



What Christians Believe

The Apostles Creed

(9) I Believe in the Return of Jesus Christ

Matthew 24:36-44

July 5th 2020

Roy Summers

Introduction - unpopular lines

I have some neck ties in my wardrobe which I don't wear these days because they are out of fashion! (Just because they are unfashionable today doesn't mean they will always remain out of fashion, of course: that's how I persuade myself—and my wife—to keep them!)

As we make our way through The Apostle's Creed, on Sunday mornings, we've come to a line which does not come out of the preaching wardrobe very often because it is out of fashion in the age we live in. *"Jesus will come again to Judge the living and the dead."* *"Jesus will come again"* is out of fashion, and *"to Judge the living and the dead"* - is especially out of fashion. But just because a truth is unpopular to the world is no reason for the church to throw it out. Especially since the return of Jesus is *mentioned some 300 times* in the NT which is about once every 13 verses! And especially since the return of Jesus Christ is *our great hope*: *"We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."* (Titus 2:13)

#1 Jesus is Coming Back!

"Jesus will come again to Judge the living and the dead." What is the Creed teaching?

(a) *Jesus is coming back to the world in glory one day*

"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven," (said the angels to the disciples as they witnessed his ascension) "will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

In the same way that Jesus ascended into heaven, so he will return, but this time in great power and glory;

“the Son of Man (will) come in his glory, and all the angels with him...” (Matthew 25:31)

“The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. (1 Thess 4:16)

“The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.” (2 Thess 1:7)

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him” (Revelation 1:7)

“No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angles in heaven, nor the Son, but only the father” (Matt 24:36)

When Jesus Christ came into the world the first time, it was as a helpless unknown infant, but when he returns, it will be in splendour and power and glory and everyone in the world will see him. How that will happen we do not know, but his return will be the most spectacular sight the world has ever seen!

(b) Jesus is coming to judge the world

And when Jesus does return, he will judge the world.

“God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

A Man who experienced all the trials and temptations of life will judge the world.

“I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened....The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (Revelation 20:11-13)

The world will be judged according to their words and actions, because God has given

everyone a conscience which tells them right from wrong. The world will also be judged according to the amount of light they were given. If they had been given more truth, their judgement will be more severe: *"It will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement"* said Jesus than for towns that saw the miracles of Jesus and heard his precious words, but rejected him. (Matthew 10:15)

And then the world will be separated into sheep and goats, the wheat and the tares: Matthew 25: *"...He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left... the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world... he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

Jesus says that at the end of judgement day, some will be welcomed into heaven, and some will be condemned to hell. A most solemn truth!

(c) Jesus is coming to judge believers

Thirdly, Jesus Christ is coming back to judge believers also: *"For we must all appear before the judgement of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad."* (2 Corinthians 5:10)

The judgement of believers will be different from the judgement of unbelievers, because the end verdict will not be whether or not we are assigned to heaven or hell, but how great our eternal rewards will be. God will ask us: *Did we use and steward the gifts God gave to us? How did we use our time, our money, our spiritual gifts, the opportunities to serve others, and so on? God will ask us: Did we build our lives on Christ's word? Our marriages, our family lives, our careers, our ministries - or did we build our lives on the passing philosophies of the world? "The fire (of God's judgement) will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives he will receive his reward, If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."* (1 Corinthians 3:13-14)

All believers will enjoy the gift of heaven which Jesus has prepared for us, but not all believers will be equally rewarded in heaven. I know this is hard to understand, but just as there are levels of punishment in hell, so there will be levels or reward in haven. None will be jealous of another, but some, who have laid up more treasures in heaven,

will be given greater responsibilities than others in that glorious world to come!

#2 Why this truth is out of fashion today?

So why don't churches preach this truth today?

(a) *Science teaches a different end to the universe*

First, because we live in a culture much influenced by science, which says that the universe will end naturally, in a heat death, just as it began naturally in the Big Bang. But the Bible says that the world will not end *naturally* but *supernaturally*, when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory. Science does not know what is happening even tomorrow any more than you do or I do, so why do Christians so often bow at its shrine?

(b) *Many people have been put off by speculation*

Another reason the return of Jesus is kept in the cupboard today is because of endless speculation about the date of his return, the signs of his return, and so on. One American preacher, for example, has been recently teaching that Coronavirus is one of the signs that proves the end is nigh. Christians can become so wearied by these waves of speculation—which most of the time turn out to be wrong—that they just give up expecting Jesus to return altogether!

(c) *Our culture does not like God's standards*

But the main reason this line of the Creed is out of fashion today is that the world does not like the idea of God setting the standards, the commandments, by which Jesus will judge all mankind. You can see this especially in the area of *sexual ethics*. "As long as you do no harm" is today's mantra, it's OK: *The Righteous Brothers* and a host of song writers since, have echoed the "if it feels good, just do it" ethics

Is it so wrong to love you this way

When loving you feels so right?

According to the teaching Christ sex is to be preserved for marriage between one man and one woman, alone. "*Marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral*" (Hebrews 13:4) "*Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men or thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor*

swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Our world totally rejects the unchanging standards of Christ and so rejects being judged one day by those commandments.

For all these reasons and more, today’s line of creed: *“Jesus will come again to Judge the living and the dead.”* is kept in the cupboard like some old embarrassing tie! And that is a pity because there are few truths more comforting or challenging than this line; so let’s end with three words of comfort and challenge.

#3 The Return of Jesus Christ Applied

(1) Since Jesus will judge the world we can leave vengeance/ justice to him!

When I read the autobiography of Albert Pierrepoint, England’s last hangman, it seemed to me that the real reason he wrote the book was to correct all the wrong things that the press had written about him. *Many people who write their own stories do the same! They feel the need for justice in this world.*

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath.. It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)

Has someone harmed you? You feel a great sense of injustice and even want to take revenge! You don’t need to and you mustn’t because one day Jesus will judge the world in perfect justice. *“Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm.” says Paul, “The Lord will repay him for what he has done.” (2 Timothy 4:14)*

Such a practical doctrine– never take revenge!

(2) Jesus is coming soon, so let us share the Gospel while there is still time.

The return of Jesus should give urgency to evangelism; we need to share the Gospel with our friends and the whole wide world while there is time, because there will be no opportunity to *repent after* Jesus returns.

I remember a Christian explaining how he became an evangelist. His mother died suddenly. He had failed to pluck up the courage to share the Gospel with her while she was alive. He was determined that would never happen again, and vowed from then on to share the Gospel wherever opportunity presented itself. Is there someone you

need to share the Gospel with before Jesus returns, or before they pass into the night?

(c) Jesus is coming back so let us be ready for him!

The return of Jesus at any moment ought to spur us on to holy living every single day. Why? Because when Jesus returns I do not want to be ashamed of what I am thinking or saying or doing; and because I do not want a long list of my sins to be read out on the day of judgement. Again and again, Jesus told his disciples to be ready for his return: *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”*
(Matthew 25:13)

Some Christians think sin doesn't matter! “Jesus has paid for all my sins I can behave as I please!” No true believer can ever think like that! *“All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”* (1 John 3:3)

Jesus is coming back at any time, so we need to be ready and stay ready! Is God speaking to someone this morning who is overlooking some sin and needs to repent today?

Some years ago, and with this I close, I heard a sermon in Michigan, USA. I remember only one sentence from the sermon, this; *“The arrow of eternity is set in time.”*

Our future forever, destination, is set, is determined in this short little life down here. So if we want to enjoy the eternal life Jesus offers, we need to respond right away, while there is time, in this short life, to his command to repent and believe.