



Surprised by Hope

Session 8

October 7, 2024

Opening Prayer:

Let us pray: Loving and Eternal God, you are the creator of all. You have granted us life and faith, offering each of us a glimpse into your glory. We rejoice in what is before us. Yet, we know your glory goes beyond our senses in this reality. We ask you to open our hearts and minds in reflection about what might be beyond. Help us to imagine, to wish, to hope, and to do this all without fear, but rather in wonder. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

I. **What about the Second Coming?**

- a. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.
- b. Creed: He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.
- c. **Reflection: What does this mean?**
- d. **Reflection: Are we living in the End Times? Will there be a rapture? (True Christians are snatched away from the earth; and those left behind are now struggling to survive in a godless world.)**
- e. There is an unrelenting belief that we are living in the End Times. If that is the case, there is no point in trying to be good stewards of the earth. It's all going to end anyhow. Fear and dislike of the Second Coming:
 - i. Christ will come again – Jesus will come into the world like a spaceman and intervene in the world.
 - ii. Will judge the living and the dead – Judgment rings of vengeance, wrath, punishment, and fury – with a goal of throwing as many people as possible into hell.
 - iii. The Psalmists knew: that for God to judge the world meant that he would, in the end, put it all to rights, straighten it out, producing not just a sigh of relief all around but shouting for joy from the trees and fields, the seas and the floods.
- f. Eschatology
 - i. It is a term that is often confused with the Second Coming, death, judgment, heaven, and hell.
 - ii. Eschatology simply means, “the study of last things.”
 - iii. First-century Jews and early Christians believed that history was going somewhere under the guidance of God and where it was going was toward God's new world of justice, healing, and peace. The transition from the present world to the new one would be the radical healing of our space-time universe.



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- iv. Jesus's resurrection was the first fruits of this event. The entire sense of God's future for the world and the belief that the future has already begun to come forward to meet us in the present.

II. When He Appears

- i. God will redeem the whole universe; Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of that new life, the fresh grass growing through the concrete of corruption and decay in the old world. That final redemption will be the moment when heaven and earth are jointed together at last, in a burst of God's creative energy for which Easter is the prototype and source.
 - ii. What do we get? The personal presence of Jesus, as opposed to his current absence.
 - iii. We will meet Jesus face-to-face.
- b. **Coming, Appearing, Revealing, Royal Presence**
- i. **Reflection: How do you envision Jesus's coming?**
 - ii. The term "second coming" gives the impression of a literal downward descent, meeting halfway with the redeemed to are making a simultaneous upward journey.
 - iii. Wright argues that during Jesus's earthly ministry, he never said anything about his return.
 - 1. Jesus speaks of the 'son of man coming on the clouds.' He is not talking about the second coming, but in line with the Daniel 7 text he is quoting, about his vindication after suffering. The 'coming' is an upward, not a downward, movement. In context, the key texts mean that though Jesus is going to his death, he will be vindicated by events that will take place afterward.
 - 2. What those events are remain cryptic, but they certainly include both Jesus's resurrection and the destruction of the Temple, the system that opposed him and his mission.
 - 3. The early church used an inadequate way of talking about the strange thing that happened after Jesus's resurrection: his 'ascension' his glorification, his 'coming,' not to earth, but to heaven, to the Father.
 - 4. Secondly, the Jewish tradition in the first century would have everyone hear the story to be about God himself, having left Israel and the Temple at the time of the exile, coming back at last, as the post exilic prophets said he would.



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- iv. Wright make it clear that just because Jesus did not talk about it makes it untrue. It could very well be true.
 - v. Jesus had a hard enough time explaining to his disciples that he had come to die; they never really grasped that at all, and they certainly didn't take his language about his own resurrection as anything more than the general hope of all Jewish martyrs.
 - vi. When Jesus came to Zion as Israel's rightful Lord, the event would point to his return as the rightful Lord of the whole world.
 - vii. No where in the New Testament does any writer say that at Jesus's final coming some of his servants, some actual believing Christians, will be judged in the way that the wicked servant was judged for hiding his master's money in a napkin.
 - viii. Some say that the events of 70 C.E. were the second coming of Jesus so that ever since then we have been living in God's new age and there is no further coming to await.
 - ix. **Reflection: Is there a 'second coming?' If so, has it occurred already, or are we still waiting?**
 - x. Wright emphatically believes that the second coming has not yet occurred.
- c. **Pauline vision**
- i. Parousia – Two meanings:
 - 1. The mysterious presence of a god or divinity, particularly when the power of this god was revealed in healing. People would suddenly be aware of a supernatural and power presence. Josephus sometimes used the word when he referred to YHWH coming to rescue Israel.
 - 2. The second is when a person of high rank makes a visit to a subject state, particularly when a king or emperor visits a colony or province.
 - ii. Paul's Letters to the Corinthians, Philipians, and to the Thessalonians are pertinent.
 - 1. Paul wanted to say two things:
 - a. First, they say that Jesus was near in spirit but absent in body but that one day he would be present in body and then the whole world, themselves included, would know the sudden transforming power of that presence.
 - b. At the same time, they say that Jesus who had been raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand was the rightful Lord of the world, the true Emperor before whom all



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other emperors would shake in their shoes and bow their knees in fear and wonder.

2. Jewish tradition of the story of the Day of the Lord, the Day of YHWH, the day when YHWH defeats all of Israel's enemies and rescue his people once and for all. Paul regularly refers to the Day of the Lord to mean it in a Christian sense: "the Lord" here is Jesus himself. In this sense, there is a solid Jewish background for the Christian doctrine of the second coming of Jesus.
3. Through the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Jewish Christians came to see Jesus as Israel's Messiah, and was already the world's true Lord and that his secret presence through the Spirit was only a hint of a time yet to come, when it would be revealed that he was the one whose power trumped all other powers, both earthly and heavenly.
4. Jesus is Lord. Caesar is not! Parousia is the reality that Jesus is the reality and Caesar is the parody.
5. In Corinthians, Paul speaks of Parousia as the time of the resurrection of the dead, the time when his present through secret rule becomes manifest in the conquest of the last enemies, especially death.
6. Those who are not yet dead will be transformed from the present lowly body to be like Jesus's glorious body, as a result of his all-conquering power.
7. In Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians, it talks about the Lord descending and the living saints being snatched up on the air.
8. Paul brings together the stories of Moses coming down the mountain. In Daniel, the persecuted are vindicated over their pagan enemy by being raised up on the clouds to sit with God in glory. This is extended to the Christians were suffering persecution.
9. When an emperor visited a colony, the citizens of the colony would go out to meet him and escort him into the city. When Paul speaks of 'meeting the Lord in the air' the point is not rapture theology but rather that we will go out to greet the returning Lord, and escort him back into our domain.
10. In Philippians, being citizens of heaven doesn't mean that one is expecting to go back to the mother city, but rather means that one is expecting the emperor to come from the mother city to give the



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colony its full dignity, to rescue it, and to subdue local enemies and put everything to rights.

11. **Reflection: When you think of the ‘rapture,’ what does that look like to you? What is your take on it?**
12. The rapture theology recognizes much of what we’ve talked about. But, it avoids the confrontation with political authorities because it suggests that Christians will miraculously be removed from this wicked world.
13. The promise is not that Jesus will simply reappear within the present world order, but that when heaven and earth are joined together in the new way God has promised, then he will appear to us – and we will appear to him, and to one another in our own true identity.
- iii. With minor variations, there is a sense of uniformity of vision.
- iv. There will be a time, which may come at any time, when, in the great renewal of the world that Easter itself foreshadowed, Jesus himself will be personally present and will be the agent and model of transformation what will happen both to the whole world and also of believers. This expectation and hope, expressed in the New Testament, continues undiminished in all subsequent centuries.
- v. **Reflection: Why is this discussion of Jesus return important in our theology and faith life?**

III. Final questions, comments, observations, suggestions.

Next session will discuss: Jesus, the Coming Judge

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray: Loving and Eternal God: We praise You for Your love and goodness. You have created us in uniqueness and wonder. You granted us the power to imagine and dream of life with You hereafter. Help us to honor all perspectives, and offer us the wisdom to have faith in your providence. We give glory to You through Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Note: The information above is taken, whether in part or in whole, from *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* by N.T. Wright.