

The Second Advent of Christ *Power and Glory*

Today we begin our Advent messages (a week late). The term advent simply means “coming” – a reference to Jesus coming into the world. During advent we ponder the **first** advent of Christ. We find ourselves in awe year after year that the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, laid aside His heavenly prerogatives and entered this world as a baby. He became one of us so that He might show us how to live in the kingdom of God and so that He might die for our sins. During advent we remember this infinite journey Jesus made in coming to earth.

During advent we also anticipate the **second** advent of Christ – His future return to earth. This will be the focus of our morning messages during advent this year. In past generations, especially here in the States during the 20th century, the doctrine of the return of Christ (and the “end times” in general) received a great deal of attention. Sometimes this emphasis on the second coming of Christ was good and healthy; other times it produced a type of preoccupation with the details of end-times events that wasn’t particularly healthy.

But the tendency in our day is to go to the other extreme and neglect the topic entirely. I understand how a person could say, “It’s all so confusing to me, I don’t even want to think about it.” And I understand a person reacting to excesses and concluding, “Thinking too much about the future return of Christ can distract us from living for God in the present.”

But consider this question: Out of the 27 books of the New Testament, how many explicitly mention the return of Christ? Five or six? Ten or twelve? Try **twenty**. Twenty of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament explicitly mention that Jesus Christ is returning. So, the return of Christ is no obscure doctrine that theologians and Bible scholars have forced upon the church. I think we have to conclude that the return of Christ is an integral part of a Christian worldview. In other words, as we think about this world and how we should live in it, we have to take into account the second coming of Christ.

Today we begin our series by simply noticing the contrast between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. The contrast really couldn’t be more stark.

The first advent of Jesus Christ was characterized by humility and obscurity. The gospel accounts of Christ’s first advent emphasize how Jesus entered this world in a remote village (Bethlehem) in a remote part of the world (Palestine). Listen to Luke 2:1-7.

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he

was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

It's really hard to imagine a more humble, obscure entrance into this world. The shepherds soon showed up because the angels appeared to them announcing the birth of the Child. The magi eventually showed up because they were led by the star. But the first advent of Christ was largely hidden.

When Jesus grew up and began His public ministry, people scoffed at Him because He had such a normal, ordinary life. They knew He had grown up in Nazareth as the carpenter's son. There were occasional glimpses that Jesus was extraordinary (such as the time He stayed behind in Jerusalem to talk with the teachers in the temple – see Luke 2:46ff); but there was really nothing very unusual about His early life.

Jesus public ministry was characterized by great restraint. I don't want to overstate the point: Jesus' three-year public ministry was certainly not devoid of glory. Jesus did many miracles such as turning water into wine, feeding the 5,000, healing the man blind from birth, etc. And John did say that "we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). People of faith saw Jesus' glory through His miracles, His teaching, and His life.

Having said all of that, we also have to say that Jesus' earthly ministry was characterized by great restraint. His glory was largely veiled. He exercised His power very selectively. People who weren't interested in Jesus could ignore Him and continue on with their lives. The kingdoms of this world were left intact when Jesus came and inaugurated the kingdom of God. Jesus really didn't really overwhelm people at His first advent. The Jewish authorities thought that after the crucifixion Jesus was merely be a footnote in their history.

Kierkegaard tells a parable to describe the first advent of Christ.

"Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden.

How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his very kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist – no one dared resist him. But would she love him?

She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind. Would she be happy at his side? How could he know?

If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross over the gulf between them.

The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to *descend*. He clothed himself as a beggar and approached her cottage incognito, with a worn cloak fluttering loosely about him. It was no mere disguise, but a new identity he took on. He renounced the throne to win her hand.

(cited by Philip Yancey in *Disappointment with God*, pp. 103-104)

Of course we shouldn't press the details of this parable, but it does make a profound point: Jesus didn't overwhelm people at His first advent was because He was coming to "win a bride." His power and glory were restrained and veiled because He didn't want people following Him for the wrong reasons. He wanted people to trust Him and love Him. He wanted a bride that would say to Him, "There is none like You. I give up everything I have – I even consider it rubbish – to know You and dwell in Your presence." Jesus came in humility and obscurity because He came looking for a bride.

Today you can ignore Jesus if you want; you can live as if He isn't Lord. By contrast, the Scriptures tell us that nobody will be able to ignore His second advent. He is coming to rescue His people. He is coming to bring about justice that is so scarce in this world. In short, He is coming to fully establish the Kingdom that He only inaugurated at His first advent.

The second advent of Jesus Christ will be characterized by power and glory.

Consider how Jesus described His return in Matthew 24:27-31. Jesus had just warned His disciples against listening to people who seek a following by claiming that the Christ has returned and that **they** know where He is. Jesus told his disciples, if you ever hear such claims from anybody, "don't follow them" and "don't believe them" because:

27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

In other words, when He, the Christ/Messiah, returns, it will be as unmistakable as a bolt of lightening that streaks across the sky from east to west. Nobody will miss His coming in glory and power. You don't have to worry that you'll miss His second advent.

One night years ago, when my children were very young, we were talking about the return of Christ. The question was asked (something to this effect), "Dad, if Jesus returns here, will people on the other side of the world be able to see Him?" I had no explanation for how people all over the world could simultaneously see the personal, bodily return of Christ. All we know is that nobody will miss the "coming of the Son of Man."

28 "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. 29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Unlike His first advent, Jesus' Second Advent will be characterized by glory and power. The glory of Jesus, which was largely hidden at his first advent, will be revealed for all to see. The power of Jesus, which was largely restrained at his first advent, will be unleashed. Here in Matthew Jesus tell His disciples ahead of time that His second coming will be in power and glory; He wanted them to live in light of this reality.

Let's turn to Revelation 19 for another description of Jesus' Second Advent "in power and glory." Some people stay away from the book of Revelation because it all seems so complicated: hybrid creatures, symbolic numbers (lots of threes and sevens and multiples of ten and twelve), bowls that are poured out, trumpets that are blown, and seals that are broken. Please understand that the book of Revelation isn't a puzzle that God expects us to figure out. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ. If we ask the question, "What does this book teach us about God and about Jesus Christ?" the answer is pretty clear: **Jesus Christ will one day return in power and glory.** Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom of God that He inaugurated at His first advent.

Let me also say that when we read apocalyptic imagery (such as Jesus charging out of heaven on a white horse with a sword sticking out of His mouth), we should avoid two extremes. On the one hand, we should avoid being literalistic. Apocalyptic imagery is intentionally bizarre and extreme. On the other hand, we should avoid spiritualizing imagery to the point where it doesn't mean anything. Apocalyptic literature describes real events (Jesus is really, literally returning), but it does so using imagery that stirs the imagination and emotions. I think we should come to the book of Revelation more as artists than as engineers. When we do that, the "point" is usually quite obvious.

Beginning in verse 11 John records this vision:

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

Here Jesus is depicted as the warrior Messiah who comes to conquer His enemies. The book of Revelation has described how the enemies of God have largely had their way on earth; they have pursued unrighteousness at the expense of the people of God. The people of God have cried out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on earth?" This is a legitimate question: Lord, when will those who persecute Your people be brought to justice? The answer given here in chapter 19 is, "at the second advent of Christ."

Jesus comes charging out of heaven on a white horse; He is charging into battle. The fact that He “is called Faithful and True” assures us that He is completely reliable to accomplish the will of God. The fact that “*in righteousness* He judges and wages war” assures us that He isn’t coming to slaughter people indiscriminately. Rather, He is coming to judge those who hate Him, and He is waging war against those who have declared Him to be their enemy.

Verse 12 emphasizes Jesus’ holy righteousness and authority.

12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

When your eyes are a flame of fire, nothing can escape your gaze. When you have many diadems/crowns, you have infinite authority. When you have “a name” which only you know, there is something about you that is beyond scrutiny; you are not of this world. All of these things will be true of Jesus.

13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

The blood on Jesus’ robe is probably not His own. It probably symbolizes the blood of His enemies in battle, indicating that He is coming in victory. His inevitable victory is also indicated by His name “The Word of God.” John had already referred to Jesus as “the Word” in his gospel (John 1:1ff). Here again His name is called “The Word of God” signifying that He perfectly expresses the deepest desires and purposes of God Himself. He is as unstoppable as every “word” that God utters: sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4), accomplishing God’s purposes without returning void (Isaiah 65), etc.

Guess what? Jesus isn’t coming alone.

14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

With Jesus leading the charge, an entire army of righteous beings (probably angels) floods out of heaven to bring justice to earth.

15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

The contrast between Jesus’ first and second advents couldn’t be more stark. When Christ returns, He is not trying to win a bride; He is coming as a conquering King to establish the Kingdom of God by force. The book of Revelation depicts the world as so broken that it cannot be fixed. The enemies of God are in control of all the world’s systems and have poured out their wrath upon the church. The world and its systems

don't need to be tweaked or reformed; they need to be conquered. The only solution is for Jesus Himself to return, "strike down the nations," and "rule them with a rod of iron." It will be as if the enemies of God are grapes in a "wine press" and God Himself is stomping them with fierce wrath.

Notice one more detail from this verse. Notice Jesus' single weapon: His word (See Isaiah 11:4, Hebrews 4:12). "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations." The symbolism seems to be that His word, which expresses His mind/will, is powerful enough to conquer nations. None who stand against Jesus and His word have a chance. This is fully consistent with the emphasis throughout the gospels that Jesus' followers have a fundamental responsibility to "listen to Him." To do anything else is foolish.

We're given one last name for Jesus in verse 16:

16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS,
AND LORD OF LORDS."

There are many kings and "lords/masters," but they all bow the knee to Jesus. He is the King of kings; He is the Lord of lords. When He returns, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. All history is moving inexorably toward the Kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus Christ at His return. Again, this is in great contrast with Jesus' humility and obscurity at His first advent.

In coming weeks we'll talk about how we should live in the "in between time" – between His first and second advents. But this week I simply want us to internalize this truth that one day Jesus will return with power and glory. We've provided a "reading guide" to accompany our messages in Advent. Each week we provide 5 days of readings that go along with the previous Sunday's message. I'd encourage you to keep this guide in your Bible and take the time to internalize the truths we discuss about Jesus' second advent. This week's passages allow us to dwell on the truth that Jesus' second advent will be characterized by power and glory.

The Lord's Table also provides an opportunity to dwell on the second advent of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul quotes Jesus' words about the bread and the cup symbolizing His body and blood. Then he makes this statement in 1 Corinthians 11:26:

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Paul here tells us that the Lord's Supper is a declaration/proclamation about the the Lord's death. When we eat the bread, we are declaring that Jesus' body was broken for us; when we drink the cup we are declaring that His blood was shed for us. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ (if you believe that His death paid for your sin) we invite you to make this declaration along with us here today. Please hold the bread until everyone has received and then we'll eat together. Hold the cup until everyone has received and

we'll drink together. In this way we declare that Jesus' body and blood sacrificed at His first advent paid for our sins.

Paul pointed out that whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death ***until He comes***. The implication is that the Lord's Table anticipates the second coming of Christ and the reality of His presence. Revelation 19 depicts "the marriage supper of the Lamb" when we sit down and enjoy table fellowship with Jesus Himself - a rich and satisfying time of fellowship the Jesus Himself.

At the Lord's Supper here today we look back at Jesus' sacrifice at His first advent. And we anticipate the marriage supper of the Lamb after His second advent.