

## LESSON 8

### PART 1: THE LAST THINGS AND MISSIONS

#### Introduction

By “the last things” we mean that area of theology called eschatology, or the doctrine of the last things. The subject includes the second coming of Christ, the judgment, and the eternal states of heaven and hell. These biblical doctrines have strong missionary ramifications, and we will do well to look at them.

The Christian lives not only in this world but his destination is eternal life with his Lord. Christianity is of history, but it goes beyond history both in its origin and in its destination.

The Lord Jesus Christ is returning to this earth. He will carry His redeemed to be with Him. The man without Christ as Saviour will meet Him as Judge. The decision he makes now will determine how he will meet Christ when He returns. Our neighbours, friends, and billions of others around the world face this choice. There is a Gospel, a good news, by which the lost and rebellious man or woman, who by repentance and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, can become a child of God and look to Christ’s coming as the great day of victory. This good news provides both the missionary motivation and the substance of our message.

It was a dark day for the allied forces during World War II when the Japanese defeat of the American and Philippine forces in the Philippines became inevitable. General Douglas MacArthur, the commander, at last was forced to leave the islands in order to take up other portions of the Battle of the Pacific.

As he left he made this promise to the soldiers, the people, and the enemy, “I shall return.” As Japanese occupation became complete, people whispered to one another the words of encouragement, “I shall return.” Eye witnesses say that there were match-books printed with this theme. At times they had to be hidden in mattresses. But hope never died because the promise had been made.

Near the end of the war, Douglas MacArthur jumped off a landing craft into the waters of the Pacific and made good his promise. But Jesus made a promise to return that is many times more exciting.

The Greek word *parousia* may be translated as presence, a coming, an arrival, or an advent. It is often used to refer to the visit of a person of high rank, such as a

Eschatology means the doctrine of the \_\_\_\_\_ and includes the second \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ, the \_\_\_\_\_, and the eternal states of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The Greek word *parousia* means presence, a \_\_\_\_\_, an a \_\_\_\_\_, or an a \_\_\_\_\_.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

king or an emperor. The New Testament uses it to refer to the future, personal, visible return of Jesus from heaven with the purpose of raising the dead, holding the last judgement, and bringing His Kingdom to completion.

The Mandarin dialect of Chinese sheds real light on *parousia* as the crisis of missions and history. Chinese is not an alphabet language but rather is made up of symbols. *Crisis*, according to missionary colleagues, is made up of two symbols: one meaning "danger" and the other meaning "opportunity." *Crisis*, then, becomes a "dangerous opportunity." Christ's coming with its dual qualities of judgement and redemption is the perfect example of the dangerous opportunity.

The word appears in Matthew 24 in verses 27, 37, and 39. The Pauline letters use the expression fourteen times, and it appears in James, 2 Peter, and John six times. This specific word for Jesus' return to earth appears a total of twenty-two times in the New Testament.

This personal, visible, physical return of the Lord in glory contrasts with His personal spiritual presence in the believer through the Holy Spirit. *Crisis* is the English form of the word *krisis*, which means judgement. In current literary usage, crisis means the decisive moment—the turning point in the plot. Both of these meanings help us to understand the crisis in missions. The *personal, visible* return of Jesus Christ to earth is the decisive moment in all of history. It means the separation of the saved from the unsaved; it means the transformation of time into eternity. It is the finalization of the direction that God set in motion in the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Exaltation.

The mission of the people of God will find its fulfilment in the coming of their King. Hence the doctrine merits close study for its missionary content.

### In the Old Testament

The "Day of the Lord" is one of the characteristic expressions of the Old Testament. The prophets especially use the term to announce that God is active in history. What is more, they affirm, He rules both within the historical process and beyond. The expression, "the Day of the Lord," appears in Amos 5:18, Malachi 3:2-3, and Joel 2:28-32.

The "Day of the Lord" always has two elements. It is both a "day of salvation and judgement, or a day of salvation through judgement . . ." The "Day of the Lord" was to be "a day of judgement on the heathen world and the Church's foes, but also upon the apostate, impure Church

<sup>1</sup> A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1904), p. 377.

How does the New Testament use *parousia*?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

*Parousia* is the crisis of m \_\_\_\_\_ and h \_\_\_\_\_.

In the Mandarin dialect, crisis is a dual word meaning d \_\_\_\_\_ o \_\_\_\_\_.

(missions, history, dangerous opportunity)

The return of the Lord will be--

p \_\_\_\_\_,

v \_\_\_\_\_,

p \_\_\_\_\_.

(personal, visible, physical)

The two elements of the "Day of the Lord" are:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(salvation, judgement)

itself—and a day of salvation behind this.”<sup>2</sup>

Amos repeatedly called to the attention of the people who were so earnestly clamouring for the “Day of the Lord” the fact that God’s coming would be in justice and righteousness. His coming would reveal their hidden sin as well as their ceremonial observance of the rites of Judaism (see Amos 5:18).

Reward and judgement appear side by side in the Old Testament picture of the “Day of the Lord.” The “Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament holds importance for the current study of missions because it means that God has not retired to the edge of the universe and abandoned His action within history. In the words of the poet William Wadsworth Longfellow, “God is not dead, nor doth he sleep.” He is carrying out His purposes in history and will bring them to a climax beyond history. The same God of the Old Testament is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the same God who returns in the *parousia*, the perfect day of the Lord.

### In the New Testament

The Old Testament looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Christ; the New Testament, in the Gospels, looks upon the Christ among men. Acts records the Spirit at work through Christ’s people, and the Epistles and the Apocalypse look to the return of the glorified Lord.

The number of verses referring to Christ’s coming or return overpowers the investigator. But several key verses present the salient aspects concerning His coming.

The New Testament teaches that Christ’s coming will be public and visible to believers and to unbelievers alike. The following verses make this point clear: Matthew 24:27, 30; 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; and Romans 14:10.

Everywhere the New Testament teaches that Christ’s return will be sudden, unexpected, and unheralded by special warnings (Matt. 24:27, 42-44; Mark 13:35-37; 2 Pet. 3:10). Peter, for instance, describes the manner of His coming as like that of a thief, that is, suddenly, unexpectedly, surprisingly. Luke describes the surprise element as being like a snare. The picture is graphic. A soldier or an animal is walking along when, without any warning, the trap springs on him. He has no time to prepare for the disaster or to change direction.<sup>3</sup>

Definite signs will precede Christ’s coming. While heeding Jesus’ warning that no man knows the day or the

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Much of the basic development of this section comes from John T. Mueller and Charles R. Erdman, “Parousia,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 4:2249-2251F

Amos called the people's attention to the fact that the "Day of the Lord" would bring  
j \_\_\_\_\_ and r \_\_\_\_\_.

(justice, righteousness)

Tell how each of the following viewed Christ.

Old Testament \_\_\_\_\_

New Testament \_\_\_\_\_

Acts \_\_\_\_\_

Epistles and Apocalypse \_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The New Testament teaches that Christ's return will be \_\_\_\_\_,

\_\_\_\_\_, and

(sudden, unexpected, unheralded by special warnings)

hour, the reader of the New Testament nevertheless finds that the time before the coming of Christ will be characterized by a universal preaching of the Gospel (Matt. 24:14, Acts 1:8), by apostasy and the coming of the Anti-Christ (2 Thess. 2:3, 4; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3, 4), and by great calamities on earth mentioned in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.<sup>4</sup>

Even in the face of these signs, evil men will scoff at the preaching of Christ's return as they did in the days of Noah (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:3-12). The fact that neither the day nor the hour is known to men and angels stands as a warning to those who would spend time in idle speculation about dates (Matt. 24:36-51, Luke 21:34-36, Acts 1:7).

The New Testament, then, clarifies and completes the idea of "the Day of the Lord" in the Old Testament. The New Testament looks to the return in power and glory of the Crucified One whose purpose is to judge the earth and reward those that belong to Him. Certain conditions will precede the end, but one walks in quicksand if he tries to predict the time of the *parousia*.

The New Testament uses a number of terms to refer to His coming. Besides the word for coming, there is *apocalypse* or revelation. It also means unveiling. Christ's glory, veiled in human flesh, will be revealed in all of its wonder (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 5:2).

Still another term is *epiphany*. This term may be translated manifestation or appearance. It is used in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and 1 Timothy 6:14. In keeping with the Old Testament, "the Day" is used in 2 Peter 3:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

The three principal events that attend this coming are: resurrection of the good and the bad (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:23); judgement of all men, good and bad, the dead and those alive at the time of Christ's coming (Matt. 7:21; 13:30-43); and the general conflagration of the world (Matt. 24:35; Heb. 1:11).

For the unredeemed, the meeting will hold terror; for the child of God, it will mean joy. He will have the joy of presenting the fruits of his labour (1 Thess. 2:19-20). New Testament hope burns brightly at the thought of meeting the returning Lord (1 Thess. 3:13; 1 John 2:28). This *parousia* gives wholeness to the story of history.

The entire New Testament is eschatological in that it sees history as being moved under God toward a goal. On the negative side this goal is to be understood as judgment; on the positive side it is redemption.<sup>5</sup>

The time before the coming of Christ will be characterized by u \_\_\_\_\_ p \_\_\_\_\_ of the Gospel, a \_\_\_\_\_ and the coming of the A \_\_\_\_\_, and great \_\_\_\_\_ on earth.  
(Compare your answers with the text.)

Another term used in the New Testament to refer to Jesus' coming is \_\_\_\_\_ or revelation. Christ's glory will be revealed in all its wonder.  
(Compare your answer with the text.)

Epiphany is another New Testament term for Jesus' coming. It means \_\_\_\_\_ or appearance.  
(manifestation)

Three principal events that will attend His coming are:  
1. Resurrection of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,  
2. Judgement of all \_\_\_\_\_, and  
3. General conflagration of the \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Compare your answers with the text.)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), p. 305.

Each person at the judgement is to be judged with regard to his relation to Christ and to His people. "Our true relationship to him is reflected in our relationship to his people. To serve them is to serve him and to neglect them is to neglect him" (Matt. 25:31-46).<sup>6</sup>

At the judgement each person must give an account of himself before God. "The New Testament provides for no escape through annihilation nor through the loss of individual identity within the family, nation, or church."<sup>7</sup>

### The Finality and Certainty of His Coming

Jesus told His disciples that many would come from east and west to dine at the table with the patriarchs (Matt. 8:11). The angels would go to the ends of the earth at the command of the Son of Man to gather the elect from the extremes of the planet (Matt. 24:31). Jesus spoke of His disciples' going to the streets to gather both the bad and the good; He stated that His disciples would give testimony before the Gentiles (Matt. 10:18).

Christ's coming will institute the final order of things. Opportunity for the man outside of Christ will terminate. Eternity enters time. Karl Barth says,

Accordingly, "to the close of the age," of this age, must signify until the time when the *eschaton*, ushered in with the appearance of Christ, will have run its course, when the universe will be subjected to God's reign, when the distinct reign of Christ will come to an end, and God will be everything to everyone.<sup>8</sup>

The finality in Christ's coming grows out of the fact that history will terminate at His coming; a final judgement will take place (Matt. 5:21-30; Luke 10:12-15); a general resurrection will come (Mark 12:25-27); and there will be a final separation of the redeemed and the unredeemed (Matt. 25:31-46).<sup>9</sup>

The certainty of Christ's coming inspired the Christians of the first century to heroic action in the spreading of the Gospel. The promise of His return has inspired Christians in difficult days ever since. Just the opposite of being an escapism, the hope of His coming has caused Christians to lift their heads and hearts. Knowing that God is carrying forward His plan, Christians have picked up the arms of spiritual warfare and continued against the powers of darkness even when the battle has been most fierce.

The timely statement is made in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* that "there is to be a real

At Christ's coming, opportunity for man without Christ will be \_\_\_\_\_.

(terminated)

When Christ comes, history will be \_\_\_\_\_.

(terminated)

The certainty of Christ's coming inspired the Christians of the first century to h \_\_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_\_ in the spreading of the Gospel.

(heroic action)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961), p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, p. 313.

Parousia, a Second Advent of the Christ, a Personal Appearing, the prophecy of which must not be allowed to evaporate as mere rhetorical phrases.”<sup>10</sup>

### The Call to Action

The return of Christ should provide a powerful incentive both to the individual Christian and to the Church. It should call to action in Christ’s name.

The coming of the Lord incites us to action with the knowledge that we shall meet our Saviour personally. This outreach action is not predicated in fear but rather in the desire to please our Lord. The desire to carry fruits of labour before Him provides a challenge. This rescue action is based on the knowledge that “it is not the Father’s will that any should perish.”

The second incentive is the teaching of the Scriptures that the Gospel must be preached in the whole world before the end comes (Matt. 24:14). In God’s plan, He has decreed that the Gospel will be preached universally before Christ’s second coming. The work is all of God, but we have the wonderful privilege of being used as God’s instruments for fulfilling His promise.

In the dispensation of God, this time in which we live is essentially the era of mission. Is it too much to hope that missionary obedience may not only make the crooked straight and the rough places plain but actually speed the Lord’s return and hasten the final epiphany?<sup>11</sup>

Treating the same hope in a slightly different manner, Oscar Cullmann says, “The missionary work of the Church is the eschatological foretaste of the kingdom of God, and the Biblical hope of the ‘end’ constitutes the keenest incentive to action.”<sup>12</sup> This heralding of the Gospel to all nations is at the same time a sign of the end and an indispensable part of the divine plan for salvation.

Mueller places the return of Christ in contemporary perspective when he says,

Events in church history have shown a steady development of mission work, until today the Gospel of Christ is witnessed in the whole world, and the Gospel age may be said to have appeared. . . . While the Word is being preached, the other signs are being steadily fulfilled; apostasy increases; love is waxing cold; and the true church of Christ, which is loyal to His Word, is suffering tribulation.<sup>13</sup>

In a sense we would question the first part of Dr. Mueller’s analysis. Vast regions, particularly behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains, remain closed to extensive

The coming of Christ inspires Christians to action in that we shall meet our \_\_\_\_\_ personally.

(Saviour)

The Gospel must be \_\_\_\_\_ in the whole \_\_\_\_\_ before the end comes.

(preached, world)

<sup>10</sup> “Parousia,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 4:2249.

<sup>11</sup> James S. Stewart, *Thine is the Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956), p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, ed., *Christian Mission*, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Mueller, “Parousia,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 4:2251B.

witness to the Gospel. The task before the people of God is staggering, but they find inspiration in the fact that they may hasten the Lord's coming.

Today's Christian is not to stand gazing into the sky. Rather he is to scan the horizon, note the dawn will come, and return to the work of the proclamation of the good news.

B. B. Crimm, the cowboy evangelist, illustrated the meaning of Christ's return to the Christian with an account of his hunting hounds. Crimm said that each hound was trained to chase raccoons and tree them until the hunter could reach the spot. Although the hounds often far outran the hunters, the hunters could identify the bark of their dogs and know where they were. At the same time each hunter had a cowhorn which he could blow, and the dogs would respond to the sound of it.

In the darkest hour just before the dawn, the hunter would lift his horn to his lips and blow. In the far distant night a hound with "B. B. Crimm" stamped into the collar would stop, lift his head, prick up his ears, and turn towards home.

Someday when the night is darkest, God will send His archangel to the edge of heaven. There he will lift the trumpet to his lips and sound the end of time. And every child of God, with the mark of the Lord Jesus upon him will stop, lift his head, and turn towards home. The coming of Christ provides the eternal dawn of Christian missions.

Missions will hasten the Lord's \_\_\_\_\_.

(coming)

The coming of Christ provides the eternal dawn of Christian \_\_\_\_\_.

(missions)

## Home Study Exercise

### Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3)

After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What is the theological term used to describe the doctrine of the last things? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the meaning of the Greek term *parousia*? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the meaning of "crisis" in the Mandarin dialect of Chinese? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How will the return of Christ be? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. List the two elements of the "Day of the Lord" in the Old Testament. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What warning did Amos give to the people who were constantly clamouring for the "Day of the Lord"?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How do each of these portions of Scripture look upon Christ?
  - 1) Old Testament \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) The Gospels \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3) Acts \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4) The Epistles and the Apocalypse \_\_\_\_\_
8. What are some of the signs that will precede Christ's return? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. In what way will Christ's glory be revealed at His coming? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Give the meaning of *epiphany*. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. List three events that will accompany Christ's return. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. In what way did the certainty of Christ's coming inspire the Christians of the first century? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Why does the coming of Christ inspire Christians to action? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. How does the return of Christ relate to missions? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3)**

Answer the following questions.

1. To whom is the New Covenant given?
2. Describe your task as a representative of Christ.
3. What are the signs of the consummation of the age? What implications do they have for missions? (See Matthew 24–25.)
4. What are Christians to do as they await Christ's coming?

### Advanced activity (Level 3)

Read pages 48-67 in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* and answer the following questions.

1. What distinction do you see between principles and methods, and why are the former more permanent?
2. Discuss the need for updating the theology of missions.
3. How can technology be used for spreading the Gospel?
4. Prepare a sermon based on 2 Peter 3:1-14 which stresses the urgency of our being involved in missions and evangelism. (Ministerial students who are not pastors should prepare the sermon as if they were. Other students may prepare a Bible study lesson instead of a sermon.)

### Seminar Discussion

1. How does a man's decision concerning Christ now determine whether he will meet Christ as Saviour or Judge?
2. Discuss the Greek term *parousia* and tell what we can learn of Christ's return from it.
3. Looking at world conditions, what does "crisis" mean for the Christian?
4. What two elements do we find in the "Day of the Lord" concept of the Old Testament?
5. How is Christ's return a stimulus to missions?