

Alton Baptist Church e-Service 22nd November 2020

The visible return of Christ and final judgement

(THE FUTURE)

Welcome

As we have discovered, this is not a normal service, but maybe it never should be. The dangers of routine and ritual are obvious, but usually ignored. They're all comfortable, but Jesus never offered comfort: "I have nowhere to lay my head", he said.

We plead with the Lord to guide us through this morning, that we might serve him, which is our purpose.

Song:

So let us move on with Him, as we sing, "Crown him with many crowns", for He alone is worthy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YJnVN6wdvI&feature=youtu.be>

Prayer:

As we turn to prayer, let me offer you what we call The Lord's Prayer -- not that he could really say it himself. It comes in five parts:

Feel free to offer your own prayer after each part now. But, be honest and open before Him!

Firstly, Praise.

Our father in heaven, may your name be hallowed. May your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Let us bring our praise to our Father.

Secondly, Please. Give us this day Our Daily Bread.

All that we have is from our Lord.

Thirdly, Pleading. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Let us bring our confession and requests before his throne.

Fourthly, Protection. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We need his protection each and every day.

Finally, Proclaim. For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Song:

Let us rejoice at our certainty as we sing the hymn, "I know who holds the future".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgA4UlkB1N8>

The title of today's subject is 'The visible return of Christ and the final judgement'. We will consider this in light of the following readings.

Readings:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *Believers who have died*

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Revelation 20:11-15 *The judgment of the dead*

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Some Thoughts:

In fact I'm sharing my thoughts on the future as we look at what matters. There is so much wild and careless comment about the future, much based on Catholic fixed ideas, safety first by the churches, and unreal impressions by artists. When someone says he, or she, feels

comfortable in a lovely old parish church or in a field of wild flowers, just how real is this?

Who knows what the future holds? Only the Lord, but he has given us clues and indicators from scripture. We must not try to out-think the Lord, make wild guesses and proclaim them as fact.

There are several stages to consider; as we have life, whatever we may think about it. We are physical, body and mind; soul, life, which is not the same as spirit; and our spirit, which is ongoing and accountable. But we do have the rest of our life and must use it in the right way. Sooner or later we will die, and that is certain.

There will be a time gap between that and the next stage. There is an interim. Awaiting the new heaven and earth. There will be no problem as we will not notice and because time will be irrelevant. Then there is to be the Millennium, 1000 years when Jesus rules the earth, and all are equal; I do not think there is any point in trying to argue the case. When we meet him, we imagine what our form will be in heaven. This is impossible. If we were only 2- dimensional, we could not visualise being 3 - dimensional. So, try thinking of ourselves as 4 - dimensional and we will get truly stuck. God is not limited by space or time or position, so why should we be in his Kingdom?

What will we do in heaven, as so many of our familiar activities will be quite inappropriate? We shall not be dealing with controlled animals. There will be no marriage, or even its temptation. Not even any rugby or tennis! Nothing negative, as we truly learn to love with a presently unknown level. We shall be so keen to join together in worship and adoration, that all else will seem trivial. But we shall have work to do, whatever that is, so don't slacken down as we slow down! It will not be hymns all day, even if you **can** sing, unlike me, but it will be much more real. We will not even need our 6G electronic devices.

Briefly, the struggles of Revelation are many.

There are warnings about the seven churches and putting on a good but unreal face; the warnings of the seven seals and the seven trumpets indicate some very tough times ahead. The tribulation we have already looked at. It is obvious that the exponential growth of technology could easily lead to the mastermind taking full control, even through the 'need' to have one-world control to save the planet from global warming, and elected by the people. Satan and his 200 million angels will serve him as he exercises that control.

But never forget that God IS in control and cannot be challenged. The good will prove their worth and the bad will realise what they have missed. But all will have to await the judgement.

We shall join Jesus when he returns to us to take complete control, possibly using the faithful to help him, but prior to that there will be a tribulation, a time when Satan is let loose to deceive the world, take control and spend 3 1/2 years building his world empire, before exercising a brutal regime that will include untold suffering to all who do not obey. This will include the control of all transactions by the so-called 666 system, without which we shall starve for 3 1/2 years.

Then comes the judgement of (not by) Satan. That's the final judgement, when the books will be opened and God, who already knows the answers, will decide who is guilty and ready for punishment and whose names are in the so called Lamb's book of life, who are deemed not guilty.

It is impossible to put any timescale on all of this, let alone the correct order of events. Some believe that there is a rapture, a being drawn up to the clouds, before the tribulation starts. Others believe it will come halfway through the tribulation and others only after it. The scriptures seem to back up the view, held for 1700 years, that all will be alive at the time and will suffer. I know that if we have to suffer, just look at Matthew 10:22, and we should be ready for it. If not, Hallelujah!

As far as meeting the Lord is concerned, will we literally meet the Father or the Son? 1 Timothy 6:16 says that God lives in unapproachable light. So in some way that is an impossible task. Many scriptures, especially the psalms, suggest that we will meet God the Father. But as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are in control and, if you look at the end of the Bible, God wins!

All fine but, and it is a big but, we must not forget some basic facts. God deliberately gave mankind choice. Without Satan we would just be good all the time. All Christians are volunteers; we choose to obey or not.

I have no comment on man B.C, or those dying young et cetera, et cetera. God in his mercy will judge rightly. What matters is you, is me, and our choice.

There are always consequences to our choices, even those we do not want. We can drift and think we are all right. Five of the seven churches thought that and were condemned by Jesus. Are we always enlisted and loyal soldiers? Is Christ no more than a good idea? Are we on a luxury liner or a battleship in action? The most dangerous preaching is that 'God loves everyone', therefore he would never condemn anyone to hell. He indeed loves all, wants the best and offers it, but if our choice is not his way, we opt out of his love.

Song:

Let us conclude with that beautiful Welsh hymn, 'Here is love, wide as the ocean'. -- this is all God's doing, his plan, our future, if we are truly saved by grace alone".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8YOPj5TnUM>

So, let us go forward thoughtfully in the light of His truth, not the inevitable result of others' rules for us.

Finally, I leave you with God's words from Isaiah 43:18-19:

Forget the former things;
Do not dwell on the past.
See I'm doing a new thing!
Now it springs up --
Do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the desert.

Let us all go on our way, to trust and obey, rejoicing in the future and all its unknowns. But all its certainties and promises are in Jesus our Lord and Saviour and our only hope for that future.

Only we limit God, as he poured out His love through His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah.

Amen.