hand and has excluded the Jew; the plans already before the nations to give the Holy Land to the Jews by consent of the powers; the early and latter rain in Palestine; railroads, electric lights, etc., now in the land long desolate—the fig-tree is budding, and the hour of the coming is at hand.

It should not be forgotten in this connection that many of the signs mentioned refer primarily to the coming of Christ *with* His saints. But if that stage of the coming be near then surely the first stage of it must be. Other signs have reference to the first stage in the one great event of His coming, which is known as the "rapture" or Christ's coming *for* His saints.

3. IT SEEMS CLEAR FROM THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO PREVENT THE COMING OF CHRIST FOR HIS SAINTS AT ANY MOMENT.

By this is meant that there is nothing, so far as we can see from the teaching of the Scriptures and the signs of the times, to hinder the introduction of the Day of the Lord, or the Second Coming of Christ looked upon as a great whole—a series of events, by Christ's coming to take His own people unto Himself. In other words, there is nothing to hinder the "rapture" or "parousia"—the "epiphany," "manifestation," or "revelation" is something for a later day.

Some objections are offered to this view, the which it will be well to examine and answer even though briefly.

First, That the Gospel has not been preached into all the world (Matt. 24:14), therefore the coming of Christ is not imminent.

Reply: We must understand the emphatic words of the text: By "end" is meant the end of the age; but the rapture, or Christ's coming *for* His saints, of which we are here speaking as being imminent, is not the end of the age. By "world" is meant the inhabited earth; by "Gospel," good news; by "witness," not conversion but testimony. Even if these events

are to precede the "rapture," have they not all been fulfilled? See Acts 2:5; 8:4; Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:6, 23, for the answer, which is certainly in the affirmative. We must give the same meaning to the word "world" in Romans and Colossians that we do to Matt. 24:14. Further, is the Church the *only* witness? See Rev. 14:6. If the rapture is not the end of the age, and if an angel can proclaim the Gospel, why cannot part of the work of witnessing be carried on after the rapture?

Second, Peter, James, and John were told that they should not taste of death until they had seen the coming of Christ's kingdom (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).

Reply: True, but was not this fulfilled when they saw Christ on the Transfiguration Mount? Peter, who was there, in his second epistle (1:16-18) distinctly says it was thus fulfilled.

Third, The disciples were told that they shall not have gone over all the cities of Israel until the Son of Man be come (Matt. 10:23).

Reply: Mark 6:30, Luke 9:10 shows that they did not finish all the cities, nor is there evidence anywhere that they ever did, for Israel rejected the message of the kingdom. May it not be that under the restoration of the Jews and the preaching of the "two witnesses" (Rev. 11) this shall be accomplished?

Fourth, Christ said "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." See Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:32; Mark 13:30.

Reply: What is meant by a "generation"? Some would say "forty years," consequently the Master referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, which event was the second coming of Christ. But this is not necessarily the case. The word "generation" may refer to the Jewish *race*; cf. the use of the same Greek word in Matt. 11:16; 16:4; Mark 8:38; Luke 7:31; 16:8; 17:25; Phil. 2:15; Psa. 22:30; 24:6. And in this connection consider carefully the wonderful preservation of the Jewish race. Other nations have passed away, having lost their identity; the Jew remains—that generation (race) has not yet passed away, nor will it "till all these things be fulfilled." [FOOTNOTE: *Jesus is Coming*, by W. E. B., is heartily recommended as an exceedingly helpful book on this subject. The author is indebted thereto.]