

Our Hope In Christ's Return

Just over a month ago, we were celebrating what is called Advent season, when we looked forward to Christmas when we worship the birth of Jesus – our Redeemer, Immanuel. Christmas falls on a date certain – December 25th, year after year. We don't have to wonder when the new born King arrived. This morning I want to focus on the return of Jesus. He promised He would return and we need to prepare for that. Unlike Christmas, we have no idea of when that will be. It could be today or tomorrow or next week or 100 years from now. We just know, because He told us, that He will return again. In **Revelation chapter 22** He tells us in 3 separate verses that He will: verse 7 **"Behold, I am coming soon"**, verse 12 **"Behold, I am coming soon"**, and verse 20 **"Surely I am coming soon."**

In the late 19th Century in America, there was a wave of enthusiasm for prophecies predicting the actual date for Christ's Second Coming.

One such prophet was an Adventist leader named William Miller (1782-1849). And it is in his movement that both the JW's and the Seventh Day Adventists find their roots.

Miller first predicted that Christ would return on 21st March 1842, but then revised the date to April 3, 1843. Over 3,500 of his followers jammed the Boston Advent Temple, only to be disappointed.

You might have thought that the movement would have died. But it didn't. Rather it continued to grow. They failed to heed the words of Jesus in Mark 13:6 where He told His disciples to: **"See that no one leads you astray"**

Miller decided to recalculate his date for the Second Coming and soon publicized a new date - April 18, 1844. When the Messiah did not show up on that date, there was again frustration and some followers left the Adventist ranks.

Undeterred by these failures, Miller came up with a third date – the 22nd of October 1844. The date was publicized in the Millerite publication *True Midnight Cry*. And, surprisingly, this third date rallied his followers.

They began to spread the news of the new date of the second coming with an enthusiasm that had not been seen before. Churches which did not accept this message were denounced as agents of "Babylon." and the devil.

And - despite opposition from established, mainline religious groups - , thousands of people – including many clergy – began to defect to the Millerite cult.

As doomsday approached, the Millerites began to prepare.

One account notes that “Fields were left unharvested, shops were closed, people quit their jobs, paid their debts, and freely gave away their possessions with no thought of repayment.”

Huge press runs of Advent publications like *The Midnight Cry* warned the public that (with titles such as) “*The Time Is Short*”. “*Prepare to Meet Thy God!*” and “*The Lord is Coming!*”

William Miller himself began peddling white “ascension robes” to the faithful, many of whom waited for the miraculous event in freshly dug graves.

But as we all know; the Second Coming of Christ did not occur on the 22nd of October 1844.

In fact, if they had heeded this morning’s Gospel reading of Mark chapter 13, they would not have been taken in by Miller’s false prophecy.

For Jesus speaking about the Second Coming said:

32"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Be on guard! Keep awake! For you do not know when the time will come." (Mk 13)

For many of us, Advent is a time when we look forward to the Birth of Jesus two thousand years ago in a stable in Bethlehem.

However, it is also the time we look forward to the Hope we have in Christ’s Return.

As I reflected on the meaning of Advent, I found three emphases evident in this Gospel passage.

I. Christ is Coming Again (v.24-27)

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."

The disciples had been a little confused and thought that the destruction of Jerusalem would be the end of the world. Christ sets them straight and shows that the day of Christ's coming and day of judgment are after that tribulation. He gives prophecy here of the dissolution of the very components of the world. Finally, he tells of His appearance in the clouds and the gathering together of His believers.

On November 2, 1992, the *"Mission for the Coming Days"* church disbanded after a very tough weekend. Lee Jang-rim, the Korean church's founder, was in jail and the embarrassed congregation returned to their respective homes and places of employment. The central message of this church had been Christ's imminent return on October 28, 1992. It was the largest of the South Korean churches that were predicting the impending end of the world. Hundreds, and possibly thousands of these believers sold property, left their families, quit schools and jobs, and deserted military duties. Of course, they should have checked the pastor's financial portfolio before banking on the October rapture date. Pastor Jang-rim had swindled four million dollars in donations and had \$380,000 invested in bonds that wouldn't mature until the following May.

This distinguishes prophecy and guesswork. You see Jesus gives us prophecy of hope here. He tells us of His second coming, and gives us a basic timeline to work with, while NOT giving us a date and time of any clarity. Why do you think Jesus doesn't just come out and throw out a date? His emphasis is clearly that the date and time is not so important as how we should consistently live our lives in the knowledge that it is coming at any time. But Christ in His infinite knowledge doesn't want anyone to misunderstand, and so he illustrates with a parable...

II. The Parable of the Fig Tree (v. 28-29)

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates."

Just like a tree shows signs in the spring that summer is near, we are to look around and see signs that the end is coming. We don't know at which exact day or hour, but we can tell when the season is coming. Our hope is foundational in the belief that Christ's second coming will not be a mystery but rather we will have been ready for an extended period of time.

John Wesley was working in his garden one day when a neighbor came by to visit. The neighbor attempted to jolt Wesley by asking, "What would you be doing now, John, if you

knew for certain Jesus would return today?" Wesley jolted his neighbor instead by replying, "I would go right on doing what I'm doing." May we live in such a way that Christ could return at any time and we would be comfortable continuing the task at hand.

Do you live your life in a state of readiness if at any moment Christ were to return? From the evidence we have around us, just like that of a tree telling of summer, we are living in the last days. That could mean today, next week, a few years or hundreds, but in the timeline of humanity, we are nearer the end than the beginning.

III. The Hope of His Return (v. 30-37)

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will return, in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all – "Stay awake."

The end is coming and soon, but we are not to know the day nor hour. Our job is to 1) watch and 2) pray. We do not know the time or place, but after our birth, our bodies begin to die. As such we are to anticipate Christ's return to us at our death. We are to be ready for Him when He returns, that's why his command is an emphatic: **WATCH!** In Matthew chapter 25 Jesus tells a story of 10 virgins who took their lamps to go out to watch and wait for the bridegroom. And how 5 were wise and 5 were foolish. The wise virgins brought extra oil to keep their lamps burning and the 5 foolish were not prepared and while they had gone to fill their vessels, the bridegroom appeared and those who were prepared went into the wedding, and then the door was shut to anyone not prepared. Then Jesus said to them: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Rev 22:20 "He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

My prayer is that the end times for you – whether during your life or when you meet Christ in death, that you might be ready. That you have been watching. That when Christ returns you will know you are born-again.

Do you have the hope in Christ that I am talking about today? Are you ready? Do you believe the scriptures? Do you believe He really is coming again? Are you wise or are you foolish? Are you watching and praying? Be ready!