

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Is Jesus coming back again?

Just as surely as Jesus came into the world 2000 years ago, He will return again someday. His second coming is as certain as His first.

How do we know Jesus is coming back again?

- Jesus promised to return (Matthew 26:64).
- Jesus often spoke of His return in parable and exhortation, urging His disciples to be ready for that day (see Matthew chapters 24, 25).
- The apostles taught that Jesus would return (Acts 3:19-21).
- Angels testified that Jesus would return (Acts 1:11).
- The return of Christ is a prominent theme of the whole New Testament, and has been the blessed hope of believers from the first days of the church to the present (Titus 2:13).

How will Jesus come back?

The second coming of Christ will be like the first in that He will return literally and bodily, not just in some spiritual or symbolic sense (Acts 1:11). He will come back in the same glorified physical body in which He was resurrected and ascended into heaven.

The second coming of Christ will differ from the first in several important ways:

- Jesus came the first time to begin the process of redeeming the fallen Creation; He will come the second time to complete the process (Romans 8:19-23).
- The primary focus of Jesus' first coming was salvation; the primary focus of His second coming will be judgment (Acts 17:31).
- Jesus came the first time as the suffering Lamb, offering no resistance to His enemies; He will come the second

- time as the conquering Lion, destroying His enemies with the breath of His mouth (2 Thessalonians 2:8).
- Jesus came the first time in humility and meekness, His glory hidden from view; He will come the second time in overwhelming splendor, His glory shining forth like the sun itself (Luke 21:27). The second coming is referred to in Scripture as the “revelation” or “unveiling” of Christ, for then He will be seen as He is (1 John 3:2).

When will Jesus come again?

No one knows when Jesus will return (Matthew 24:36). Jesus warned us time and again that His return would come as a surprise, that there would be no way of knowing the time of His coming (Matthew 24:44; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Nevertheless, people have persisted in trying to predict what Jesus said could not be known. Over the years many declared that He would return on this date or that, and always they have been proved wrong. It is difficult to say who is more foolish, those who make such predictions or those who believe them.

It is futile to try to guess the date of Christ’s return. God hid this information from us for a purpose: He wants us to be ready at all times (Luke 12:40).

Certainly Jesus’ return will come as a surprise to those who do not know Him and so do not expect Him. It should not be a surprise to us. This is not because we know the date of His return, but because we are always watching, always waiting for Him (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6). We are to be ready whenever He comes.

What should be our attitude toward the return of Christ?

The return of Christ is the foundation and anchor of our hope as Christians. We do not feel at home in this world, for we know it is not as it should be; persecution and frustration, evil and injustice are ever present. God’s people are looking for a kingdom

where righteousness and peace reign (Isaiah 42:1). We seek a permanent home (Hebrews 13:14) that we can share with our loved ones, beyond the reach of death's cruel intrusion (Revelation 21:4). We desire to replace these diseased and decaying bodies with glorious, immortal ones (Philippians 3:20, 21). We long to see with our own eyes the One who gave Himself for us (1 Peter 1:8). When Christ the King returns, all our hopes will be fulfilled.

The promise of Christ's return teaches us to hold loosely to the things we have here, and to value things differently than the world does. We know that the political and social structures of this present age are temporary, and that any day the kingdoms of this world could be replaced by the glorious and eternal kingdom of Christ. We recognize the higher value of what is unseen but eternal, and resist the temptation to seek after the fleeting pleasures and fading prizes offered by the world (2 Corinthians 4:18). We don't worry about piling up assets here, for we won't possess our real treasures until Jesus returns (Matthew 6:19-21).

The impending return of Christ does not mean we need do nothing but sit back and wait for Him. The second coming is no excuse for idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:6). Neither should we allow curiosity to breed an unhealthy fascination with end times, so that we spend all our time trying to figure out the exact schedule of events for things to come. On the contrary, knowing that our Lord may come back any day spurs us on to work harder than ever for Him so that we may accomplish as much as possible before our opportunity is gone (Luke 19:13).

Knowing that Christ may return tomorrow does not mean we need not plan for the future. After all, He may not return for another thousand years. Therefore we must live prudently, watching for Him to come today, planning in case He does not. Of course, all our plans are made tentatively, in submission to the will of the Lord (James 4:13-15). The important thing is to be faithful and obedient so that whenever He does come, He will find us working at our appointed tasks (Luke 12:37-38).

The promised return of Christ gives us no license to plunder the natural world, or to mistreat our own bodies. The old creation will not be totally destroyed, but will be redeemed and remade. Our future life will be lived in glorified bodies in the new heaven and earth. It matters how we treat our bodies and the earth we live on now (Romans 8:19-23), for we are stewards of both.

Expecting Christ to return, we are motivated to live holy, godly lives (2 Peter 3:11-14). We strive to live righteously and blamelessly, for we want Him to be pleased with us when He comes (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

What are the signs of Christ's coming?

When His disciples asked Him about the signs of His return, Jesus warned them not to be deceived by what would happen in the years to come: wars, natural disasters, persecutions, the appearance of false messiahs (Matthew 24). All these things have occurred, and we can expect them to continue. We are not to be alarmed at such things (Matthew 24:4-6), for they are typical of life in this fallen world. Jesus said that life will go on normally until the day of His coming, and it will take most of the world by surprise (Matthew 24:37-39).

We do know that these last days will be difficult and dangerous (2 Timothy 3:1). But they will also be days of widespread preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24:14). Those who optimistically believe that scientific or social progress will lead to some kind of utopia on earth are way off the mark. The only thing that will save this world from destruction is the return of Christ (Matthew 24:22). But no matter how bad things get, the people of God need not fear, for we are assured of our destiny in Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

What will happen when Christ returns?

- **The Great Tribulation** – At the time of the end, God will cease restraining the lawlessness that even now wreaks so much destruction in the world. A strong leader will arise who

will set himself up in the place of God and gather behind him the forces of evil, both human and demonic (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12). They will persecute the people of God, and many will be martyred or lose their faith (Matthew 24:9-12). At this time, God will begin to pour out His wrath upon this rebellious world (Revelation 16:1).

- **The Rapture of the Church** – Christ will come to take His bride, and the Church will be caught up (“raptured”) to be united with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Christians who have died will be resurrected into new, glorified bodies, and the believers who are living will be transformed without seeing death. All this will happen in a split second as we are changed from mortal to immortal, and pass from decay to glory (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

- **The Final Judgment** – In the end all those who remain in rebellion against God, whether devils or men, will be defeated and destroyed. All the unbelieving dead will be raised to life to face judgment before the throne of God. All will be judged according to what they have done, and will suffer the punishment they deserve in hell (Revelation 20:11-15).

- **The New Heaven and New Earth** – God will complete the redemption of His fallen creation by refashioning a new heaven and earth where all the ravages of sin are no more – no pain, no sorrow, no death (Revelation 21:1-4). We will spend eternity exploring the glories of God’s new creation, enjoying the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and savoring the presence of God among us (Revelation 22:3-5). It will be our eternal delight to worship and serve the Lord together in a world filled with the knowledge of the glory of God (Habakkuk 2:14). Now we can only begin to imagine all that God has in store for us, but we will have all eternity to find out (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

1. In what way are we like the servants in the parable?
2. What kind of Master do we have?
3. What does God expect us to do while we wait for Jesus to return?
4. What do you think it means to “bury your talent”?