

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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What difference does it make: Why will Jesus come again?

When I was a school boy, I was not always totally conscientious about homework and revision. There was more than one occasion when I walked to school knowing that some key piece of work that was due in that day had not been done. Having been a Christian from an early age, and because I had been brought up in a Christian family, I knew all the basic teachings of the Bible. At times like these, my favourite doctrine was Christ's second coming! You would not believe how fervently I prayed that Jesus would return before the second afternoon period when my maths paper was due in! Strangely God never chose to grant these impassioned requests! Looking back, I smile at how I tried to manipulate the eternal plans of Almighty God to solve my self-inflicted problems. Even today, when my own children are approaching GCSE age, I find that I easily forget that God's plans and designs do not revolve around me but His Son, Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to conclude the series of talks entitled "What difference does it make?" by considering the question "Why will Jesus come again?" I think it is safe to say the answer is not, "to rescue school boys from homework troubles"!

I am going to attempt to answer the question by looking back to Jesus' death on the cross at Calvary and seeing how His coming again will contrast with what happened there. Along the way we will see how God will complete many plans that He has been progressing from before time began.

There are six contrasts that I want to consider:

1. Sorrow and Joy
2. Death and Life
3. Crown of Thorns and Many Crowns
4. Judged and Judging
5. Aloneness and Companionship
6. Blasphemed and Worshipped

1. Sorrow and Joy

We are all familiar with Isaiah's description of Christ as a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". I suppose that description was never more apt than at Calvary where Isaiah says, "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." But let's not run away with the idea that God is **totally** solemn and Christ is **only** a Man of sorrows. Jesus, Hebrews 12:2 tells us, "endured the cross, despising the shame" because of "the joy that was set before Him." In the middle of all the sorrow of the cross, Jesus was looking onwards to the joy ahead of Him. It was essential that Jesus endure the sorrow of the cross; without it the full glory of God's grace would not have been revealed, and we would not have been saved. It is also essential that Jesus has the full joy that is part of His coming again; without it the character of God would be misrepresented, and our salvation would be incomplete. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25) the master says to each of the faithful servants, "Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord." The eternal joy of heaven is the joy of the Lord. He will look around Him at the results of all that He has done and He will be indescribably joyful, and that is the joy we will enter into. Psalm 16 ends, "My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." We know that Christ was not in the grave long enough to suffer decay and corruption, and that He is now at God's right hand.

God's plan for the salvation of disobedient, rebellious human beings will not be complete until they too experience the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore that are only available in the presence of God. That cannot happen until Jesus comes again.

2. Death and Life

Golgotha was a place where death was king. It was called the place of a skull, and people went there to die. One of those people was Jesus. Like many people before and after Him, He went to Golgotha and died. Death seemed to

have claimed another victim. But of course Jesus did **not** die like other people and death's victory was short lived. Some time before His death Jesus had said, "No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." John 10:18. In John 19 John, recording Jesus' death, says that, "bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." Jesus' death was voluntary in every sense. He willingly made Himself an offering for sin, and He had to give up His spirit in order to die. Neither the chief priests, nor Pilate, the soldiers nor even death itself could take Jesus' life from Him unless He voluntarily let it go. Not only could death not take or keep Jesus, but in His death Jesus mortally wounded death itself! SW Gandy captures this in a verse of a hymn when he says,

*"He Satan's power laid low,
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death by dying slew."*

For Jesus **Himself** this was accomplished at His resurrection. He rose in absolute triumph over death and, in doing so, completed His work, glorified the Father, and became the way to salvation and life. But this was really just part one of the story. Death still seems to reign over everybody else today. Thousands of people die every day - good people and bad people. Christians die at the same rate as non Christians. All Jesus' original disciples have been in the grave for centuries, and every disciple since then has joined them. Singing about the death of death seems a little premature!

In John 5:25 and the verses following, Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgement also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." The first 'hour' mentioned, the one that "now is", is the period we are living in today. Spiritually dead people are hearing the saving voice of the Son of God and are coming to life. The other 'hour' is still in the future. The two parts of this resurrection will be separated by many years - the resurrection of believers being a thousand years or more before the resurrection of unbelievers, but they are both part of that one 'hour'. In that hour the Son will speak with such a powerful voice that everybody who has ever lived and died will hear it! Not only will they hear; that voice will drag them out of their graves, to stand face to face with Christ. At the end of that 'hour' death will be seen to be dead. Indeed Revelation 20:14 talks about a day when Death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire. Imagine that, the death of death! This final triumph of Christ in raising His own to take them in their new bodies into the full experience of eternal life, is a necessary answer to the shame and death of Calvary, and another reason why Jesus must come again.

3. Crown of Thorns and Many Crowns

Part of the humiliation of Christ's cross was the mocking of His kingship. The soldiers pushed a crown made from thorns onto His head, put a reed in His hand for a sceptre, then, pretending to bow in deference, they slapped Him across the face.

When Pilate brought Jesus out before the crowd he declared, "Behold your King!" What a joke this King of the Jews was - or so it appeared! But of course He really was the king! The accusation fastened to the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", was true; but it was not the complete truth. He **was** King of the Jews. He was also King of Pilate, the soldiers, the crowd, the whole of the world; in fact the King of Heaven and the whole of creation. God packed the Old Testament with promises of a coming King. He put in place a whole dynasty of kings in Israel, descended from the great King David, to illustrate what the coming King would be. When Jesus finally came, His own people did not recognise or receive Him, and the only coronation He received was the one we have just recalled. Were all those Old Testament prophecies mistaken? Has God abandoned those plans and settled for His Christ only reigning in the hearts of believers? I don't want to belittle the fact that Christ should rule in our lives, I think it is very important, but it does not look much like direct fulfilment of all those promises, and it does not feel like an adequate riposte to all the humiliation of the 'coronation of the cross'.

John 5:23 insists that, "all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father." Let me read you a selection of verses from Revelation 19 that describes some of that happening. "I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!' ... Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns ... Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron ... And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords."

Now **that** sounds like the Son receiving the honour that is due to Him! It is absolutely necessary that this happens. The fulfilment of God's promises demands it.

The honour due to God's own Son demands it. The mockery of the King at Calvary demands it. To accomplish all this Jesus **must** come again.

4. Judged and Judging

We have brushed up against the subject of judgement a few times already. Let's put it centre stage for a moment. At Calvary, several groups of people thought they were judging Jesus. The rulers of the Jews judged Him to be guilty of blasphemy, and wanted Him killed. Herod thought he would act as judge, but could not get the defendant to utter a word. Pilate, the most politically powerful of them all was, ironically, the most reluctant to act as judge, but was prepared to tell Jesus, "Do You not know that I have power to crucify you and power to release You?" A thief on one of the crosses and the crowd and the passersby were ready to mock Jesus and sit in judgement on Him. They all missed the terrible irony that the man they were all judging was, in fact, 'the judge of all the earth'. Are we to think that Jesus gave up all claims to be judge at Calvary? Did He not say (in John 12:47) that He had not come to judge the world? Now it is a very happy thought that those who have put their faith in Christ as Saviour will never have to face Him as judge. But not everybody trusts Christ as Saviour. The verses I have already quoted in John 5 spoke about two resurrections: one to life, and one to condemnation. The verses we read from Revelation 19 were littered with references to Christ judging.

I find it staggering that God's grace is so vast that He saves human beings on the basis of the cross, when that cross was the ultimate crime of humanity! God's justice was satisfied when His judgement on **my** sins was poured out on His own Son. For those that refuse this stunning grace and mercy, judgement is still outstanding. When Christ first came to earth He had **not** come to judge the world. The chief purpose of His first coming was to save. When He returns to reign He **will** come to judge the world. He will judge fairly and with total insight, but that will not make the condemnation and eternal punishment any less appalling.

"[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." Acts 17:31. Let's make sure that we play our full part in telling others about the fantastic salvation that God has provided through the death and resurrection of His Son, and in warning them about the judgement that God has committed to that same Son.

Jesus must come again to judge the world that judged Him. We must warn people of that coming judgement!

5. Aloneness and Companionship

The cross saw Jesus completely, uniquely alone. The disciples had run away. John seems to have returned quietly later to receive the commission to care for Jesus' mother, Mary, but in no way did the disciples stand with Jesus. Some of the faithful women gathered round the foot of the cross, but they could contribute nothing more than pity. Then the three hours of darkness came. Only God and His Son were present then. Nobody else had access even to see. The Father and the Son had fully delighted in each other throughout eternity, and God was therefore never alone, even before anything was created. But these were not hours of fellowship between Father and Son. These were hours when the saddest, strangest words in history were spoken by the sinless Son of God. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" At that point Jesus was alone in a sense that nobody had ever experienced before, outside of Hell. In Hell, men experience total separation from God, and receive exactly what they deserve. On the cross, Jesus experienced total separation from God, having done nothing whatsoever to deserve it.

He stood absolutely alone, receiving the wrath **we** deserved. That heartbreaking loneliness demands a corresponding delight, and God has planned exactly that.

Listen to Ephesians 5:25-27: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." I omitted verse Revelation 19:7 from my earlier readings. That verse says, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." Weddings are meant to be days of pure joy. Sometimes things conspire to mix in elements of sadness or frustration to what should be a joyful day. Nothing in all creation will be able to cast a single shadow on that day when all the inhabitants of heaven rejoice and exult that the marriage of the Lamb has come, and nobody's joy will exceed that of the Bridegroom Himself! On that day He will be the exact opposite of alone. Jesus must come again to receive those for whom He suffered complete aloneness that they, and He, might never be alone again.

6. Blasphemed and Worshipped

What should we call the persistent demand that God the Son be crucified? How shall we characterise the statement, "We do not want this man to reign over us"? What shall we call the cry, "We have no king but Caesar"? If the using of God's name in vain is blasphemy, is it too strong to regard the words and actions of Calvary as blasphemy? It is impossible to imagine any outrage worse than what was done to Christ on Good Friday. It is simply unimaginable that God would allow these affronts to stand uncorrected. Some well known verses in Philippians 2 remind us that God will not let this happen. "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Indeed, Paul makes clear, in Philippians 2, that this exaltation is God's direct answer to Christ's self emptying at the cross.

Let's return to Revelation, this time Revelation 5, to read about the praise and worship that will be given to Christ at His return. "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!' And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!' Then the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the twenty four elders fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever." Nobody who truly loves Christ Jesus can read those words and not say, "Amen! May it be so." Every living thing in creation will join together in praise and worship of the Father and the Son. I'm sure nobody will be able to make out my voice amongst the millions of others, but I will be using all my breath to join in heartily the praises of the One who will be recognisable, even then, as the sacrificed Lamb.

Why will Jesus come again? Because God's plans cannot be completed until He does. Because every dishonour of Calvary must have a corresponding glory. Because Jesus Himself said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself." There can be no better way to conclude than to read Revelation 22:20: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

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