

## The Weight of Glory—Talks about Heaven

### The Return of Jesus Christ

#### 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

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### Heaven is our home

*Deep within your heart and mine are longings that can never be satisfied in this present world. Longings for a Person and for a Place. That Person is God and the Place is Heaven.*

*Some people make the mistake of trying to satisfy these divine longings with possessions, music, career, fame, hobbies, sex, sport, or friendships. But that path is strewn with a thousand broken hearts because nothing in the world can satisfy this aching homelessness.*

*The better path is to recognise, acknowledge and embrace these unfulfilled yearnings; to say in the words of CS Lewis, “The sweetest thing in all my life has been... the longing for home” and to see our present dissatisfaction as proof of a living hope for the Person and the Place where every longing will be satisfied.*

On Sunday mornings, for a few weeks, we’re thinking about heaven. It’s right for believers to long for heaven! *“We would **prefer** to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:6) “They were **longing** for a better country —a heavenly one.” (Hebrews 11:16)* When my mother suddenly died in 1998, at the age of 77, Yvonne explained to our 5 year old that Grandma had gone to heaven. An excited little boy exclaimed back, “Wow, really, Grandma’s in heaven now, already!?”

If we are trusting in Jesus Christ our souls or spirits - the real person – will go to be with Christ, which is better by far, as our bodies return to the earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. That new home Jesus called paradise, but our souls have to wait for the full enjoyment of heaven, when they are joined to our new resurrection bodies in a renewed heavens and earth! I want us all to understand this! When we die our souls or spirits, the real you and the real me, pass immediately into the joyful presence of Jesus Christ!

But in that joyful state we are waiting for the day of resurrection, when our gloriously renewed bodies will be reunited to our souls - and then body and soul together we shall enjoy the fullness of heaven! My mother is in heaven with Christ at this very moment, but she is waiting for her new body, when Jesus returns! I says “waiting” as if it could be a long time, but since time is likely to pass differently in that world, the “waiting” is likely to seem like no time at all!

So if we are trusting in Jesus Christ, death holds no fear, because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, which is better by far! But - and this is today’s meditation - we might go to heaven a lot sooner than the hour of our death! If Jesus Christ was to return next week, then we’d all be fast-tracked to heaven; we would bypass the experience of death, and what is more, the moment Jesus returned, we’d receive our

new resurrection bodies, and be transported straight into the new heavens and the new earth! Not every believer will have to wait until the moment of death to enjoy heaven, if they happen to be living when Jesus Christ returns!

But we need to take things a little more slowly....

### **We believe in a supernatural end to history**

The Bible teaches that history will end supernaturally, when Jesus returns to earth. The world, of course, thinks that is ludicrous; many believe that history will end naturally. Perhaps a large asteroid will slam into the earth and destroy all of life. Perhaps mankind will bring history to an end, either with a third world war, or with global warming. And if neither an asteroid nor mankind put an end to history well then in billions of years the sun will run out of fuel.

But that's not what the Scriptures teach. By faith we believe that just as the world *began supernaturally* when God created it, so the world will *end supernaturally*, when Jesus Christ returns. This is the Bible's supernatural end-time chronology—four divine actions, happening in quick succession, one glorious event, the day of the Lord:

1. Jesus will return in splendour with the souls or spirits of God's people who have gone before, *"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."* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)
2. At that very moment, everyone's body—everyone who has ever lived— will be raised from the dead, *"For the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement."* (John 5:29)
3. Then Jesus Christ will judge the world, *"Christ Jesus, will judge the living and the dead."* (2 Timothy 4:1)
4. And final, God will renew this fallen earth to become our eternal home, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new" (Rev 21:1,5)*

Don't worry if some of this is new, and don't worry if there's a lot to take in; we will unfold these truths, with the Lord's help, over the coming weeks. Today's focus is the event that starts the end of world history, the return of Jesus Christ.

### **(1) Jesus is coming back—soon!**

*"Behold I am coming soon!" (Rev. 22:7)*

*"Behold I am coming soon!" (Rev. 22:12)*

*"Yes, I am coming soon!" (Rev. 22:20)*

When Jesus says something three times—all in a row—we should take special note, right?! Again and again Scripture encourages us to anticipate, “Jesus is coming back soon, let’s look forward to it, let’s be ready!”

*“Be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Matthew 24:44) “Jesus will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” (Hebrews 9:28) “... our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)*

Jesus is returning soon, but how soon? Are we given any clues as to the when? Well, the Scriptures say two things to help us with the timing:

*(1) No-one knows the exact time. “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Matthew 24:36).* In 2011 a radio preacher, predicted that Jesus would return on Saturday 21st May. People quit their jobs, sold their homes and in one case spent \$500,000 of his savings to warn the world with advertisements! But Jesus did not return on May 21st. And if those disappointed Christians had listened to Jesus rather than a radio preacher, they would have avoided that traumatic experience, “about that hour *no-one* knows,” Jesus said.

*(2) There will be signs preceding the return, Jesus.* But secondly, to build our anticipation and kindle expectation, God in his wisdom has decided to give us signs, some world events which will indicate that the time is close! When our children were small, we’d tiptoe into their bedrooms on Christmas eve and place a stocking filled with small gifts on their beds. When they woke up, those small gifts were a sign that Christmas day had arrived and the best gifts were on their way! In the same way, God has given us a number of signs to build expectancy and hope! *“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28)*

- *The Gospel preached to all nations “And the Gospel must first be preached to all nations.” (Mark 13:10),* well that may be close to happening!
- *Signs in the heavens, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heaven will be shaken.” (Mark 13:24).* Well that has happened yet, but it could happen quite soon.
- *False prophets working wonders, “False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonder, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.” (Mark 13:22)* There are many false teachers in the world today, but perhaps not yet in the intensity of that prediction. (I heard one of these American false teachers on YouTube joking about the wealth he’s wheedled out of his TV audiences. He said he’d rebuked someone who had called him a millionaire, “You’re wrong, I’m not a millionaire, I’m a *multi-millionaire.*”) Men who call themselves preachers but love money are frauds.
- *A time of intense difficulty, “in those days there will be such tribulation as had not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be.” (Mark 13:20)* This sign hasn’t yet occurred, but once again, acute trouble could come upon the world very quickly.
- *The rise of antichrist.* And then the sign of antichrist. The rise of a particularly evil man on the world stage,

the man of rebellion. Paul talks a lot about him in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. *“Do not let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction,”* (verse 3) Over the centuries, believers have thought the pope, Stalin, Hitler - and many others - were candidates for this evil man. But one day a particularly evil deceiver will arise on the world stage. This doesn't seem to have happened yet, but he could arise very quickly—perhaps especially with the advent of global mass media.

Some of these signs don't appear to have happened yet, but they could happen in a very short span of time, so that it can still be said that Jesus is returning soon. When 9/11 happened in 2001, within hours the world was watching the twin towers burn. And when the Americans launched their “highly secretive” mission to capture Osama Bin Laden, ten years later in 2011, a local Pakistani man in Abbottabad was woken out of his sleep by the helicopters and tweeted what was happening to the world. We live in a global village, where news travels like lightning.

When is Jesus coming back? Soon! No-one knows the hour, but God has given us signs to encourage his people to look and talk and think about the return of his Son to the world. *“Look out for the stocking because it means Christmas day has arrived!” “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* (Lk 21:28)

## **(2) Jesus is coming back in splendour**

Secondly Jesus is coming back in splendour! No artist could ever capture the glory of the scene!

*Not in that poor lowly stable,  
With the oxen standing by,  
We shall see Him, but in heaven,  
Set at God's right hand on high;*

When the Son of God came to this world the first time, he came in terrible weakness as a baby. I have so enjoyed being a granddad. One of the things about babies that has struck me this time round, is just how weak and vulnerable they are! The Son of God came into this world like that 2000 years ago, in weakness, but he will return in power.

Jesus came the first time in obscurity: no trumpets to herald his birth, no fanfare, no royal red carpets, just a stable “rude and bare.” Ah, but when he returns, everyone will know about it. *“You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”* (Matt 26:64) *“For 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. 4:16-17) *“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)

Everyone who is alive on earth on that day will see him, I don't know how that will happen. (When TV was first spreading around the world some folks said that at last we could imagine every eye seeing the event! But God does not need human technology for everyone to witness this event!)

That awesome day will be terrifying for unbelievers, because the day of judgement has arrived. But for believers whose sins have been paid in full, it will be a day of great joy! On that day Jesus will be *"marvelled at among all who have believed."* (verse 10) What does marvel mean? At the end of those house or garden make-over programmes, when the veil is pulled back, the sleep masks removed, the owners marvel, open-mouthed, at their renewed garden or house! (I do wonder sometimes how much they've been coached, it's only bricks and mortar after all! )

Ramp that up a hundred times, to the limit of human joy and perhaps we can gather an idea of what that moment will be like, "marvelled at."

### **(3) Jesus is coming back—be ready!**

Whenever the Bible talks about the return of Jesus Christ, it always has a practical purpose; either to challenge us or to comfort us! Listen, as we close to the apostle Peter, 2 Peter chap 3

*"But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and its works will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to conduct yourselves in holiness and godliness as you anticipate and hasten the coming of the day of God, when the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt in the heat."*

There's the challenge: Since Jesus is coming soon, live a righteous godly life, put your house in order.

And the comfort? *"In keeping with God's promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells."* (2 Peter 3:10-13) The return of Jesus should orient daily life towards our future glorious inheritance:

- Have you suffered injustice? Don't seek revenge, when Jesus returns, God will put it right!
- Has a loved one in Christ died? Grieve with hope: You will see them again!
- Is the world persecuting you? (For many of our brothers and sisters around the world this is true) Well, when Jesus returns, God will "pay back trouble to those who trouble them"
- Do you suffer in body, when Jesus returns, you'll receive a new resurrection body!
- Do you lack *"never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst.. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from their eye"* (Rev 7)
- And for all who are just tired of living in a world with wickedness and brokenness everywhere, we are looking forward, how did Peter put it, *"where righteousness dwells."*

Jesus is coming back soon! He will return in splendour! May the Holy Spirit help us to live each day in the light of that glorious event, seeking to obey him in everything, and comforted as we look forward to everlasting rest. Amen.