

Daniel 7:13-14 ¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

John 18:36-38 ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." ³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." ³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

Revelation 1:4-8 ⁴ John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits {4 Or the sevenfold Spirit} before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. ⁷ Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

“He Is Coming”

Let me try your memories a bit. Where have you heard this before, “Great is the mystery of faith! Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!” It comes from the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving that we pray when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The prayer is an affirmation, an amen, to what Jesus did on the night of his arrest. It says: Christ has died in victory over sin and death so that we are forgiven. Christ is risen, vindicated to new creation life and Lordship over the whole Creation. As Lord Christ will come again in judgment and all things will be made new. In him we place our utter trust and can therefore hope.

Here is another confession you might find familiar. “For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” That is from the Nicene Creed, the most common of all Christian creeds and confessions. It fills in a little more what we mean by “Great is the mystery of faith! Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!”

This affirmation and credal confession of faith both have in common that they point us to Jesus personally and bodily returning from Heaven to earth one day. Yet, Jesus’ return is a difficult topic to broach. When we do, it seems that there are two extremes that show up. On the one hand, there is the Christian fundamentalist talk of the Rapture when Jesus will return and all true believers will be whisked off with him while those who are left behind will have to suffer living on a Godless earth where all Hell is breaking loose. On the other hand, there is the view of Christian Liberalism that says, “Jesus is not returning at all. His return as well as his resurrection and ascension are impossible according to science and reason. Therefore, it is up to us to bring his kingdom to earth through spirituality and following his teachings.” Then, in between those two extremes is Mainline cowering. Since the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment, has bound our Western minds with the assumption that religion is really a matter of private beliefs and since we find this topic confusing and uncomfortable, let’s just not talk about it and just privately believe that we are going to Heaven when we die. This view unfortunately robs us of real hope upon which we should act.

So, to do justice to what the Bible really says about Jesus’ return (and it says he really is going to return) we must lay aside those two extremes and our impotent Mainline middle ground. Briefly, the Christian fundamentalist belief in the Rapture has been conclusively shot down by the last twenty years of biblical scholarship. Those who teach it are misleading their people with a false teaching and those who believe it are being misled. The creation of searchable computer databases containing first century writings from the Greek and Jewish world has made it possible for scholars to find out what terms like “clouds of glory” would have meant to someone in the first century without having to root through every book that was around in the first century. The result is that the passages that the “Left behinders” base their beliefs in the Rapture on had to do with Jesus’ first coming and not his second. Moving on, the stance of Christian Liberalism falls in the face of Scripture itself. In almost every book of the New Testament the hope of Jesus Christ’s return is spoken of. For that same reason, our moderate Mainline middle-ground view of “Let’s not talk about it” falls as well. Without contest, one element of the Gospel that Jesus is Lord that the Christian Church should be proclaiming today is that he is coming to judge the world and put it to right through the full establishment of his kingdom. Therefore, Jesus is coming to judge the world with righteousness and rule with justice. People start hoping.

Psalms 96:10-13 tells us to “Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns.’ The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will

sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth." People rejoice. Be glad. Join Creation's celebration. It might sound funny but, sing with the trees!

Daniel wrote: "I saw one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." That son of man was Jesus resurrected and ascended. Paul wrote in Philippians, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Since this is true about Jesus, that all power and authority has been given to him, that he is the LORD, then what John writes at Revelation 1:5-6 is true about us. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." Because he loves us he has set us free from our sins and made us to be a kingdom and priests. His kingdom is coming now in and through yet not exclusively us, his church, his disciples. His kingdom is coming now on earth as it is in Heaven in answer to the Lord's Prayer.

So, what are we going to do about it? Bishop N.T. Wright in his book *Surprised by Hope* asks, "What would happen if we took seriously our stated belief that Jesus Christ is already the Lord of the world and that at his name, one day, every knee would bow?" I would add that as we proclaim the Lordship of Jesus according to Scripture, even now knees are bowing. So, what would happen? You know, we the church as his kingdom and priests really do have the responsibility in the first place of worship and secondly, of announcing Jesus' reign and his return and thirdly, holding the powers that be accountable to the standards of justice and peace presented in the Bible. We cannot use what Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not from this world," as an excuse to sidestep our responsibility to hold our governments accountable to what God has established them to do.

As a priesthood of all believers we serve by worshipping him not only in a Sunday morning service but with the sacrifice of our whole lives as Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual {1 Or reasonable} act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will." Since Jesus is Lord of the world and we are his evident kingdom we cannot sit back or throw our hands in the air at the enormity of evil in this world that our governments and other powers like multinational corporations are propagating or turning a blind eye to. We must play the prophet. We must demand climate control because this is God's good Creation and humanity is its steward, the priest who gives voice to creation's praise. Destroying the Creation is not what God created us to do. If little boys are being abused by the Afghani police force which Canada has helped to put in place, and they are being abused, then we must hold our government accountable to put an end to it. Furthermore, Christians must continue to hold global governments accountable for the corruption that leads to poverty. And the list goes on.

Let me end with a story. The Duff's Presbyterian Church in Puslinch, ON and their minister Marty Molengraaf, who has been instrumental in helping us work with North-South Partnership for Children, are right next door to the Nestle plant that is arguably destroying the water table over there by drawing free water from the ground and selling it to us in little plastic bottles. The Duff's Session after hearing of the difficulty of finding clean water that First Nation reserves in Northern Ontario are having wrote to the manager of the plant and basically said "you have so much water and these people have so little; can you help?" Oddly, the plant manager fully sympathized with the need and she got Nestle to help by shipping free water up to several communities. Christians held a multinational accountable and the kingdom of God broke in. Friends, our Lord is coming and when he comes stuff like that is going to happen. The world will be put to right. Amen.