

Sermon Subject: JESUS IS COMING SOON

Scripture: Acts 1:6-11

When therefore they were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put into his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, 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.

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And if I go, I will prepare a place for you, and come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, ye may be also.

Is Jesus coming to earth again? Modernism thinks it old fashioned and superstitious to believe any such nonsense, and attempts to spiritualize any remaining notions that may exist about a second coming. Nevertheless, a belief in the imminent, personal, literal, physical second advent of Christ has been stated in many of the ancient creeds, and is regarded by many as one of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Latter Day Saints have always believed in the second advent of Christ, and in its imminence in our day. In fact, this belief is implied every time we recite the phrase "Latter Day Saints."

Is Jesus coming again? Twenty of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament teach the second coming of Christ, and the authors of those books which do not expressly mention it (Paul for instance) teach it in their other writings. It can therefore be truthfully said that every writer who contributed to the New Testament believed in and taught the second coming. It is mentioned, according to one student, three hundred eighteen times in two hundred sixty chapters. And in addition, there are many references in the Old Testament to a Messiah who should come to gather the dispersed remnants of Israel, and the believing Gentiles, and to reign over them in glory -- promises which were never fulfilled by Christ's first advent as a babe.

There are several glib but unscriptural and unsatisfactory explanations offered by those who do not believe in a personal, physical, literal second advent for Christ. One is that his return is to be only a spiritual return; that his second coming is the coming of his Holy Spirit to the believer. The recital of one simple historical fact disproves that theory. Every word of the New Testament was written after the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given to the Christian Church; and yet that New Testament, as we have said, promises in three hundred eighteen verses and in two hundred sixty chapters that Jesus will come again. Why keep renewing the promise, if the promise was already fulfilled on the day of Pentecost?

Another explanation is that the second coming of Christ is his coming to claim the soul of the believer and receive it unto himself at his death. Those who believe this theory quote "If I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself..." Death is the principal enemy which Christ came to vanquish and overcome. Christ died and rose again that men might be resurrected, and restored to life in the body, with spirit and body inseparably connected. Simply acquiescing in the death of his saints and leaving them disembodied spirits is not the work of a Redeemer. Further-

more, there is a promise that those who are alive at his coming will not suffer death, but will be glorified without death, and caught up to meet him when he comes. The redeemed are to reign with him, to dwell with him in his kingdom on this earth, not in some far-off heaven.

Another explanation for the second coming of Christ is that he will reign in the spiritual sense in the human hearts everywhere when the whole world is converted to him, and acknowledges his reign. But we can find no such promise of universal conversion and perfection in the Bible. The very opposite is promised -- that the final day and Christ's coming shall not be until there be a falling away first; that when the Son of Man cometh, he may have a difficult time finding faith still left in the earth.

How is Christ coming? There is much confusion about this question, due perhaps in a large degree to the fact that there is confusion about how many times he is coming. We speak of his first advent and of his second advent, as if these were the only two times he was ever to visit the earth. If we recognize only these two advents, there is much difficulty in reconciling the idea of his coming as a thief in the night, and his coming in clouds of glory so that every eye shall see him. A thief comes quietly, unobtrusively, accomplishes his mission, and is gone. Such a coming does not fit the description of the final coming of Christ in clouds of glory.

One explanation of this seeming discrepancy is suggested by the Inspired Version of the Bible, which was corrected by Joseph Smith. In the 12th chapter of Luke there occurs this language: "For behold, he cometh in the first watch of the night, and he shall also come in the second watch, and again he shall come in the third watch. And verily I say unto you, He hath already come, as it is written of him; and again when he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, blessed are those servants when he cometh, that he shall find so doing." (i.e., watching)

The Jews divided the night into three watches -- nine p.m. to midnight, midnight to three a.m., and three to six a.m. Assuming that Jesus was using the Jewish system, it is obvious that his birth is his coming in the first watch, and that his final coming in glory to reign as a king in righteousness will be at the end of the third watch, or just before the dawning of the great millennial day. But it would also seem that there will be one or more comings in the second watch, or between his birth and his final coming in glory. His coming in the second watch will be the coming as a thief in the night. A thief comes quietly, unobtrusively, surreptitiously. He takes away the wealth of those who sleep, unmindful of his coming, and departs before they know he has been there. Jesus' coming in the second watch will result in judgments to the wicked inhabitants of the earth which will remove many of the prized material possessions of men who have placed their trust in riches and wealth and material or worldly power. These riches, and all the material, worldly things in which men have trusted, will disappear. Many have already disappeared in great world-wide depressions, in two great world wars, in the downfall of kingdoms and empires. The righteous servant of the Lord will be watching for this coming in the second watch, and will lay up his treasure where moth and rust do not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.

In the second watch, Jesus has already made several quiet advents. It is the Latter Day Saint belief that he appeared to Joseph Smith to give him instruction about setting up his church on earth for the last time, to warn the world of his final coming in the third watch, and to restore the means of regeneration through authoritative gospel ordinances. He has appeared to his servants in this church on other times and at other places, which it is not necessary to describe in detail here. He is a living Christ; he has not forgotten his world or his church; he still is actively in charge and actively directing his work during these closing days of the world's history.

There will be another coming -- a final coming in glory, a coming as a king to reign in righteousness, a coming to judge the world. There are many scriptures pointing out the manner of this coming. It will not be quiet or surreptitious or unnoticed. The disciples who watched his ascension received the promise: "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." His departure had been personal, physical, tangible, visible to the eyes. His coming will be the same way. Luke 21:27, and Mark 13:26 say that he shall come in the clouds with great power and glory. Matthew 16:27 says that he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels. Matthew 24:26,27 says not to seek him in the desert or in the secret place, for "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Revelation 1:7 says "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him..." I Thessalonians 4:16 says that the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God. Jude 14 says that he cometh with ten thousand of his saints. He will come as a judge. He will gather the dispersed of Israel, and set up a literal kingdom, with political dominion over the nations of earth, as the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. The government shall be upon his shoulder, and of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end. He will not come secretly or quietly in the third watch, nor as a man walking in the earth; he will come from heaven as he ascended into heaven, but with such an announcement that not a single man dwelling on earth can escape the knowledge of the final advent.

The Book of Mormon bears an added witness to the second coming of Christ. The latter part of this book deals with a visit which Christ made to the people of the American Continents following his resurrection and his return to his Father. It tells of his stay among them, his instruction and preaching to them, his acceptance of them as a part of the lost and dispersed of Israel, his promises to them regarding the gathering of Israel in the last days and his coming in glory to judge the nations of earth and to reign in righteousness.

When shall this final advent of our Lord be? The men who wrote the New Testament seemingly misinterpreted some of their own prophetic writings, and expected it momentarily, in their day. Many sects and religious leaders since that day have set dates for this final advent, only to be disappointed. In the face of Jesus' own statement that not even he or the angels in heaven knew of the day and the hour, but only the Father in heaven, it is presumptuous for any of us to try to fix a date. But there have been many warning signs given us by which we may know that his coming is near. His coming is to be preceded by wars and rumors of wars; nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. The love of many shall wax cold. There will be signs in heaven -- in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear. Shortly before his coming, and as a preparation for the return of dominion to Israel under Christ, Jerusalem, which has been trodden down by the Gentiles since the first century, is to be delivered.

We could spend a great deal of time in pointing out the increase in world-tensions, in calamities, in wars, in rumors of wars which are spread by printing press, by radio, and by television. We could point out the increase in crime and wickedness, the increase in the diabolical efficiency of our weapons of destruction. We could point to Daniel's prophecy that in the time of the end many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased -- and point to the nomadic activities of the present generation and to the spread of knowledge. We could point to the deliverance of Jerusalem during World War I, and the terrible persecutions of the Jews which have turned their hearts to a homeland. A complete discussion of these

points as they deserve is outside the realm of possibility in this short program. Suffice it to say that we believe that the time when we and the whole world must give an account of its stewardship is drawing nigh. We believe that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is imminent; that at his coming he shall reign as a king in righteousness and judge all nations. We are trying to lift the warning voice to our neighbors, and to live each day ourselves as servants and wise stewards whose Lord has gone on a journey, but whose return is expected momentarily. We hope that we, and you with us, may so live that we may be able to join with John in the prayer which closes his book of Revelation: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly, Even so, come, Lord Jesus."