

## WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST?

(Wesleyan Methodist)

The "Second Coming of Christ" is being increasingly discussed in the religious world, and its relation to the world-events of the present time is being carefully studied by many of the foremost Christian scholars and teachers. We have felt that the readers of the Wesleyan Methodist ought to have the benefit of these studies from time to time, as an increasing interest in this theme is apparent. We ought to be able to consider different views that we may be informed upon this important question. This week we invite consideration of a discussion by Rev. James M. Gray, D. D., Dean of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. The important consideration is to be ready for His coming, whether it be soon or late. With the Revelator all true Christians can say: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The following by Dean Gray appeared in the Christian Herald recently:

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals that our Lord Jesus Christ is to come again to earth.

We remember His comforting words to His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, recorded in John 14: "In my Father's house are many mansions; . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." And His words spoken under very different circumstances the next day, when, abjured by the high priest, He affirmed: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26-64).

His testimony is continued by the angels after His ascension, when, addressing the waiting disciples on Mount Olivet, they say: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Following the day of Pentecost, Peter renews the assurance to the surprised and excited multitude, saying that He in whose name the lame man had been healed had been received into heaven "until the times of the restoration of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21).

The Apostle Paul is very full of the subject. He represents the Corinthian church as "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). He tells the Philippians that "our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20). The Thessalonians are taught that "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. 4:16). Titus is directed to instruct his hearers that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" they "should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13.)

John, James and Jude all refer to it in a similar way, the language of the first-named being very familiar: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7).

Indeed, Bible students with a talent for such matters have counted the number of times in which the second coming of Christ is alluded to in the New Testament in one form or another, and while there is a variation in their figures, yet the lowest is 300. This shows the importance attached to it by the divine Author of the Scriptures, and gives countenance to the statement that, with the exception of our redemption through the death of Christ, there is no doctrine of Christianity that receives greater emphasis.

But what does it mean? Strange that there should be a question about it where the language seems so simple and convincing! But question there is, nevertheless; and from time to time there have been those who have tried to spiritualize or allegorize it away.

1. Some have said that the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) sufficiently fulfilled the promises of Christ's second coming. But is this true? When you think of it, the condition on which the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost was the departure of Christ and not His return! Did He not say, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7)? We thus see that the Holy Spirit is not the same Person as Christ. In the Godhead they are one, but as a manifestation of the Godhead to men Christ is another Person than He. His work supplements that of Christ and prepares for His coming reign, but it cannot be regarded as that reign itself. Indeed, Christ especially differentiates the coming of the Holy Spirit from His own coming, saying, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter" —not me, but another.

2. Some have said that the fall of Jerusalem under Titus, A. D. 70, is the event to which certain of the promises of the second advent refer. But Luke 21:20-28, which is predictive of that event, is opposed to such a thought. For example, it says, "When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." This was true indeed in Titus's time, but the second coming of Christ is associated uniformly not with the desolation but the restoration of Jerusalem. See, for illustration, Zechariah, chapters 12 to 14. Again, Luke says that after the desolation of Jerusalem by Titus the Jews will "be led away captive into all the nations," which was literally fulfilled. But Isaiah 14, having in mind evidently the second coming of Christ, says that in that day the Jews "shall take them captive whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors." Luke says that after the desolation of Jerusalem the city "shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," a parenthesis of time which has existed from that day until this. But he also adds that, when those "times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled, "then shall they see

the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Neither the period nor the description in this case fits in with the desolation of Jerusalem under Titus.

3. Others spiritualize the promises of Christ's second coming and resolve them into a spiritual coming only. But this is inconsistent with the meaning of the words revealing that event, as will be noted later on. It also is inconsistent with the literal fulfilment of the predictions concerning His first coming. If that was personal and visible, why not this? Which seems to us the less likely, that the Son of God should come as a helpless infant, cradled in a manger, or that He should come as the Lord of Glory, riding upon the clouds of heaven? And finally, it is inconsistent with the fact of His spiritual presence with His church today, for even now, where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20; 28:20). As a matter of fact His spiritual presence never can be absent from His church, for He is God, and His Spirit dwells within us to make His presence real. All these circumstances show beyond a peradventure, as another has pointed out, "that something more is in store for us than the spiritual influences of our absent Lord."

4. A fourth class of objectors think that the progress of the Gospel and the church is the concrete fact in which the promises of Christ's coming combine. However, this cannot be, for the simple reason that, with a single exception, the two are always distinguished in the New Testament. The church is to use the sacramental symbols "till He come" (1 Cor. 11). His servants are to "occupy," to trade with the goods of the nobleman until He returns (Luke 19.) We are all to wait for Him, and to join in the prayer of the Apocalypse, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly" (Rev. 22.) The single exception is 1 Cor. 12:12, 13, the object of which is not to teach that Christ and His Church are the same, but to identify the latter with the former as the body of which He is the Head.

5. Finally, the death of the Christian believer is sometimes identified with the second coming of Christ; but this, as another says, is the most extravagant of the errors. Death is an enemy, though a conquered one; while the coming of Christ is a "blessed hope" (1 Cor. 15:55; Titus 2:13). Death means dissolution and decay, while the second coming of Christ means resurrection and glory (Phil. 3:20, 21). At death the believer goes to be with Christ, while at the second advent Christ comes to the believer (Phil. 1:23; John 14:3; 21-23.)

### THE ART ENDURING.

If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust; but if we work upon immortal minds, if we imbue them with principles, with the just fear of God and love of our fellow men, we engrave on those tablest something which will brighten to all eternity.

—Daniel Webster.