

SERIES: "THE RICHES OF SALVATION"**MESSAGE #8 "THE PROSPECT OF SALVATION"
I PETER 1:7b-9**

"...the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

An artist, giving art lessons to his students, said, "Never paint a picture of a forest without also painting a pathway leading out. Without a pathway the viewer will feel trapped in the forest." Peter paints a picture of Christians in a jungle of trials in verses 6 and 7 and then in the last half of verse 7 through verse 9 he paints the pathway out – the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The Left Behind series of best-selling novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, dealing with the End Times and the sudden return of Jesus Christ, became a phenomenal success. Total sales for the series have surpassed 75 million copies. Seven titles have reached #1 on the bestseller lists for The New York Times, USA Today, and Publishers Weekly.

The series tells the story about millions being suddenly snatched away leaving the world in a chaotic mess. The Left Behind website has the following promotional paragraph: "As people scramble for answers, a Romanian politician named Nicolae Jetty Carpathia rises to become secretary-general of the United Nations, promising to restore peace and stability to all nations. What most of the world does not realize is that Carpathia is actually the Antichrist foretold from the Bible. Coming to grips with the truth and becoming born-again Christians, Rayford Steele, his daughter Chloe, their pastor Bruce Barnes, and young journalist Cameron "Buck" Williams begin their quest as the Tribulation Force to help save the lost and prepare for the coming Tribulation, in which God will rain down judgment on the world for seven years."

I have been asked, "Have you read the *Left Behind* series?" I answer, "No, I've read God's account of the Last Days and got the original version!" However, make no mistake about it, Jesus Christ is coming back! That is the event that Peter refers to in these verses in view in this message. Let us focus on that prospect as follows:

I. THE MOMENT OF HIS APPEARING.

Notice the words, "at the appearing of Jesus Christ" in I Peter 1:7. Peter asserts *that* Jesus will return, however, he does not specify *when* He will return.

One of the questions that I have been asked most often in the over 50 years of my ministry relates to the return of Jesus Christ. The most frequent question relative to His return is "When will Jesus come back again?" There has been much speculation as to exactly when Christ will return. Charles Taze Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, predicted that He would return in 1910. Edgar Whisenant published *Eighty-eight Reasons*

Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988, and sold thousands of copies. Harold Camping wrote the book *1994?* in which he predicted the end would come on September 6, 1994. Let us not speculate but investigate what the Scriptures say about our Lord's coming.

A. The Scriptures And The Advent Of Christ.

When we stick strictly to what God has revealed in His Word about the return of Lord we learn that the date for the Lord's return is:

- *Unknown.*

The prognosticators have overlooked, or deliberately ignored, what Matthew 24:36 says about the moment of Christ's return: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

- *Unexpected.*

Matt. 24:44 "be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

- *Unannounced.*

I Thess. 5:2 "The day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."
Revelation 16:15 – "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

He is coming regardless of the sensationalist's pronouncements or the skeptics protestations. Some golden daybreak, Jesus will come!

B. The Scriptures And The Assignment For Christians.

Our assignment in view of the imminent coming of Christ is basically two-fold:

- ***We are to be ready ourselves.***

No one knows when Jesus will return, so everyone must be ready, beginning with God's people. Look with me at Romans 13:11-13 wherein Paul writes to the church in Rome:

"Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."

Getting ready for Christ's return according to those verses in Romans 13 means:

- * Be aware! - "knowing the time";
- * Be awake! - "it is high time to awake out of sleep";
- * Be alarmed! - "now is our salvation nearer that when we believed";
- * Be armed! - "cast off the works of darkness -put on the armor of light";
- * Be active! - "walk honestly, as in the day"

ILLUST. A family was packing suit-cases and loading the car for a trip to Grand-mother's house. The little girl said, "Daddy, are we going to heaven someday?" Dad

replied, "Why sure, darling, why do you ask?" "Well", said the daughter, "when we want to go to Grandmother's house we get ready to go. But I don't see us getting ready to go to heaven and the preacher talks about it all the time!"

- We are to be reaching others.

We must warn others to "flee from the wrath to come." (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7)

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the charge to the early church in Acts 1:8 were given with a view to preparing people for the Lord's return. The early Christians took this truth seriously and so they lived in the daily expectation of Jesus' impending return going far and wide spreading the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. They wanted to be found doing what they would be doing if they knew that Jesus would be coming back that day. They wanted everyone they knew to be right with God, today. They had a passion for missions and evangelism, for they knew the time was short.

ILLUST. There is a story about the time the devil had a meeting of his demons to decide how best to deceive men and women. One said, "Let's tell them there's no heaven," but the devil said that wouldn't work, that God has put heaven in every heart and we know it's real. Another said, "Let's tell them there's no hell," but the devil said that people know wrong must be punished, so that won't work. Finally a third said, "Let's tell them there's no hurry." And they did. And they still do!

II. THE MANNER OF HIS APPEARING.

We earthlings always want to know the "how" of everything, don't we? I suppose that is part of our being presently limited to time and space. Inquisitiveness about spiritual truths is good. God knew that we would want to know how He would accomplish all that He promised. For example:

The Virgin Mary asked, "How shall this be?" (Luke 1:34);

Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born the second time?" (John 3:4);

The Jews asked, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52);

The blind man's neighbors asked, "How were thine eyes opened?" (John 9:10)

Hebrews asks, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb.2:3);

The martyrs in heaven ask, the question that some of us ask, "How long, O Lord?" (Rev. 6:10) referring to the final judgment. (The answers to the "How?" questions make a good Bible study series.)

Paul anticipated a question about the coming of the Lord and the resurrection: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" (I Cor. 15:35) In answering the "How?" question in relation to the coming of the Lord, we must, of necessity, talk about the *manner* of His appearing.

The Second Coming of the Lord is in two phases: He comes *for* His own before He comes *with* His own. Explanation:

A. He Comes For His Own – This Is Called The Rapture.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we

which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (I Thess.4:16-18)

The "coming" to which Paul refers in the above verses is called "The Rapture." The English word "rapture" does not occur in the Bible. Theologians have used the Latin word "rpto", (the English is "rapture") which means "to seize, carry off, to be caught up," to convey the truth of the passage. This is the Lord coming for His church.

B. He Comes With His Own – This Is Called The Revelation.

Peter refers to "*the appearing of Jesus Christ*" in verse 7. The Greek word translated "*appearing*" is "*apocalupsis*" and means, "uncovering, unveiling, revelation." The same word is translated "revelation" in Rev.1:1 where we read, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." The rapture of the saints and the revelation of the Savior are two separate events.

In Enoch's prophecy recorded in Jude verse 14-15 we read, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment..." At the "rpto" He comes for His own; at the "*apocalupsis*" He comes with His own. At the revelation He comes "to execute judgment upon sinners." At the rapture He comes to catch away His saints. He must come "*for*" His saints before He can come "*with*" His saints! These are two different phases of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Warning! A cataclysmic event is about to take place that will shock the world. There will be the disappearance of millions of people instantly from all over the earth. Cemeteries will be destroyed as graves open and people long dead come to life only to disappear again into the heavens. Seven years later, Christ will descend again from the heavens. John describes the scene:

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Rev. 19:11-16)

This is the "appearing" of Christ to which Peter refers. When this event takes place I want to be "up there" with Christ looking down; not "down here" looking up!

III. THE MEANING OF HIS APPEARING.

The meaning of the Lord's coming will be vastly different depending upon whether one is

saved or lost at the time of Christ's coming. Below are listed seven things His advent will mean:

A. Retribution.

"The Lord himself shall be revealed from heaven In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."
(2 Thess.1:8-9)

Jude writes, He comes "To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (v.15)

At the Revelation of the Lord Jesus, the wrath of God will be exercised. Today, God extends mercy, but the time is coming when the age of Grace will be ended and Judgment Day will come. This is what the unsaved have to look forward to. It won't be a happy time for those who do not know Christ. It's so sad to think about the terrible end of those not ready to meet Him. God help us to get the Gospel out to the ends of the earth!

However, for the saved, that is those born-again, the church of Jesus Christ, the meaning of the Savior's return is totally different. It means, among other things:

B. Resurrection.

"Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (I Cor.15:51-52)

C. Rapture.

That is, the Redemption of our bodies. "we wait eagerly ...for the redemption of our bodies." (Rom.8:23) also I Thess. 4:16.

D. Reunion.

"Caught up together" (I Thess. 4:16-17) and reunited with loved ones long dead.

E. Review.

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10)

F. Rewards.

"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Rev.22:12)

G. Reigning.

"And they shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev.22:5)

CONCLUSION

Jesus came to the earth once and then went back to Glory. His first coming and ascension were real. And his return the second time will be just as real. What He has promised He will perform! Buddha never made this promise, or Mohammad, or Confucius, or Joseph Smith. But Jesus did.

We are one day closer to His return than ever before in human history. I cannot promise you that Jesus will return today. But I cannot promise you that He will not. Are you ready to see Him? Today? If you knew He would be coming back some time today, would you change your plans? How?

Evangelist Dwight Moody presented the gospel one Sunday in Chicago, then told his vast congregation to go home and think about it. The next Sunday he would give an invitation, and he would expect them to come to Jesus. But that night the Great Chicago Fire began. 18,000 buildings were destroyed; \$200 million was lost, a third of the entire city's value. No one knows how many died, but some estimates range as high as 15,000 casualties, many of whom had been in Moody's service. He never waited again, thereafter, to invite his audience to decide when it was fresh on their minds and they had the opportunity. Nor should we.

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