

“The Presence of the Son of Man”

“Just as the lightning goeth forth from the east, and shineth unto the west, so, shall be the presence of the Son of Man.”
—Matthew 24:27,

*Rotherham
Emphasized Bible*

NEAR THE CLOSE OF Jesus’ earthly ministry, after his disciples had pointed out the Jews’ Temple buildings in Jerusalem, he said to them: “Verily, I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Then the disciples asked, “Tell us,

when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?”—Matt. 24:1-3, *King James Version*

In the foregoing commonly used version, the word “coming” is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*, which means “presence.” New Testament translations such as *The Emphatic Diaglott*, *Young’s Literal Translation* and the *Rotherham Emphasized Bible* have correctly rendered *parousia* as “presence” in Matthew chapter 24. The *King James Version* has incorrectly, we believe, translated *parousia* as “coming.”

The following quote is taken from the Appendix of the *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*: “In this edition the word *parousia* is uniformly rendered ‘presence’ (‘coming,’ as a representative of this word, being set aside). The original term [*parousia*] occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament. ... The sense of ‘presence’ is so plainly shewn by the contrast with ‘absence’ (implied in II Cor. 10:10 and expressed in Phil. 2:12) that the question naturally arises,—Why not always so render it?”

We therefore understand that the disciples were not asking Jesus what would be the sign that he would be “coming,” or “on his way,” prior to actually having returned. Rather, the disciples were inquiring as to what would be the sign to indicate that he was “present” following his return.

AN INVISIBLE, DIVINE, SPIRIT BEING

When Jesus was resurrected, he was no longer a human being, but rather a powerful divine, spirit being in “the image of the invisible God.” (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 5:16; Heb. 1:3) Therefore Jesus is invisible to the human eye, just as God is invisible. It is for this reason that the disciples asked Jesus what sign would indicate his “presence,” rather than how or where they should look for his visible “coming” or arrival.

Jesus willingly gave his perfect human life as “a ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) He stated, “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51; Heb. 10:5-10) Following his crucifixion, Jesus was raised as a spirit being. (John 20:19,26; Luke 24:31) If God had raised him from the dead as the human being Jesus, it would

have meant that the ransom had been taken back, and the world of mankind was not redeemed.

The Apostle Peter confirms that Jesus was resurrected as a spirit being and not a human being, writing, “Christ also, once for all, concerning sins, died,—Just in behalf of unjust,—in order that he might introduce us unto God; being put to death, indeed, in flesh, but made alive in spirit.”—I Pet. 3:18, *Rotherham*

The Apostle Paul also confirms that our Lord Jesus is now a spirit being, stating, “The first man, Adam, became, a living soul, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.” (I Cor. 15:45, *Rotherham*) The resurrected Jesus has become the “last Adam” because he took the place of the first man Adam and became the exalted life-giver to the human race, having purchased and redeemed it by giving his own human life. The perfect man Jesus died as a ransom, an exact corresponding price, given for the redemption of the perfect man Adam, who had disobeyed. Seeing these distinctions, therefore, we understand it is not possible that Jesus could be resurrected as a man.

WORDS OF WARNING AND CAUTION

Before answering the disciples’ question as to what would be the sign of his “presence,” Jesus first gave a warning. He said, “Be taking heed, lest anyone, deceive you.” (Matt. 24:4, *Rotherham*) The Master then proceeded in verses 5-14 to list some of the many events which would occur throughout the ensuing centuries, prior to his second presence. This is followed by verses 15-22 which, we believe, have a double application. First, they were fulfilled literally in the devastating events which came upon

the Jewish nation soon after the time when Jesus spoke these words. Secondly, they also were prophetic of the rise of a symbolic “Babylon” system and the development of abominable false doctrines and practices which would be imposed during the period of the Dark Ages.

In verses 23-25 Jesus gave additional words of caution to guard against certain errors that would be proposed concerning his return and second presence which could lead his followers astray. He further warned in verse 26, “If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.” Thus did our Lord put us on guard against believing that he would come in the flesh—perhaps in some remote location on Earth, or in a secret room of a building.

“JUST AS THE LIGHTNING”

In Matthew 24:27, Jesus begins his answer to the disciples, stating, “For, just as the lightning goeth forth from the east, and shineth unto the west, so, shall be the presence of the Son of Man.” (*Rotherham*) Here the word “lightning” is a translation of the Greek word *astrape*, which means “a bright shining.” The same Greek word is translated “bright shining” in Luke 11:36, which reads in part: “... as when the bright shining [*astrape*] of a candle doth give thee light.” Literal lightning, although a bright light, rarely flashes from east to west. However, there is a bright light which always “goeth forth from the east,” and “shineth unto,” or sets in “the west.” That is the sun! Sunlight becomes present as soon as it begins to rise above the horizon,

yet it is noiseless, and is at first only discerned by those who are awake in the dawning hours of the morning.

Incorrect ideas of our Lord's return in the minds of some Bible translators led them to the error of translating the Greek word *astrape* by the word "lightning." They supposed that our Lord would be revealed suddenly, like a flash of lightning, rather than gradually like the dawning sunlight. How beautiful, though, is the figure of sunrise, to illustrate the manner of Christ's second presence. It is gradually discerned and has a continuing measured effect, just like the sun rising on a new day. Eventually the full, clear brightness of Christ's presence shall thoroughly remove the darkness of evil, ignorance, superstition and sin. Therefore, just as the dawning light of the sun grows little by little, so also the presence of the Son of Man will be gradually manifested and understood.

The expression "Son of Man" refers to Jesus. It is a title of high honor, serving as a reminder of his obedience as a man, even unto death on the cross, by which he secured the honor, dignity, and power of the divine nature, which his Father in heaven granted to him when he raised him from the dead. Additionally, the title "Son of Man" is recognized among the Jews as applying to the Messiah. (Dan. 7:13,14) Numerous times during his earthly ministry, Jesus referred to himself as the "Son of Man."—Matt. 12:40; 16:13; 17:9,22; 26:2

LIKE THE DAYS OF NOAH

Jesus adds in response to his disciples, "For, just as the days of Noah, so, will be the presence of the

Son of Man; ... And they observed not, until the flood came and took away all together, so, will be, the presence of the Son of Man.” (Matt. 24:37,39, *Rotherham*) The comparison in these verses is between the time of the presence of Noah among the people before the flood came, and the time of the invisible presence of Christ in the world, prior to the final, extreme trouble of the Day of the Lord with which this present age ends.

In Noah’s day all the people, except for his family, were ignorant of the coming flood and did not believe his testimony. Consequently, they “observed not, until the flood came.” Similarly, during Christ’s second presence none, except for those of the family of God, will believe it. Others will not discern it until the “flood” of trouble now impending actually comes with full force and overflows the political, social, religious and economic systems of society.

This is illustrated by Jesus’ words, “They were in those days that were before the flood, feeding and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage,—until the day Noah entered into the ark.” (vs. 38, *Rotherham*) During Christ’s second presence the world continues on with its eating, drinking, planting, building and marrying. This indicates the ignorance of mankind regarding Christ’s presence and of the final trouble that will soon come upon the earth. Thus, Jesus is stating that the world in general would not know of his presence and the coming dispensational changes.

Although there shall never be another literal flood such as occurred in the days of Noah, it is written that the whole earth shall be devoured with the fire of God’s jealousy. (Gen. 9:11; Zeph. 3:8) With great

emphasis, we note that in both cases—the flood in Noah’s day and the trouble which will end this present age—the physical earth is not destroyed, but only the existing, sinful, human social order.

BE WATCHFUL AND ALERT

The remaining verses in Matthew chapter 24 are significant. Jesus states, “Be watching, therefore, for ye know not, on what manner of day, your Lord is coming [Greek: *erchomai*, “arrive”]. ... If the householder, had known, in what watch, the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert, and not have suffered his house to be dug through. Wherefore, ye also, be getting ready, because, in what hour ye are, not thinking, The Son of Man doth come.”—vss. 42-44, *Rotherham*

We suggest the following paraphrase of the foregoing words of Jesus. “If someone is expecting a thief to come during the night, but they do not know the definite time of his arrival, this person would stay awake so as not to be taken by surprise: so you should be always awake, ready and watching for the first evidence of my presence. In my answer to your question, when shall these things be? I merely tell you to watch and be ready, and when I arrive, and am subsequently present, I will communicate this by means of the fulfillment of various prophetic statements, but only those who are alert and watching will discern and understand. All others will be in darkness, unaware of my presence and the portentous events which will follow.”

HOW TO WATCH

It is by faith that watchers discern the presence of our Lord. They “walk by faith, not by sight.”

(II Cor. 5:7) Watchers continually examine themselves, knowing that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Rom. 8:9) Watchers are alert, and strive to walk as close as possible in the footsteps of the Master. They do not “sleep, as do others,” but instead strive to “watch and be sober.”—I Thess. 5:1-6, *Rotherham*

Watchers discern the approach of the great climax of human trouble in which all present world institutions will be shaken. (Heb. 12:26-28) Watchers do not lose sight of God and his providences. They remember that he is at the helm. (Ps. 75:6-10; 76:9,10) In addition, watchers do not look merely at the outward signs of Christ’s second presence, but they also study the Bible prophecies to “discern the signs of the times,” with the aid of the Holy Spirit.—Matt. 16:3; John 16:13

The details which Jesus gave regarding the manner and the attending circumstances of his return and second presence were not given to alarm the world in general, nor to satisfy idle curiosity. Instead, they were given for those who are awake, faithful, and earnest students of our Heavenly Father’s plan, so that they might be aware of the significance of transpiring events, and not be in darkness regarding the “times and seasons.”—I Thess. 5:1-6

SCOFFING FORETOLD

Peter describes how some will scoff during the second presence of the Lord, even as they scoffed in the days of Noah. (II Pet. 3:3,4,10-12) “Scoffers” include those who cherish false ideas, such as expecting literal fire, trumpets, voices, and expecting to physically see the Lord descending through the air

in a shining body of flesh. Peter states that in the last days of this present evil world, scoffers will say, “Where is the promise of his presence? For, since the fathers fell asleep, all things, thus remain, from the beginning of creation.”—II Pet. 3:3,4, *Rotherham*

Peter continues, stating, “They, willfully, forget” the great change which occurred in the days of Noah. Then, using the symbol of fire, he describes the overwhelming flood of trouble which shall shortly overtake the whole world—“the heavens and the earth which are now”—utterly overthrowing all religious and civil powers, and melting the entire social fabric, resulting in the dissolution of the present world order. This is not the final outcome, however, for Peter adds, “But, new heavens, and a new earth, according to his promise, are we expecting, wherein, righteousness, is to dwell.” That is, the kingdom of God shall establish a just civil and societal order on the earth, organized on a new and better basis of love, equality and righteousness.—vss. 5-13, *Rotherham*

“WHAT MANNER OF PERSONS” WE SHOULD BE

Peter assures us that “the day of the Lord will be here, as a thief.” That is, it will generally be unobserved—the Lord’s presence being invisible—while at the same time some are scoffing. The apostle then exhorts the Lord’s followers, stating, “Seeing that all these things are thus to be dissolved, what manner of persons, ought ye all the while to be, in holy ways of behaviour and acts of godliness.” (II Pet. 3:10,11, *Rotherham*) “All these things” which are to be dissolved include the world’s present civil, religious, social and financial systems, not the people nor the planet Earth.

In reflecting on Peter's words as to "what manner of persons" we should be, let us remember that we are to remain separate from the spirit, attitudes, and delusions of the present world. We must not allow ourselves to be swallowed up by political division, societal conflicts, or by the pursuit of wealth or other worldly endeavors. Instead, we should set our affections on holy things. In addition, he writes that we should be "expecting and hastening the presence of the day of God," that is to say, watching for the evidences and signs which indicate that we are living during the time of Christ's invisible presence and of the climactic events of the "day of God."—vs. 12, *Rotherham*

Through the Apostle Paul, God assures us that none of the children of the light will be left in darkness, that the presence of the "Son of Man" should come upon them unawares. He writes: "The day of the Lord, as a thief in the night, so, cometh; As soon as they begin to say—Peace! and safety! then, suddenly, upon them, cometh destruction,—just as the birth-throe unto her that is with child. ... But, ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that, the day, upon you, as upon thieves, should lay hold; For, all ye, are, sons of light, and sons of day,—we are not of night, nor of darkness: Hence, then, let us not be sleeping, as the rest, but let us watch and be sober: ... Being of the day, let us be sober, putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and, for helmet, the hope of salvation."—I Thess. 5:2-8, *Rotherham*

SYMBOLS AND FIGURES

Although we believe that we are now living in the time of Christ's presence and are witnessing

various features of the foretold “time of trouble,” we are told elsewhere, in symbol, that the great storm of trouble is held back until all of the faithful servants of God are “sealed in their foreheads.” This symbolic sealing is the mark, or evidence, which each member of the body of Christ must receive, showing divine acceptance of them as faithful “sons of God.” Thus, we understand that the final whirlwind of trouble upon the earth is yet future, and will not take place until the “sealing” work is complete.—Rev. 7:1-4; I John 3:1,2; Rom. 8:19

Using symbols of “trumpets,” “voices,” “fire,” and other prophetic language, God hid various Truths which were not meant for the whole world of mankind to know at the present time, but only for a “little flock” of his consecrated people. These wonderful gems include such things as the understanding of “the harvest” of the present Gospel Age; the manner and purpose of Christ’s return and second presence; the heavenly call, which remains open even now; the hope of the “first resurrection;” the general resurrection of all mankind; and other precious treasures found in the Scriptures. Long ago God arranged these symbols, figures, and prophetic testimony so that, in due time, they would be understood by those for whom he intended the information. During Jesus’ first “presence” on Earth as a human being, he said to his disciples, “To you, the sacred secret hath been given of the kingdom of God, whereas, to them who are outside, in parables are all things coming to pass.” (Mark 4:11, *Rotherham*) Now, too, during Christ’s second presence, only a few earnestly faithful ones, a “little flock,” are permitted to see and understand.—Luke 12:32

EFFECTS UPON US

Believing that Christ is now invisibly present, what effects should this have on our Christian life? One effect is an increased appreciation of the Bible truths which have been revealed and explained to us during this Harvest period at the end of the Gospel Age. Such understanding is now readily available, foretold by our Lord as “meat in due season” to be provided by “a faithful and wise servant.” (Matt. 24:45) Much spiritual food has been bountifully dispensed during the Harvest, making it another compelling indicator of Christ’s second presence. Topical studies covering every important Bible subject; contextual Bible study helps that examine the scriptural record from Genesis to Revelation; numerous translations which clarify the meaning of many Bible passages; concordances and lexicons which reveal the definition and use of Greek and Hebrew words; and dictionaries which help to illustrate customs and life in Biblical times; have all made for a balanced and nourishing diet for the servants of God at this end of the age.

Another important sign of Christ’s presence is the regathering of the people of Israel from across the globe, and their return to the land which God promised them. (Ezek. 11:16-20; 36:22-36; Zeph. 3:14-20) The “fig” and “fig tree” are used in symbol in the Scriptures to represent the nation of Israel. (Jer. 24:1-7; Hos. 9:10) Jesus gave “a parable of the fig tree” as one of the signs associated with his second presence. When the fig tree “putteth forth leaves” symbolizes the regathering and reestablishment of the Jewish nation. (Matt. 24:32,33) Such an extraordinary event did not happen by chance, nor

by the will of man, but by the will of God, in harmony with the foretold times and seasons testified to by both the prophets and by Jesus himself. This should have the effect of making us fully confident in all God's holy promises regarding his coming kingdom.

An understanding of the second presence of Christ should also have the effect of increasing our appreciation as to why certain events are occurring at the present time. Unjust, illegal, and immoral actions by individual citizens, groups, countries, businesses, and leaders of this world have been going on throughout history but have generally been hidden from the general public. Today, however, such actions are being revealed more and more through instantaneous information and communication available in every corner of the earth. Is this happening by accident or chance? We think not. Rather, we believe it is a result of the times and seasons in which we now live, and the presence of the Lord who promised to "bring to light the hidden things of darkness."—I Cor. 4:5

The revealing of such things has created, and continues to create, growing dissatisfaction with present human institutions and leaders. This growing unrest is permitted by God for the wise purpose that the hearts and minds of mankind will eventually realize that imperfect man cannot manage his affairs, nor solve the myriad problems and issues in the world. Such realization is a part of the preparation for God's kingdom on Earth. (Hag. 2:6,7; Mic.4:2; Heb. 12:26-28) However, as sympathetic as we may feel toward one side or the other of mankind's struggle, as followers of Christ we should not participate in, nor advocate, anarchy or

lawlessness of any kind. We are exhorted to “follow after the things which make for peace,” and to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God.” —Rom. 14:18,19; I Tim. 2:1-3

Knowing that we are living at the end of the age, we should also come to a greater appreciation of the shortness of time, that we may be ever more diligent in making our “calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10) Daily we should be reminded of our responsibility to “cast off the works of darkness” and “put on the armour of light,” striving to be not merely outwardly obedient, but especially to be obedient from the heart to the spirit and intent of God’s laws and principles.—Rom. 13:12

In summary, let us rejoice in our understanding of Christ’s presence, not visibly in the flesh, but rather as a divine spirit being, having been vested by God with “all power ... in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28:18; Heb.1:1-4) Like the Apostle John, we see in faith’s vision, Christ, the “son of man, having, upon his head, a crown of gold, and, in his hand, a sharp sickle.” (Rev. 14:14-16, *Rotherham*) His sickle of truth is separating and gathering “his elect” into oneness of heart and mind. (Matt. 24:31) Soon the elect “body of Christ” will be complete and, together with their Head, will rule and bless the world in righteousness.—Ps. 72:1,2; Isa. 32:1 ■