

### 4.3 The Second Coming of Christ

*A summary of the 3rd Lecture by J N Darby on the Present Hope of the Church  
– Geneva entitled ‘**The Second Coming of Christ**’*

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In Acts 1,

The Lord will return to the Earth

The State of the Church

The Joy of the departed Soul

God will gather together all things in Christ

We (the Church) will come with the Lord

Asleep in Jesus

The Mystery of Iniquity

An Appeal – Darby’s own Words

#### **In Acts 1,**

1. The Holy Spirit was about to come.
2. The Lord was going to return.
3. The kingdom of Israel would be restored to Israel, but the answer as to when going to be hidden in God. Times and seasons belonged to the Father who had put them in His power.

The promise of the Lord’s return is the hope of church. Christ’s return ruled the intelligence, sustained the hope and inspired the conduct, of the apostles. Sadly, the expectation of the Saviour’s return has been lost sight of in the church. Hence the public position has declined spiritually.

## The Lord will return to the Earth

Most of Old Testament prophecy, and therefore the disciples understanding, centred around the Lord's actual return to earth and the redemption of Israel. It is not surprising, therefore, that this was the question that they asked the Lord after the resur

rection.

According to Matthew 24:30, His coming will be a great public event.

- The Son of man will come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
- The tribes of the earth shall mourn.
- The Jews '*shall look on him whom they pierced*' (John 19:37; see also Zachariah 12:10 and Revelation

1:7).

In one of the first preachings, Peter said, '*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord ... whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things*' (Acts 3:19-21). Both the initial preaching of Peter and the Lord's words in Matthew 24 and 25 (correspondingly in the other synoptic gospels) relate to Israel. Darby makes this clear in his 'Synopsis<sup>1</sup>', though in his ministry he applied it to the poor state of Christendom.

### The State of the Church

Let us now see how both the Lord Himself first, then the Holy Spirit, have continuously directed our attention to His return.

The degree of expectation of the Lord's return is gauged (as with a thermometer, so to speak) as an indicator of the life of the Church. In Matthew 24, the evil servant was not prepared for the Lord to return. '*My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites*' (v. 49-51).

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<sup>1</sup> IN the Synopsis on Matthew 24, Darby writes as to verse 30, 'The Lord gives the history of the testimony in Israel, and that of the people themselves, from the moment of His departure until His return; but the length of time, during which there should be neither people nor temple nor city, is not specified. It is this which gives importance to the capture of Jerusalem. It is not here spoken of in direct terms the Lord does not describe it; but it put an end to that order of things to which His discourse applies, and this application is not resumed until Jerusalem and the Jews are again brought forward'.

*'Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh' (v. 44).*

After appeals at the start of the church period, Stephen, the first martyr had to tell the religious leaders that they would not repent and continued to resist the Holy Spirit; See Acts 7:51.

All the virgins in Matthew 25 were in the same state; the wise ones (the true saints) as well as the foolish ones, who lacked the oil of the Holy Spirit, slept and forgot the immediate return of Christ. What woke them up was the midnight cry that He was coming<sup>2</sup>.

Christendom is in a state worse than that of the Jews or pagans, in that it has had more advantages. The evil which Satan has caused by heresies, false doctrines and false religions, continues to increase, and ripen.

### **The Joy of the departed Soul**

This is seen in four scriptures:

1. *'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.'* (Luke 23:43).
2. *'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit';* (Acts 7:59)
3. *'To be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord'* (2 Corinthians 5:8).
4. *'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better'* (Philippians. 1:22, 23).

It is far better to expect the glory and to be present with Christ, than to remain here below<sup>3</sup>:

The Lord says, *'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself.'* He, Himself will come for His church, so that the church may be there, where He is.

### **God will gather together all things in Christ**

In the early preaching, Peter said, *'He [God] may send Jesus Christ ... whom the heavens must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.'*

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<sup>2</sup> Note that Darby makes it clear that this applies to the Lord's second coming (the Appearing). It is not:

Death (that is not the Bridegroom),

The coming of the Spirit (not the Bridegroom either).

The aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 (The Bridegroom did not come then).

<sup>3</sup> Really our expectation is to be with Him. We are out of the reach of sin, and we enjoy the Lord apart from it.

(Acts 3:20-21) The work of the Holy Spirit is not to re-establish all things here below, to rebuild creation (which sadly many Christians are trying to do) but to announce the return of Jesus, to whom every knee must bow.

### **We (the Church) will come with the Lord**

*'For our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory'* (Philippians 3:20, 21 Darby). This scripture demonstrates that our relationship with the Lord is in heaven – that is where our citizenship is. We are aliens here. I have added this.

*'When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.'* (Colossians 3:4.) – Obviously, in order to come with Him, we shall have had already to have been taken to be with Him.

The two epistles to the Thessalonians focus on the coming of Christ. It is remarkable that this church, one of the most flourishing of those to which Paul wrote, should be the one to which the Lord chose to reveal, with the most detail, the circumstances of His coming. *'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.'* (Psalm 25:14.). Such was the faith of the Thessalonians that it was spoken of in all the world. They expected the Lord from heaven. May we have this same faith that the Thessalonians had!

We, pre-millennialists, expect the Lord before the thousand years. If Paul had not been a pre-millennialist too, and had expected a Millennium of the Holy Spirit before the coming of Jesus, how could he ever have said, *'We who remain until the coming of Christ'*? There was, then, in his soul, a continual expectation of the coming of Christ. He did not know the moment, but he expected it imminently.

The believers in Thessalonica (modern Thessaloniki) had the hope of the return of Christ to such a degree that they did not think of dying before that event; and when one of them departed, his friends were afraid that he would not be present at that happy moment. Paul reassures them by asserting that those who sleep in Jesus will be brought back with Him.

### **Asleep in Jesus**

In passing, we should note that when somebody is taken, we often hear it said, 'He/she has gone to glory'. Paul did not see it that way. The person was 'asleep in Jesus' or 'With Christ'. Our outlook is to be with Him if we are taken before the Rapture. It is not to 'go to heaven when we die'.

*'Therefore we are always confident; knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.'* (2 Corinthians 5:6) . I have already the life of Christ: if I depart, I shall be with Him. Paul will enjoy the fruits of his waiting.

### **The Mystery of Iniquity**

The mystery of iniquity, which was already working in the time of Paul, was to go on until the manifestation of the man of sin. He will be destroyed at the glorious Appearing of Christ Himself<sup>4</sup>.

The Appearing of Christ is not at the end, for at the end, He will have delivered up the kingdom. In reality, the kingdom takes place at His Appearing.

We shall only be like Him when He appears for us (i.e. at the Rapture), not before<sup>5</sup>. *'But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.'* (1 John 3:2) A heart that is full of this hope conducts himself accordingly – he purifies himself. Knowing that when Jesus appears, I shall be like Him. I ought to like Him now.

### **An Appeal – Darby's own Words**

'May the Lord apply these truths to our hearts, on one side, to detach us from the things of the world, and, on the other, to attach us to His coming – to Himself in Person; and we shall purify ourselves even as He is pure. There is nothing more practical, nothing more powerful to disentangle us from a world that is to be judged, and to knit us to the One who will come to judge it.

Certainly, there is nothing that can serve better to show us where our purification comes from. There is nothing which can console us, invigorate us, and identify us more with the One who has suffered so that we might reign with Him, co-heirs in glory. Surely, if we were expecting the Lord any day, there would be seen in us a self-renunciation rarely seen among the Christians of the present age. May none of us be found saying, *'My Lord delayeth his coming'*! (Matthew 24:4).

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<sup>4</sup> Now, in such a state of things where is the place for such a post-tribulation Millennium? Indeed, where is the scriptural justification for suggesting that the church will still be here when the man of sin is revealed?

<sup>5</sup> Note that we are not told what a body of glory will be like (See also Philippians 3:21). Scripture is not to satisfy our curiosity.

