

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST? SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

As the great possibility of war between Iraq and the western alliances looms on the immediate horizon, my wife and I have found our Christian and non-Christian friends and neighbors asking us in one way or another, "Do you think the current political and economical events are setting up the stage for the second coming of Jesus Christ?" What they want to know is whether we believe in the second coming and, if so, where we are in the time line of history. We can reply with confidence that we do believe in Jesus' second coming. Then we explain that, as many of you who are students of the word know, the second coming of our Lord will take place in three different phases: (1) In their physical death Christians experience the second coming of Jesus Christ. In Luke 9:27 our Lord told the crowd that some standing among them "shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." Now, as we will see in the passage before us this morning, our Lord had in mind that three of his disciples would see him in all his glory on Mount Hermon when they experienced his transfiguration. After the resurrection, one of Jesus' followers named Stephen was being stoned to death by the Jews for his faith in Christ and, as Luke records, "he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:54-60), moments before he tasted death.

Each Christian who is about to taste physical death will experience the second coming of Christ in all his glory. This taste of death is just a sip; it does not consume them. (2) There will be a generation of Christians who will never have to taste physical death because they will experience the invisible return of our Lord like "a thief in the night;" he will take his church out of the world before the seven years of tribulation without the world realizing it (1 Thessalonians 4-5). I want to be in that generation! I remember my mother always used to say, "He's coming, he's coming," and I wanted to tell her, "Mom, have you noticed? He hasn't come." Then she tasted death, and that was how she experienced the second coming of her Lord. But there will be a whole generation that will have the wonderful experience of suddenly being caught up together in the air to meet Jesus, rejoicing with him as they see him in his glory. (3) Then at the end of the great and terrible tribulation period he will return in a visible manifestation, and this will be quite a different coming. At that time the whole earth will see Him coming in power with his saints and angels in fire to judge the living and the dead and set up his divine rule on earth for a thousand-year reign (Matthew 24, Revelation 20). This is the coming of the Lord to be feared if you don't know who he is.

These are serious days for our nation politically, economically, and spiritually. As Christians we need to have a firm grip on the truth in God's word concerning the end times. Our focus this morning will be on the second coming-an event anticipated by some with joy and by others with anxiety. The invisible second coming of Christ for his church is a time of joy, but the visible second coming of Jesus Christ will be a time of judgment for all those who have rejected him as Lord and Savior. So let's look together at Luke 9:28-36 and review the question for ourselves in order to encourage our own hearts and offer a warning to those who have not yet come into a personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior. Do you believe in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Jesus does!, Luke 9:28-29

Looking back at Luke 9:18-27, which we studied together last summer, we find our Lord just months away from the cross of Calvary. He was taking his disciples north of Capernaum to a Roman city called Caesarea Philippi located at the foot of Mount Hermon. In that city was a large cliff located at the head waters of the Jordan River. Throughout the centuries the various pagan societies had made this a site for idol worship. To enhance their worship they had carved out small niches in the rock in which they placed graven images of their gods and goddesses. Jesus took his disciples to the foot of this cliff, and then, facing them with all those pagan gods and goddesses behind him, he asked them, "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" (9:18.) The

disciples answered that some thought he was John the Baptist and others thought he was Elijah or some other prophet.

Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter responded by spiritual revelation (Matthew 16:16-17) and said in view of all the false gods, "The Christ of God"-the promised Messiah. It was then that Jesus began to teach them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." (Luke 9:22.) He also told them, according to Matthew 16:27-28, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds [as had been prophesied in Psalm 62:12 and would be prophesied again in Revelation 20:12]. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

So the setting for these events is Jesus' beginning to teach his disciples about the prophecies concerning him. This was Jesus' first mention of his suffering as prophesied in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, his resurrection from the dead, and his second coming, in which his kingdom would be set up in power and glory. In context it appears that when our Lord said some present would not taste death until they saw him coming in his kingdom, he was speaking of the very next event that was about to take place: what we now call the transfiguration. Three of the disciples would be encouraged by God the Father by experiencing a foretaste of the glory and power of his Son Jesus as they began to understand the full scope of our Lord's ministry of redemption. It would include not only the cross but also his resurrection, his ascension, and his return to earth in full power and glory for all the world to see.

And some eight days after these sayings, it came about that He took along Peter and John and James, and went up to the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.

The Lord moved all his disciples up the slopes of Mount Hermon away from the pagan surroundings of Caesarea Philippi, and then he felt the need to meet his Father in prayer. He asked his inner circle of three disciples to join him: Peter, John, and James. Peter would become the great preacher of Pentecost and would be used by the risen Lord to open the doors of the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles until he himself was crucified upside-down on the Appian Way some 35 years later in the city of Rome. John would outlive all the other apostles, the only one to die a natural death, and would live long enough to be invited to see and write about the final Revelation of Jesus Christ as the bishop of Ephesus and a prisoner of Rome some 65 years later on the island of Patmos. And James would wear the crown of martyrdom only about 10 years later when he would be beheaded by Agrippa I in AD 44. Jesus and now his disciples knew that he was setting his face to go to Jerusalem, and the shadow of the cross had fallen across all their hearts. It was time to pray.

Here we find a reminder that our Lord modeled for us how to live the new life we have in him. He had continuously taught his disciples that he never said anything, did anything, or went anywhere without first checking in with his Father. For he had come to earth to do the will of his Father in heaven, and now that will was that he would become the final innocent passover lamb who would willingly die to take away the sins of the world. When we enter into relationship with God through Christ Jesus, we come to realize that our life is not our own; it is bought with a price. And we learn to imitate Jesus and check in with our Lord about everything-work, family, vacations, or whatever-so that we end up at the right place at the right time, say the right words to the right people, and so on, all to his honor and glory, not ours.

Since the incarnation and all through Jesus' childhood, temptation, baptism, and two years of ministry, he accomplished all the work his Father wanted him to accomplish right up to the cross, within the restriction of humanity. The apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:6-8 that "...although He existed in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The innocent Lamb of God was willing to die for the sins of humanity, and to die as a criminal in the hands of the Romans on a cruel cross

outside the gates of the holy city of God. He was veiled in humility in his incarnation. But for the moment our Lord in his humanity and his disciples were about to be greatly encouraged by the transfiguration, for it would offer hope to them and to us today, because beyond the cross is the second coming of our risen Lord in power and glory.

Sometime during his prayer our Lord was invited by his Father to step back into eternity and experience his full deity and glory once again—the glory he would later mention the night he was betrayed, just before the cross, when he said to his Father, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." (John 17:4-5.) Peter had confessed, "[You are] the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20), and now Jesus' Messiahship was confirmed: He was transfigured. Matthew says, "...His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." (17:2.) And Mark records, "...His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them." (9:3.) John would later write, "...we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (1:14.) It was the glory or the full manifestation of his inward character which had been and would again be veiled until the resurrection from the dead. The heavens opened up, and Jesus' human body, designed for time and space, took on his eternal qualities, all the characteristics of God. He shone with an incredible brightness! His face changed into that of the wonderful person he had always been. Dr. Dwight Pentecost wrote in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, "This transfiguration was a fulfillment of the prophecy spoken the previous week. It was a miniature and premature picture of the second coming of Christ to establish his kingdom. It was a revelation of the glory which will be revealed to the world when He comes again." This same glory would later be revealed to Stephen at his death, to Saul on the Damascus Road, and to John on the island of Patmos. And finally, his glory will light the whole world at his second coming for every man to see.

I had an unforgettable experience not long ago. I was with Dr. John Edrington, a man I loved very much, in his hospital room when he was drifting between life on earth and life in eternity. It was very quiet, but he kept saying, "Can you hear the music, can you see Jesus? Ron, it is all so beautiful, so beautiful!" I was captured-in silence! I couldn't hear or see what he could, but I was aware that he was experiencing the whole beautiful translation from this world to eternity. Christ was coming for him in all his glory. Within hours John walked through the valley of the shadow of death into the glorious presence of his risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You don't forget something like that. You read, study, and hope it's all true, and then someone actually plays it all out right in front of you! I wanted to go with him.

Do you believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory? The Lord Jesus himself did because of his transfiguration, and....

The prophets of old did! Luke 9:30-31

And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now we see that there were three men present from this side of eternity, and three men from the other side as well—Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. I've often wondered why the Father invited, of all the prophets, these two men who had ministries that were separated by some 800 years on earth. He could have invited Noah, Joshua, Gideon, Abraham, or David, just to name a few. Why Moses and Elijah? One of the clues may be the subject of the conversation that was taking place between them: Jesus' departure, which is the same word as exodus.

It was the prophet Moses who had been instructed by the Lord some 1600 years earlier to deliver his people from their 400-year Egyptian bondage. On the night before this great exodus, each household was instructed to take an unblemished lamb and kill it, then put the blood and on their door post. The Lord was going to send

judgment on the household of Egypt, and the angel of death was going to kill every first-born in the land, but when he saw blood on the door post he would pass over that home. After that midnight judgment, the Egyptian Pharaoh asked the Jews to begin the exodus from their house of slavery to the land promised to their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now here we find the glorified Moses some 1600 years later standing and talking to the fulfillment of that symbolic passover lamb who would soon take away the sin of the world. Our Lord was willing to die in order to deliver all who placed their faith in him as their Lord and Savior from the bondage and enslavement of sin and death.

On the other hand, we also find present the glorified prophet Elijah, who had faithfully served the Lord some 850 years earlier by traveling all over Israel, working by God's power to deliver the Jewish people from the enslavement of Baal worship. He led the Jews back to God from enslavement to idolatry in a spiritual exodus. Later Malachi would prophecy that Elijah would be the forerunner of the Messiah, preparing the hearts of the people of God to receive the Messiah as the only hope for the forgiveness of their sins and their exodus out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. And Elijah never had to taste death, for he was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1-13).

When Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about his exodus or departure, they understood that it had to do with the full range of his redemptive plan for humanity: his arrest, beatings, trial, his suffering on the cross, the burial, his resurrection (in which he would finally be set free from the limitations of his incarnation), his glorious ascension, and, finally, his second coming. This moment of transfiguration was an encouragement to our Lord's heart and later the hearts of his disciples, for the end result of this exodus would be that "the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." (Matthew 16:27.)

Last week after the morning service a Christian couple came over to speak to me, and in the course of our conversation the husband reminded me of the death of a mutual friend several years ago and the fact that we had both been in the memorial service. I had been invited to conduct the service, and he came as a friend of the family. I had had the opportunity to present the gospel of Jesus Christ. This man had sat with a broken heart grieving over the death of his friend, but at the same time he had been listening to the message of hope in the gospel and facing the reality of his own spiritual bondage to sin and death. After the service he went home and asked Jesus to forgive him of his sins and set him free from enslavement to sin, and then he invited Jesus to become his Lord and Savior. He experienced an exodus from darkness into the beautiful kingdom of God, and that is what God is doing in this season of history.

Do you believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ? The Lord Jesus himself does, the prophets did, and...

The apostles did! Luke 9:32-33

Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And it came about, as these were parting from Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"-not realizing what he was saying.

The three disciples had been sleeping, but apparently the bright light and the sound of voices woke them up, and they were allowed to peer into eternity and see the Lord in his full glory just as he had prophesied a week earlier: "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." (9:27.) The disciples were awakened about the time that Moses and Elijah finished their conversation with Jesus. The scene was so bright and overwhelming that all Peter could say in haste was, "Lord this is so wonderful; let's celebrate by putting up three shelters and stay right here away from the world, our enemies, the cross..." But Peter did not realize what he was saying, "...for they became terrified." (Mark

9:6.) Wanting to stay there forever was a natural reaction, but if Jesus were to stay there, of course he would never go to the cross. Peter was inadvertently standing in the way of the only door through which men and women could experience the joy of the spiritual and physical kingdom of God. Our Lord had told his disciples about the cross, and now he was encouraging them by allowing them to witness the glory of his transfiguration and the preview of his glorious kingdom, which was on the way. This was a private glorification of our Lord by the Father, but one day the whole world will see and experience his full glory as the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth.

I can understand how Peter felt, though. One beautiful Sunday morning in October 1988, Anne Marie and I were sitting on a small dock with our feet in the water on the island of Patmos off the coast of western Turkey. We had opened the book of Revelation that the apostle John by the Holy Spirit had written when he was a prisoner of Rome on this island in AD 90. We read the following words: "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen." (Revelation 1: 4-7.) As we finished our reading, we sat there with the sound of the gentle breeze blowing through the willow trees behind us, and we did not want to leave that place or that moment. We wanted Jesus to come back on that island and take us to himself then and there.

Do you believe in the second coming of Christ? Jesus does, the prophets did, the apostles did, and....

God the Father does!

Luke 9:34-36

And while he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

Here we see the same experience that Moses and the nation of Israel had whenever God the Father appeared to them. God the Father appeared to them in an awesome cloud filled with light and power. Moses had received the law in a cloud, the shechinah glory of God, and now the cloud overshadowing them symbolized the divine presence as in the days when God had entered the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and the holy of holies. His coming in a cloud showed the undefinable quality of his person and presence. As Moses and Aaron of old were allowed to enter into God's presence, so the three disciples at this time were allowed to enter into the very presence of God the Father.

When they heard the voice come out of the cloud, Matthew 17:6 tells us "...they fell on their faces and were much afraid." God the Father was affirming his Son. The voice coming out of the cloud spoke in present tense, "This is My Son, My Chosen One," indicating who Jesus is and always will be, forever. Just two years earlier at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the Father had spoken from heaven to encourage him by saying, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased" (Luke 3:22), for the Lord had been sent to the earth by his Father "...to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). But the leaders of the Jews rejected him as their Messiah, and as a result of this rejection our Lord would have to "...suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." (9:22.) This is nearly that point, and now the Father spoke again and said, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" as a word of encouragement as Jesus and his disciples began to face the prospect of the cross.

When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. This is the most amazing thing to me, and one of the most

wonderful examples of our Lord's love for us. He was invited by his Father to step into eternity and be found by Moses and Elijah in all his glory, majesty, power, and authority, and yet after they finished discussing his exodus, he willingly stepped back out of eternity, appeared before the high priest as the final innocent passover lamb, allowed his Father to place all our sins upon him, faced God's wrath, and experienced death-for us. If he had not been willing at that moment to leave his glory in eternity and go to the cross, we would have no hope. We would have no eternity, no life, no forgiveness of sins; no way to deal with shame, with death, with fear, or with anything else. We would be in hell already on earth. But he stepped back into time and went to the cross so that all who place their faith in him could experience the forgiveness of their sins and the joy of eternal life now and forever.

Matthew 17:9 tells us, "...Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'" Why? Mark 9:10 says, "...they seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean." They were to be quiet until they had a full understanding of not only the transfiguration but also the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But some 30 years later Peter would be able to tell about it, having understood. He wrote to the Christians in northern Turkey, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased'-and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain." (2 Peter 1: 16-18.)

We live in a pressure cooker today socially, politically, economically, and spiritually. This is a great day to become totally aware of God's plan of redemption and your part in it. It is also a great day to believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. When our friends and neighbors ask us whether we believe in the second coming, we can reply with great hope in our hearts: "Yes! We believe in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ because Jesus does, the prophets did, the apostles did, and God the Father still does." That's enough evidence for us! We can also explain the difference in understanding the second coming for Christians and for non-Christians. In his first coming the Lord came as the passover lamb willing to die for the sins of the world, and Christians, who have placed their faith in him as their personal Lord and Savior, have experienced an exodus from the kingdom of darkness with all its sin, guilt, shame and bondage, and have been delivered over into the Kingdom of God. So as children of God, we who are alive now can look forward to his second coming in glory at the time of our own personal death, like Stephen of old, or at the invisible coming when, like a thief in the night, he takes his church out of the world before the great and horrible tribulation period. We go into an eternity of joy, where there will be no more tears, where righteousness is at home.

But for non-Christians, at the end of the seven-year tribulation period the whole world will perceive the visible coming of our Lord, and the second time the Lord arrives on this earth, it will not be in the limitations of the incarnation as a innocent and willing lamb who is willing to die for the sin of the world. The next time he appears, the world will see him as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will come to judge the world.

The Lord is coming again. If you are a Christian, your heart should be filled with joy and peace, for you will live with him forever. But if you have not accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, your heart should be filled with terror, because when you meet him at the time of your death or at the end of the tribulation, you will meet him as your judge, and he will set you free into the second death, which is eternal separation from him and all others. You will live out an existence alone in torment forever. I beg of you not to put off God's invitation to accept his gift of eternal life in his Son Jesus Christ who went to the cross to die for our sins, was buried and rose again and now stands at the right hand of the Father awaiting the word to return as the judge of the world. This is a serious moment. Be sober and think about it. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will recompense every man according to his deeds."

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