

LD 19; Heb. 9:27-28; Matthew 25:31-46; The Return of the King I. The Contrast of His Coming II. Preparing for His Coming III. The Comfort of His Coming

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we all like a good homecoming story. Like children that return home for Christmas, or the soldier that returns home from battle to his family; we all enjoy the prospect of those who were once separated united with loved ones once again. And today- at the beginning of the New Year, we are going to focus on the best and the last homecoming! The fact is, we have completed one more year- and each year brings us closer to this blessed event! Each day we are closer to the Return of the King! This coming return- this impending homecoming- is one that is filled with comfort! The fact is, the months of January and February are the most depressing months of the year for most people. After Christmas- after the most wonderful time of the year- we have the most depressing time of the year. Why is that? Well, in addition to the long, cold and dark days of winter you also have the disappointment of failed expectations! The days of Advent are a time of great excitement and preparation- so many things to look forward too! But after the parties are over and the gifts unwrapped, all that remains are the bills and the regret. Why can't we hold on to the joy, to the hope and the expectation? Well, today we are going to see that it is possible to hold on to joy and expectation- but that hope is not found in waiting for Christmas! Rather, the enduring hope and joy of the Christian is found in our waiting for His final return! As we look forward not to His first but His second coming! Only then can we hold on to this joy, comfort and expectation- as we look forward to the Return of the King! We consider this theme: the return of Jesus as our Judge and savior is the source of our lasting comfort! So as we begin this new year together- let us hold on to our hope for the coming of the King!

### **I. The Contrast of His Coming**

In our first point we are going to compare and contrast the two comings- the two advents of Jesus. The word "advent" simply means coming or arrival- so we have the Christmas advent and the Final advent of Jesus to consider. This event is called the Day of the Lord or the Day of Judgement. Both of these arrivals

of Jesus are real, historical events. Both his first and His second coming will be literal and in accordance with the prophecy of God. When the time is fulfilled- when the Father's ordained time has come- only then will Jesus arrive and appear on earth. But these two comings of the Christ could not be any more different! The first coming of Jesus was a secluded and private event- only a select few would hear the news. A few shepherds, Mary and Joseph- and later on the wise men from the east. Not everyone knew and very few actually saw His arrival. On the other hand, when Jesus comes back everyone will see! His return will be visible from one end of the earth to the other- the sky will be lit bright like lightning that shines on a dark night. The trumpet will sound- the voice of the archangel shout- and all will hear! So the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming will be visible and audible to all! Next, we see that the first coming of Jesus was part of His humiliation- as Phil. 2 says- taking on the form of a servant. His second coming will be the culmination of His glorification- every knee will bow before Him and every tongue confess His glorious name! His first coming at Christmas was the beginning of His work as our sacrifice- the Lamb of God who would lay down His life for His sheep. As we read from Heb. 9:28- His first coming was to bear the sins of man. So His first advent was to deal with sin- to purchase our justification. His second coming will not be to deal with our sins- but rather to vindicate the cause of the elect as He resurrects those who are eagerly waiting for Him! The first coming of Jesus was to secure the day of salvation. Now- today is the day of salvation! All those who believe and confess His name today will be saved! But when He returns, the Day of Salvation will be concluded! No more people will be converted- the number of the elect will be complete and every lost lamb will have been gathered! In other words, no one will become a Christian when they see Jesus in the clouds! No more will be added to the church! It is for this reason that not everyone will rejoice in His return. Just as the leaders of Israel and the kings on their thrones did not rejoice at Jesus' birth as seen by Herod's response- so also many will not rejoice when Jesus returns. Many will cry out- hide us from the presence of the Son of Man! But many did rejoice- many did praise and glorify God for the Son's first arrival- like the shepherds and the wise men! And many will rejoice when He comes back as well!

## II. Preparing for His Coming

Now that we have compared and contrasted the first and the second coming, we continue by looking at how we are to prepare for His arrival. Our reading from Mt. 25 began by stating- when the Son of Man comes in His glory. So Jesus is coming back-in glory- and soon! So how should we get ready? How can we be prepared? Well, earlier in Mt. 25 we find 2 parables concerning the coming of the King in His Kingdom. Jesus' return will be like a wedding day- when the groom comes for His bride. And the coming of Jesus will be like a master who return to His own house. So we are to learn from the actions of the 10 Virgins and the actions of the servants of the household. The first way in which we are to prepare for the return of Jesus is to be like the wise virgins. What set the wise virgins apart from the foolish? Well, the wise ones were the ones that were prepared! They had oil for their lamps- when the word came that the groom was on the way- these virgins had oil. They were watching- ready and prepared! So the first lesson is this- we must be ready because we do not know when He is coming! We also find this in the previous chapter- Mt. 24:44- be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. This lesson is reinforced in the second parable. The master of the house went away on a long journey and he entrusted his property to his servants. Some of the servants were faithful- working and using the talents for the master's good. While others were lazy- ignoring their duty as they hid their talent in the ground. From this we learn again- do no be caught off guard when the master returns. Be prepared by using the talents you have- use the master's property with an eye to his return! Do not be lazy- do not sleep- do not forget that He is coming! Rather live like His return is immanent! So the point is clear- these parables teach us to be ready! The unexpected and unknown nature of Christ's return is designed to encourage watchfulness! The purpose of our not knowing the day or the hour is to discourage sin- to shake off carnal security- to excite within us a fervent watchfulness and prayer! Since we do not know when He is coming- we must always be ready! Now the way in which we are to be ready is two-fold. First, we are ready if we are living by faith. Looking up- or looking forward to Jesus' return! A delight to see our master come back- a

longing to see the groom arrive. That is living by faith. And second, by obeying our master. Using our talents- putting our gifts to work to serve our master. So obedience is also a necessary aspect to our being prepared. As Mt. 24:23 makes clear, those who are busy doing the master's work when the master returns will be blessed by the master! Well done, good and faithful servant Jesus will say. Enter now into the joy of your master! So what should we do this next year? What will a life of a faithful servant of God look like? Well, we will be living by faith and we will be living a life of obedience! Serving at the pleasure of our King!

### **III. The Comfort of His Coming**

Now that we understand what it means to be prepared for His coming, in our last point we consider the comfort of His coming. Is the return of Jesus on the clouds of glory good news or bad news? Should it fill us with comfort or dread? Well, it all depends on your relationship to Him! When Jesus comes back on that last day- as Mt. 25:31 puts it- the Son of Man comes in His glory- before Him will be gathered all the nations. Jesus will raise the dead- both the just and the unjust. He will gather all people before Him and He will take His seat on the white throne. Then Jesus will perform His work as the Judge of the living and the dead- the judge of the world. He will separate the sheep from the goats- He will separate the wheat from the weeds- He will make a great division as He places the justified elect on His right side and the reprobate rebel on the left. To those on his left He will say, away from me, I never knew you! These will be cast out into outer darkness- as v. 41 puts it- depart from me you cursed ones into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. But to His people Jesus will say as v. 34 says- come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. So lets get back to our question- is the return of Jesus good news? Is the fact that Jesus is coming back to judge the world comforting? Well, it is if you are one of His people! His return is good news if you are one of His sheep! As QA 52 unfolds we find that the return of the King is the return of our Savior! The judge is the one who has already secured our pardon! The one who determines blessing or curses has already removed the curse from me- and opened

the door to eternal blessings! QA 52 highlights the comforting aspect of Jesus' return by putting His return in the context of current suffering! Right now, we all face various degrees of distress and persecution!

We all have various trials and tribulations! The death of a loved one. The drain of sickness. The uncertainty about the future- what will this test reveal- what is my next step? All of these trials only serve to highlight the comfort we will experience when He returns! He will wipe every tear from our eyes- then there will be no more crying and no more pain! No sorrow, sickness or death! When we see Jesus, every reason for sorrow will be removed! That is why we can and should look forward to His coming back!

Knowing that this judge is Jesus- our Savior- is what makes this a comforting event! His coming is when our faith will be made sight! So the application now becomes clear. Not only should we be ready- we should look forward to this day! We have this great truth to hold onto- our sorrow and suffering are temporary! These will not last! I have complete confidence in my Savior's victory! Do you remember what Stephen saw when he was being killed? What vision did the first NT martyr receive? He saw the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father! The ruling of Christ as the judge over all is the truth that comforted Stephen- and this truth continues to comfort all of God's people who face the fire and feel the thorn. Jesus is ruling as King and He is coming back as judge! Our waiting for His return is not a passive reclining- it is an active waiting that looks forward with a heart of faith! This is what we mean- this is what we enjoy when we confess that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead!

To conclude, if you are like me, you might be thinking- now that Christmas and New Years is over, there is nothing to look forward to. But as Christians, we have something better than Christmas to prepare for!

We have the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent on our horizon! What will this new year hold? I do not know if your next year will be one of plenty or want- sickness or health. But what I do not know is this – every year is one year closer to our Lord's return! The return of Jesus as our Judge is the source of our lasting comfort! Jesus' earthly ministry began in a cradle- but it will end on the throne! So let the church of all ages pray- Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!