

The Second Coming Of Christ

~Other Speakers M-R: Edward Payson:

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him: even so. Amen. REVELATION I: 7.

An apostle, speaking of the Lord's supper, intimates that the church will continue to partake of it, and by partaking of it to show forth his death until he shall come again. This ordinance then may be considered as a chain, which connects the first and the second coming of Christ. Of this chain, as of the gospel, he is at once the beginning and the end. If we look back to the time of its institution, we see Christ at his table, surrounded by a little band of disciples. If we look forward to the period of its completion, we see him on the judgment-seat, surrounded by all the glories and hosts of the celestial world. If we look at its commencement, we see him expiring on the cross; if we look at its termination, we see him coming in the clouds of heaven. It is this coming, of which the beloved disciple speaks in our text. Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him: even so. Amen.

In this passage there are three things which deserve our attention; 1—the coming of Christ; his being seen by all, and the manner in which different characters will be affected by the sight. A few remarks on each of these particulars will comprise the present discourse.

I. Let me lead your attention to the coming of Christ itself:

Behold he cometh with clouds. Of the greatness, the importance of this event I shall say nothing. To endeavor to enlarge your conceptions of it, by surrounding it with the pomp of language, would be like attempting to gild the noon-day sun. Everyone must perceive at once, that if we except the first coming of Christ to die for the world, inspiration has revealed no fact more momentous and interesting than that of his second coming to judge the world. But respecting the certainty of this event, it may be proper to say something more. I need not inform you, that for evidence of its certainty we must look to the scriptures alone: for it is a fact which lies far beyond the ken of human reason; a fact, which God alone could reveal. Reason might however, perhaps, venture to expect, that if God thought proper to reveal a fact of such momentous interest he would reveal it clearly, and with a frequency of repetition proportionate to its importance. In this expectation she would not be disappointed. There is perhaps no event yet future, which is revealed so clearly, or in so many different passages as this. And in revealing it, the Spirit of God seems to have avoided with unusual care, all metaphorical and figurative expressions, and to have chosen only the plainest and most simple language; language, which cannot be misunderstood, nor, without the utmost violence, perverted. A few out of the many passages in which it is thus revealed, you will permit me to mention. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation. The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. Such is the language of inspired men. Equally explicit is the testimony of angels. 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. Still more explicit, if possible, is the language of our Savior himself. The Son of man, says he, shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations. And again, Ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. I shall mention but one declaration more, a declaration uttered in circumstances of peculiar solemnity. After he had been apprehended by the Jews, the High Priest, finding that he made no reply to their false accusations, said to him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. This, according to the customs of the Jews, was equivalent to the administration of an oath. And our Savior's answer was equivalent to an answer given upon oath. And what was that answer? I am, and hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. On hearing this testimony from his lips, we may reply with the High Priest, though in a different sense, what need have we of any further witness? We have heard from his own mouth. If the solemn declaration, the oath of the Son of God is true, then it is certain that he will come a second time in the clouds of heaven. He who does not believe this, believes nothing which the scriptures assert.

II. The next particular in our text which claims attention, is the fact, that Jesus Christ, at his second coming, shall be seen by all mankind. Every eye shall see him. This assertion teaches us, that he will come in a visible form; for though the word see, when used alone, often signifies merely to perceive, yet it never, so far as I recollect, has this signification when used, as it is here, in connection with the eye. The mind may be said, figuratively speaking, to see or perceive truth, and many other things, which are in their very nature invisible; but the eye can see nothing which is not visible. And as Jesus Christ will come in a visible form, so he will come, doubtless, in a human form. He will come arrayed with that glorious body which, as another inspired passage informs us, he now wears in heaven. Should this appear doubtful to any, we would refer them to the passages already mentioned, in which our Savior says, Ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven; an expression which must mean, if it mean any thing, that he will come in his human nature. The declaration of the angels is of the same import. Ye shall see this same Jesus come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. But they saw him ascend to heaven in a human form; they will therefore, see him coming in a human form. The language of St. Paul is, if possible, still more decisive. God, says he, hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given assurance to all men, by raising him from the dead. At the same time we are assured in other places, that God is Judge himself, that our God shall come and not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. And St. John, describing a view which he had in vision of the proceedings of the judgment day, says, I saw the dead small and great stand before God. These otherwise contradictory passages will appear perfectly reconcilable, if we recollect that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, God and man united in one person. His glorified body will be the temple, the vehicle, in which God will come to judgment, and this vehicle will be visible. Of its appearance we may, perhaps, form some idea from the description given by Daniel and St. John. I beheld, says the former, till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow;—his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. Similar are the expressions of St. John. I saw one, says he, like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice was as the sound of many waters, and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength. I need not remind you, that similar was his appearance. On the mount of transfiguration, when his human form assumed, for a time, some of that glory which it was destined to wear after his exaltation to heaven; a glory, however, which will be, doubtless, increased in a degree that is inconceivable, when he shall come, not in his own glory only, but in that of his Father. Of this glory the sublime language of St. John is suited to give the most exalted conception. I say, says he, a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face heaven and earth fled away. But the assertion in our text teaches us, not only that Jesus Christ will come in a visible form, but that all mankind shall behold him in this form. Every eye shall see him. The same truth is taught elsewhere. He assured his disciples, that they should see him. He assured his enemies, that they should see him. He declared, that when he comes, he will gather before him all nations. And an apostle says, we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. And if he comes in a visible form, and all are assembled before him, all must, of course, see him. My hearers, meditate, a moment, upon this interesting truth. Let every one say to himself; I shall see this great sight. I shall see the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, the Savior, the Judge, of whom I have heard so much. My body, when slumbering in the grave, will hear his omnipotent voice and come forth. My long closed eyes will open, and the descending Judge, and the judgment-seat, with all its splendors, will burst upon them. Such was Job's expectation. Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom mine eyes shall behold, and I shall see for myself, and not another. Let us attend,

III. To the manner, in which different characters will be affected by this sight. Were the scriptures silent respecting this part of our subject, we might still be sure, that all will not contemplate this spectacle with similar feelings, nor be affected by it in the same manner. The feelings, with which men regard any object, will ever correspond with their own character. Different characters will regard the same object with different feelings; opposite characters with opposite feelings. Now we know, that among mankind there are characters not only widely different, but diametrically opposite. We know, that even now these opposite characters regard Jesus Christ, his word, his institutions, his friends, with opposite feelings. We know, that the thoughts of his second coming affect different persons in a very different manner. Some desire it, others dread it; some think of it with pleasure, others with pain. Hence we might naturally conclude, that when the event shall arrive different characters will be differently affected by it. But we are not left to our own inferences and reasonings on this point. Our text plainly intimates, and other passages clearly teach us, that the sight of Christ's coming in the clouds of heaven will produce widely different effects upon different characters. They teach us, first, that all good men desire this event, and will contemplate it with the most joyful emotions. This is intimated in our text, where the inspired writer, after predicting Christ's coming, and his being seen by every eye, adds, Even so: amen,—that is, so let it be; let the event take place, as soon as God pleases. In thus expressing his own

feelings, he expressed the feelings of all, who, like himself, are faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Agreeably, Christians are described as those, who look for him; that is, who expect and desire his second coming. And St. Paul informs us, that the righteous Judge will, at the last day, give a crown of righteousness to all who love his appearing. In another passage, after predicting the second coming of Christ, he adds, wherefore beloved, comfort ye one another with these words. Now if good men expect and desire Christ's coming, if they love to think of it, if it comforts them to speak of it, then surely they will rejoice when they see it. Indeed, they cannot but rejoice to see him, whom they have followed by faith, whom they have loved with supreme affection; who comes to complete their salvation, to give them a crown of righteousness. Nor will this joy be checked by any guilty fears or anxieties; for in their Judge they will see their Savior, their Friend, their Head, whose love for them passeth knowledge, and who has said, whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father and the holy angels. But,

2. While all the faithful servants of Christ will contemplate him with joy unspeakable and full of glory, all of a different character will witness his coming with unutterable horror, anguish, and despair. All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. These effects of his coming are still more forcibly described in a succeeding chapter. I beheld, says the apostle, and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! It seems to be clearly intimated, both in this passage and in our text, that the sight of Christ, at his second coming, will be terrible to all, or nearly all, who are then found alive in the world. We learn from other inspired passages the reason of this. It is because all, or nearly all, who are then found alive, will be wicked men. When the Son of man cometh, says our Savior, will he find faith on the earth? That is, will he find many, who believe in him, and expect his coming? a mode of expression, which forcibly intimates, that he will not. In another passage, he teaches us, that, at his second coming, he will find the world in the same situation, in which it was found by the flood, in the days of Noah, and in which Sodom was in the days of Lot. As it was, says he, in the days of Noah, and of Lot, so shall it be in the day, when the Son of man is revealed, or appears. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, and knew not, till the day in which Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

From these and other passages it is evident, that at the second coming of Christ, there will be very little religion, very few pious men found in the world. But it may be asked, how does this representation agree with the many predictions, which assure us that religion is yet to prevail, in a far greater degree than it ever has done, and that the knowledge of God shall fill the earth, even as the waters cover the sea? We shall find an answer to this question in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. We are there taught, that the great tempter and deceiver of mankind, who deceiveth the whole world, shall be bound for a thousand years; that is, during that period he shall not be permitted to tempt or deceive mankind, and in consequence religion will almost universally prevail. To this period, all the passages, which speak of the great extension of Christ's kingdom, refer. But after the expiration of this period, the great adversary, will be released for a season; in other words, he will be suffered to renew his temptations, the consequence will be a great and almost universal apostasy. Religion will be ridiculed and opposed, and its friends persecuted with peculiar rancor; the church will be compassed about with enemies, and on the very point of being swallowed up, and then, in that critical moment, will be seen the signs of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. The sight will strike them suddenly and unexpectedly. It will come, as our Savior informs us, as a flash of lightning; or, as an apostle expresses it, the day of the Lord will so come, as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them. And who can doubt that such a sight, bursting in such a manner upon men immersed in worldly cares and pleasures, or engaged in opposing the cause of Christ, will throw them into an agony of consternation and distress?

Suppose, for a moment, that this event should take place now; that while I speak the trumpet should sound, and the fiery brightness, which will surround the Judge, should begin to shine through these windows. Can you doubt, that many of this congregation would be distracted with guilty fear and remorse; and that all sinners, in all parts of the world, would be affected in a similar manner? Some of you have seen into what wild alarm, what temporary distraction, an assembly may be thrown in a moment by an alarm of fire, or a cry that the house is falling. What then would be the effects produced by the sight of the final Judge, of the heaven's departing, of the world on fire! Less terrible was the sight of the flood to the guilty inhabitants of the old world; less loud, less agonizing was the cry which they uttered, than that which will burst from the lips of guilty mortals, when every eye sees the Judge coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

It is not, however, to those only who are found alive in the world, that this sight will prove terrible. All the sinful dead, whose bodies are in the grave, will then be roused; for all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of

the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. And O, how different will be the appearance of these two classes! The former, with glorious bodies, resembling that of their Savior, will shine forth like the sun; the holiness, and the love, and the happiness of heaven, beaming in their countenances and sparkling in their eyes; while the latter, dark and gloomy as night, will express nothing but fear and rage, envy and despair. Then will the prediction be fulfilled which says, Ye shall see a difference made between the righteous and the wicked. Then the whole intelligent universe will see, that verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

Permit me now, my hearers, to improve the view we have taken of this subject, by endeavoring to bring it home to your bosoms, your consciences.

1. Consider the certainty of this event. The passages, which have been quoted in this discourse, will, I doubt not, convince you all, that if the Bible is true this event is certain, as certain as if it had already taken place. It is the same in the sight of God, as if it had taken place. He sees it as plainly, as if it were already past; and this fact renders it not only certain, that it will take place, but impossible that it should not take place. So certainly then as the Bible is the word of God, so certainly will your eyes see the Lord Jesus Christ coming in the clouds of heaven. Are any of you then prepared to rely on the assumption, that the Bible is a forgery? Remember, that if you rely upon this you stake every thing dear upon it, and that should you be deceived you lose every thing, lose your souls, lose salvation, and render your perdition sure. My hearers, if there is even a probability, nay, if there is a possibility, that the Bible is true, it is madness to incur this risk. But why do we talk of possibilities, or probabilities? We know that the Bible is the word of God. We know that the Son of God has already come once, and we know that he will come again. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away.

2. Let us improve the subject, by making use of it to obscure the glare of worldly objects, and extinguish the fires which they are continually kindling within us. Let all, who are dazzled or fascinated by the pomp and splendor of the world, come and contemplate a scene, which stains the pride of all human glory, and throws far back into the deepest shade every thing, which men call great, or splendid, or sublime. What are the pompous triumphs, the gaudy pageants, the long processions, on which men gaze with eager delight, compared with the descent of the Creator, the Judge from heaven, surrounded by all the seraphic hosts, and bearing with him the final sentence, the eternal, unchangeable destiny of every child of Adam? Pause, then, for a moment, and contemplate, with the eye of faith, or, if you have no faith, with the eye of imagination, this tremendous scene. Look at that point, far away in the ethereal regions, where the gradually lessening form of our Savior disappeared from the gaze of his disciples, when he ascended to heaven. In that point see an uncommon, but faint and undefined brightness just beginning to appear. It has caught the roving eye of yon careless gazer, and excited his curiosity. He points it out to a second, and a third. A little circle soon collects, and various are the conjectures which they form respecting it. Similar circles are formed, and similar conjectures made, in a thousand different parts of the world. But conjecture is soon to give place to certainty—awful, appalling, overwhelming certainty. While they gaze, the appearance, which had excited their curiosity, rapidly approaches, and still more rapidly brightens. Some begin to suspect what it may prove; but no one dares to give utterance to his suspicions. Meanwhile, the light of the sun begins to fade before a brightness superior to his own. Thousands see their shadows cast in a new direction, and thousands of hitherto careless eyes look up, at once, to discover the cause. Full clearly they see it; and now new hopes and fears begin to agitate their breasts. The afflicted and persecuted servants of Christ begin to hope that the predicted, long expected day of their deliverance is arrived. The wicked, the careless, the unbelieving, begin to fear, that the Bible is about to prove no idle tale. And now fiery shapes, moving like streams of lightning, begin to appear indistinctly amidst the bright dazzling cloud, which comes rushing down as on the wings of a whirlwind. At length it reaches its destined place. It pauses; then, suddenly unfolding, discloses at once a great white throne, where sits, starry resplendent, in all the glories of the Godhead, the man Christ Jesus. Every eye sees him, every heart knows him. Too well do the wretched, unprepared inhabitants of earth now know what to expect; and one universal shriek of anguish and despair rises to heaven, and is echoed back to earth. But louder, far louder than the universal cry, now sounds the last trumpet; and, far above all, is heard the voice of the Omnipotent, summoning the dead to arise, and come to judgment. New terrors now assail the living. On every side, nay under their very feet, the earth heaves, as in convulsions; graves open, and the dead come forth, while at the same moment, a change equivalent to that occasioned by death, is effected by Almighty power on the bodies of the living. Their mortal bodies put on immortality, and are thus prepared to sustain a weight of glory, or of wretchedness, which flesh and blood could not endure. Meanwhile, legions of angels are seen, darting from pole to pole, gathering together the faithful servants of Christ from the four winds of heaven, and bearing them aloft to meet the Lord in the air, where he causes them to be placed at his own right hand, preparatory to the sentence, which is to award to them everlasting life. Such, my brethren, is the scene which you will one day witness. And where now

are the pomps, the honors, the riches, and pleasures, of this world, which yesterday appeared so dazzling? Has not all their brightness faded, even in your estimation? Ought they not to appear, must they not appear, as less than nothing and vanity to him, who looks for, who firmly believes, that he shall see such a spectacle as this? Can you wonder that faith in such truths, the faith of the Christian, should overcome the world? Christian, if you would gain more and greater victories over the world, than you ever have done, bring this scene often before the eye of your mind, and gaze upon it till you become blind to all earthly glory. He who gazes long at the sun becomes unsusceptible of impression from inferior luminaries; and he who looks much at the Sun of Righteousness will be little affected by any alluring object, which the world can exhibit.

3. Shall we all see this great sight? and will it affect us according to our characters? Let us then inquire how it would affect us, should it now appear? You cannot but be sensible, that if you have lived a careless, irreligious life, if your sins are not pardoned, if you are conscious, that you have not faithfully served Christ, his coming would fill you with guilty apprehension, remorse, and despair. You would, you must feel just as a dishonest or unfaithful servant would feel, when summoned into the presence of a long absent master, to whom all his unfaithfulness was known. On the contrary, if you are the faithful servants of Christ; if you are looking and longing for his appearing; if you have the testimony of your own consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have had your conversation in the world; then you could witness his approach with joy, and lift up your heads triumphantly, knowing that your redemption was drawing nigh. O, then, if any of you are not prepared to meet the Judge in peace, let it be your great care to become prepared. If any of you are prepared for this event, live as becometh those who expect it. Remember, that your Master's words are, 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.