

Let Freedom Ring!

7. A General's Promise and a Savior's Guarantee



Scripture Reading: John 14:1-3

Introduction

“My first memory was that of a bugle call,” recalled General Douglas Mc Arthur. He was born in an army barracks in Little Rock, Arkansas, the descendant of a father who was a hero in the Civil and Spanish-American Wars. Young Mc Arthur later noted later, “It was here I learned to ride and shoot even before I could read or write—indeed, almost before I could walk or talk.” During his childhood he moved from fort to fort. There was no question that Mc Arthur would ever be anything other than a soldier, like his father before him. He would spend his entire life from cradle to grave in the military.

During his grade school years, young Mc Arthur was an unremarkable student. It wasn't until he entered a military prep school that combined military discipline with academics that he began to excel in his studies. Later, Mc Arthur entered West Point in 1898 and graduate first in his class of 93 in the year 1903—with only two cadets in the history of the school surpassing his achievements. He would go on to build a reputation as a brave soldier who served his country as Army chief of staff in World War I, as commander of the Allied forces in the Southwest Pacific arena in World War II and finally in the Korean War. Some consider this five star general America's most compelling leader of the 20th century.

In 1915, Mc Arthur became the Army's first public relations officer. He is largely credited with selling the American public on the Selective Service Act of 1917—the draft—as the country moved closer to joining the War in Europe. He was the first to clearly identify the need for gaining support at home among Americans at large as essential to winning on a foreign battlefield. Flamboyant, romantic, highly personal, brilliant on the battle field, and sometimes perceived as egotistical, Mc Arthur instinctively knew that during time of war, words were as important as bullets. His speeches were examples of the telling sound bite and turn of phrase. On various occasions he is quoted as saying:

- Never give an order that can't be obeyed.**
- A general is just as good or just as bad as the troops under his command make him.**
- It is fatal to enter any war without the will to win it.**
- Only those are fit to live who are not afraid to die.**
- You are remembered for the rules you break.**
- We are not retreating - we are advancing in another direction.**
- Americans never quit.**

- **In war there is no substitute for victory.**

Of all Mc Arthur's famous sayings, one stands out above the rest, however. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, Mc Arthur was placed in charge of raising an army in the Pacific to resist. Headquartered on the island fortress of Corregidor in the Philippines during 1941 and 1942, Mc Arthur became the target of Japanese air attacks.

In March of 1942, as the Japanese forces tightened their grip on the Philippines, Mc Arthur was ordered by US President Franklin Roosevelt to withdraw to Australia in order to regroup. Mc Arthur finally fled the islands with his wife and four-year-old son, and a select group of advisers and military commanders. They made their escape on a PT 41 boat commanded, successfully evading an intense search directed toward his capture. As the unbowed general left the Philippines, he uttered the most telling words of his career:

“I shall return.”

I. Another Promise of Return

General Mc Arthur's promise to return to the Philippines during World War II finds a parallel in the pages of Scripture. Of all the 3,000 promises of the Bible, one stands out among the rest. It is the promise of the return of Jesus Christ to planet Earth. We will be examining this promise in detail this evening. As we do we will see the Bible's answer to important questions about this return. We will see:

**The Bible clearly describes Jesus' return
so that we may be prepared to meet Him.**

Let's consider the greatest prophecy of the Bible together.. A good newspaper reporter asks and answers certain questions in arranging his facts. Those most basic questions applied to Jesus' Return include:

- ***What is the Second Coming?***

- *Who is involved with the Second Coming?*
- *What will happen to those who are ready when Jesus returns?*
- *What will happen to those who are not ready?*
- *When will the Second Coming happen?*
- *And probably most important of all, How can we be ready to meet Jesus in peace when He returns?*

The Bible answers to each of these questions in turn.

II. What is the Second Coming?

First, let us consider what the Second Coming is. The Second Coming of Jesus is one of the most common teachings of the Bible. Scholars estimate that one in 250 verses in the Old Testament refer to this grand event which will bring all human history to its close and put an end to the conflict between good and evil for all time.

In the New Testament, one verse in eight is devoted in some way to affirming that planet Earth will not in the end destroy itself and bring human life to extinction, nor go on forever in the present order of things. Rather, God will decisively intervene in human history at the time when Jesus Christ returns to our planet to put an end to the current order of things and to set up God's endless kingdom. When we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", we are in fact praying for this event that makes that prayer universally possible.

The earliest prophecy of the Second Coming is referred to in Jude 14, and 15. Though Jude's book is located just before Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, it speaks of Enoch, the earliest preacher of the Second Coming who lived between the time of Adam and Noah.

Jude writes:

"Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly

acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Enoch walked with God. He knew God's character so well from personal prayer and communication with His Maker that when he looked at the way people in his own day were thinking and behaving, he was appalled. God had made man in His own image in the beginning. But due to the fall of mankind into sin, this image of the Maker had been marred. People were ungodly. They were no longer like their Maker. They acted in ungodly ways. They spoke ungodly words. They even lifted up their tongues to speak against the Creator Himself.

Enoch said, "This is not right! People, beware! Don't you know that the Lord is coming to call those once made in His image to account for the choices, words and actions that have made them unlike their Maker? He is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones. Get ready! You must meet your Maker!"

III. Who is Involved With the Second Coming?

One part of Enoch's prophecy concerning the Second Coming of the Lord to hold a wayward world to account in judgment leads us to our second question. Who exactly is involved in the Second Coming? Who are the thousands upon thousands of the holy ones Enoch says will accompany the Lord on that occasion? Who are the primary actors involved? Matthew 24, verses 30 and 31 let us know this coming will be a world-wide event that will affect all living on our planet at the same time. It says:

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

All nations on earth will mourn when the Second Coming occurs—all who are not prepared to meet Him in peace. But there are a group

scattered among these nations who will have cause to rejoice. These are the elect—those who will be saved. They are gathered by the angels—those thousands upon thousands of holy ones that Enoch foretold. One group mourns, while the other has cause to be glad.

Who is involved in the Second Coming? First, Jesus Christ and His Father are involved. When Jesus stood before the council who condemned him to death, He spoke of His Second Coming. Matthew 26, verse 63 and 64 say:

“The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The Mighty One is God the Father. He accompanies Jesus at His return. So do the holy angels. On earth are all the nations, both the righteous elect who are saved and the wicked who will be lost. All see this universal coming at one time as Jesus and God the Father appear with the holy angels of God.

IV. What Will Happen to the Righteous at the Time of the Second Coming?

We've seen that the Bible teaches clearly and repeatedly that Jesus will return a second time to planet earth accompanied by His Father and the holy angels of God. We have seen that all who are alive at that time will see this event occur, and that the nations who are not prepared will mourn this event while the elect who are prepared will have reason to be overjoyed at their deliverance. Let's take a look now at what the Bible says will occur at the time of the Second Coming for the righteous.

One of the great passages of Scripture that pictures the Second Coming is found in I Thessalonians 4, verses 13-18. Here the apostle Paul addresses the concerns of early Christians about those who were believers in Jesus, yet who died before the Second Coming. His

comments in answering this concern gives us a clear view of what happens at the time of Jesus' return. Paul writes:

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”

When Jesus died, He was buried in the tomb and rested for three days. Then He rose from the tomb. When a follower of Jesus dies, they also rest in the tomb. But at the time of the Second Coming, God will bring forth from the tomb those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. In the same way Jesus rose from the dead, so will His followers. This is the “Great Getting Up Morning”, the resurrection of the righteous dead.

Paul goes on to paint the picture even more clearly. He says:

“According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

What happens at the Second Coming? Jesus comes in the clouds of the sky with His Father and all the holy angels. He gives a loud command, the voice of the archangel. There is the trumpet call of God that resounds through the earth. And the dead in Christ, who have been sleeping in their graves, come forth, even as Jesus Himself rose from the grave. Notice that Jesus doesn't come clear down to the ground to meet them. Instead, first the righteous dead, then the righteous living are caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.

What a marvelous scene! General Mc Arthur claimed his first memory as a boy was of the call of the bugle in the army camps where he was raised. Jesus' return is accompanied by a far larger horn and also a command. Everyone on earth will hear the voice of the arch angel, the

loud command, and the trumpet call of God. Everyone will see the brightness of this coming. In Matthew 24, verse 27 the brightness of the Second Coming is spoken of in this way:

**“For as lightning that comes from the east
is visible even in the west,
so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”**

We’ve seen that the righteous dead are raised and caught up to meet Jesus in the air at His return. So are those who are alive and prepared to meet the Lord. For them, there is a change that occurs. This change is necessary to allow them to have the new bodies that will allow them to live forever. Paul spoke of this necessary change for those who live to see Jesus return and are prepared to meet Him in peace. In I Corinthians 15, verse 50-55 he says:

“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

The righteous dead will be raised. The righteous living will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Both together will be caught up to meet the Lord Jesus in the air, to be with him forever. For them, death will have met its end. The mortal will have put on immortality.

V. What Will Happen to the Wicked at the Time of Jesus Second Coming?

But what of the nations that mourn? What of those who have persistently, knowingly, and deliberately rejected Jesus? What of those

who are not ready? Here again the Bible speaks plainly. Isaiah 66, verse 16 says:

“For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.”

The prophet Jeremiah also speaks of the results of the Second Coming on those who are not ready. He says:

”At that time those slain by the Lord will be everywhere—from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned or gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground.” *Jeremiah 25:33*

And again in the book of Revelation, the 19th chapter, in symbolic imagery the outcome for the wicked of the final battle for control of planet Earth is depicted. Here we find Jesus leading the armies of heaven against the wicked of earth for the purpose of rescuing His faithful ones. It says:

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.”

Who is this rider on the white horse? He is Jesus Christ Himself. He came in mercy 2,000 years ago, to pay the penalty for the sins of all who will accept Him as their Lord and Savior. But at the Second Coming, all have made their choices. On this occasion, He rides as the Commander of the Lord’s Hosts, to do battle against all evil and evildoers and to rescue His own. Revelation goes on to picture the angel armies who accompany Jesus at His Second Coming. It says:

“The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of

the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

What is the outcome of this battle? Again, imagery of warfare of the sort that was common in the time of the writing of Revelation is employed to picture the entire destruction of the wicked.

“And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”

What have we seen so far? The Second Coming is universal. It is very noisy. It is very bright. All nations who live on earth will be well aware it is occurring. All they must do is look up to see it happening. At that time, the righteous who are prepared for Jesus return will be caught up to meet with Jesus in the air. But those who are not ready, will be slain by the brightness of His coming. Of the antichrist, who rules among the nations at the time of Jesus’ return, II Thessalonians 2, verse 8 says:

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.”

At the time of Jesus’ Second Coming, all who are righteous will be caught up to meet their Lord in the air to be with Him forever. If they are dead, they will be resurrected. If they are living, they will be transformed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet call of God. They will be given immortal bodies that can never die. The wicked who are alive will be slain by the sword that comes from the mouth of the One riding the white horse and leading the armies of heaven. Along with antichrist himself they will be destroyed by the splendor of Jesus coming. So the good will be separated from the evil.

VI. When Will the Second Coming Happen?

Plainly, stupendous things are in store for our planet. But when will these things be? How will we know when they are about to occur? The most widely read theologian of the 20th century, C. S. Lewis summed the Bible's answer to this question up aptly. He said that the Bible teaches three things about the Second Coming. First, it most certainly will occur. Second, we don't know when it will occur and cannot possibly find out. And third, because of these things, we should be always ready.

While it is true that we cannot know the day or the hour of Jesus' return, it is also true that the Bible gives a variety of signs leading up to Jesus' coming that can let us know this event is near.

In Daniel's second chapter is pictured the multi-metal man, with the four great kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome pictured by the golden head, the chest and arms of silver, the thighs of brass and the legs of iron. Following these great empires that have ruled over mankind would be the mingled kingdoms of modern Europe, pictured by the feet and toes of iron and clay. It was in the days of these kingdoms that the kingdom of stone, the eternal kingdom of God, would strike the image and bringing all other kingdoms to their ruin. We live in the time of those final kingdoms, the very toes of the image. Until these great empires held sway, Christ's Return could not occur.

In the 24th chapter of Matthew are listed signs of conditions that would lead up to Jesus' return. These included signs in the natural world, in the political world, in the spiritual world and in society at large. Jesus disciples had the same questions we have concerning the Second Coming. They asked, "When will this happen?" Jesus replied:

"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. (Verses 4-8)

According to Jesus, there would be great danger of deception concerning His Second Coming. Great events such as wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes would stir people to believe the world was about to end. Into such distressing circumstances false christs and prophets would insert themselves, offering supposed help to those in great distress. All Christs not appearing in the clouds with the Father and the holy angels and calling the righteous dead of all ages from their tombs to meet Him in the air would be false, however.

As for God's people, their lot among men would grow desperate. Jesus predicted:

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (verses 9-12)

Terrible times would come upon earth when those true to the God of the Bible and His truth would face persecution, hatred and death. All these things, God's people would long for His return. But something must happen first. Jesus will not return to a planet that has not had full opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to it. The greatest sign would be the universal preaching of the gospel message to all who live on earth. Jesus says:

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Verses 13)

We are now living in the "information age". The preaching of the gospel is rapidly going forward. Through print, missionaries, and over the airways, the gospel is being preached to the nations in hundreds of languages. Soon all will have heard. Soon Jesus will return.

VII. How Can We be Ready for Jesus Return?

We have seen that Jesus will soon return, and that signs given in the Bible let us know that time cannot be far distant. But a most important question remains. How can we be ready for Jesus' coming? The Bible points to three things God's people can do to be prepared to meet Him when He returns: They can watch, they can wait, and they can work.

A. Watching for Jesus' return includes noting the fulfillment of prophecies that point forward to that event.

While we do not know the day or the hour of Jesus' return, many lines of prophecy in the Bible can be clearly traced down through history. All alike reveal the same great truth: Bible prophecy of things to occur between the time of Jesus' leaving of planet Earth and the time of His promised return have nearly run their course. It won't be long now!

B. Waiting for Jesus return includes living a consistent Christian life from day to day, so that when He returns we may be prepared to meet him.

James chapter five, verse 7 says:

"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains."

Someone once asked Martin Luther what he would do if he knew Jesus were coming tomorrow. He said, "I would plant a tree." He knew that the way to be ready for Jesus to return in the future was to live a good Christian life in the present. At the end of Jesus' great sermon on end time events, Matthew's 24th chapter, Jesus told this parable of readiness for that great event:

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

“But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

So we see that it isn't a matter of getting ready for Jesus to come, but of being ready day by day. After all, none of us knows when our life might be cut short. If it were, for us the next thing we would see would be Jesus' face, either smiling in welcome, or in stern justice.

C. A final thing we can do to be ready for Jesus' return is to work to win others to Him.

The astonishing news of the Bible is that we can actually live in such a way that Jesus' return is either hastened, or delayed. II Peter 3, verses 11 and 12 speaks of the destruction of the world by the fires of the last great day. It says:

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”

How can we speed Jesus' return? There is a simple answer. Jesus will not return until everyone has heard the gospel message. By doing what we can to win others to Jesus, we do the very work necessary to hasten His return.

VII. A Final Story...

There is a legend of young King Solomon's search for a queen that perhaps holds the greatest key of all in preparing for Jesus return and being ready to meet Him. In verse form, it goes like this:

**Young King Solomon of old
Wished to find a wife to wed,
A girl to be queen of his realm--
A lover for a king's own bed.**

**Young King Solomon thought he
To find a girl who would love him true--
Not for gold, or throne, or crown.
But he was king. What could he do?**

**Young King Solomon one day
Lay aside his royal crown--
Stripped him of his splendid robes
For a trade man's cloak of dullest brown.**

**Young King Solomon walked on,
Ever searching as he came.
To the country fields at last,
While still his trade man's part he feigned.**

**There he saw a lovely girl,
Caring for her father's sheep.
He watched her till his heart found words,
And he knew that he must speak.**

**Young King Solomon, 'tis told,
Touched her with his words and eyes,
Till the maiden's heart was won
By her trade man king in his disguise.**

**Soon their wedding day was set,
He would come for her that day--
Take her from her father's house
To his own so far away.**

**Young King Solomon, so grand,
Coming for his wondering bride!
He, the king of all the land,
Come to claim his love, his prize.**

**So the ancient story ends,
The country maid became the queen.
And she ever loved him well,
Who found her true love was the king.**

In the end, being ready for Jesus return is a very simple thing. It is a matter of falling in love with King Jesus, who loves us enough that He died for us on Calvary. Marry the King, and the kingdom is thrown in for free!

“I shall return!” General Mc Arthur promised when he left the Philippines. For the next three years he bent his energies to achieving that very end. “I am coming again!” King Jesus says. That is His promised. In fact, three times in the final chapter of the last book of the Bible Jesus reaffirms this guarantee. In the 22nd chapter of Revelation, the final page of the Bible, He says:

Revelation 22:7

**"Behold, I am coming soon!
Blessed is he who keeps the words
of the prophecy in this book." (vs. 7)**

And again:

**"Behold, I am coming soon!
My reward is with me,
and I will give to everyone
according to what he has done." (vs. 12)**

And a third time:

**“He who testifies to these things says,
‘Yes, I am coming soon.’
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”**

Appeal/Conclusion:

This evening we have seen what the Bible has to say about Jesus' return, and how we by accepting the King of the Coming Kingdom as our own, can be ready right now for His coming. Whether we live to see Jesus return in the clouds, or are laid to rest to rise in the resurrection when the last trumpet sounds and Jesus calls His own from their graves makes no difference. In the end, all who have loved and served Him in this life will be with Him and with each other forever in the life that lasts forever.

Would you like to say, "Lord, remember me when You come into Kingdom?" This evening, King Jesus comes courting you and I in the garments of humanity, like the fabled Solomon in search of His bride. If we accept Him, when He returns in His glory and His father's glory we will be ready to meet Him.

Jesus said:

**"My sheep hear My voice and I know them.
And they follow Me, and I give eternal life to them.**

**"And they will never perish,
and no one can snatch them out of My hand.**

**"My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all,
and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."**

No one can snatch us from the hand of Jesus, or the hand of God the Father. But we must place ourselves in those hands of our own free will. This evening if you would like to place yourself in the hands of God for safe-keeping until Jesus comes again, please come forward during the final song. We've been teaching those who come forward "The Five C's of Christian Faith" in evenings just past. This evening we would like to begin teaching a new series of basic Bible truths called "The Five S's of Adventism". The very first of those five S's is "Second Coming", our subject for this evening. If you'd like to get a little preview of the next four subjects, come forward this evening. It will take just a few minutes.

Our next meeting will be _____ . (Give time and day.) Our subject is “A Hunger for Wild Places and a Temple Carved in Time”.

Again, if you wish to give yourself to King Jesus to be kept in His hand until He comes, slip forward during the final song.

Song:

Prayer:

Thank You Lord Jesus for your promise to return to planet Earth. Thank you that it will not be long. Please keep all who have placed themselves in your hand this evening. May You who have begun a good work in these lives complete it until the day of Your return. We ask the Father God for this in keeping with the promises of Your Word. Amen.
