



Watchmen of the Advent: Paul and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

6 December 2020

Collect for the First Sunday of Advent

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Apostle Paul and the Second Coming, a sampling:

Romans 13:11-14, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, Ephesians 2:4-7, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Colossians 1:24-29, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-15, 1 Timothy 6:11-16, 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Titus 2:11-14

What details does the Apostle Paul give us about the second coming of Christ?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

How does the second coming relate to current reality?

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

The reason that Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians (and Roman Christians) about Jesus' second coming on the one hand, and mundane topics like Christian sexual behavior and earning a living on the other hand, is that in tiny little human acts, like kindness to a fellow parishioner, like giving money away, like self-control in the middle of every kind of pagan temptation, in these small ways, Christians act out signs of the victory of Jesus Christ.

~ **Fleming Rutledge**

Every step we take in this world is a step toward either darkness or light. Every harsh word, every mean act, every vengeful thought is a part of the works of darkness. Every act of forgiveness, every small act of charity, every temptation resisted is a piece of the armor of light.

~ **Fleming Rutledge**

Why does the second coming give Paul so much hope?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Advent tells us about our own lives as Christians, here and now. Advent is where we live, work, play, laugh, struggle and die. Advent is the Time Between-- between the first coming of Christ and the second coming, between darkness and dawn, between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. It is not the time of fulfillment; it is the time of waiting. It is not the time of seeing face-to-face; it is the time of seeing "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is not the time of triumphant victory; it is the time of bearing the cross.

~ **Fleming Rutledge**

