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The Second Coming on Judgment Day

Review

Chapter 11 explored the nature of the future raptured body. Paul taught that the Adamic body of flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. The natural human body that is male or female will need to be transformed into a presently unknown kind of immortal body so that God's people can inherit the eternal kingdom of heaven.

Paul compared this transformation process to seeds or nuts planted into the ground. A planted pecan does not germinate into another pecan. Rather, it is transformed into a magnificent tree. We cannot examine the exterior of the pecan, or crack it open and examine its interior, and determine what kind of plant will emerge when it germinates. Likewise, we cannot examine our natural bodies to determine what our future bodies will be like. The current natural body is adapted for the Genesis earth, but the transformed eternal body of the sons of God will be adapted for the eternal new heavens and new earth.

I also made the case that our glorified bodies will be like the post-ascended body of Christ—not like the known pre-ascended body of Christ. Paul taught that we need not worry about heaven being a boring existence, for God has already demonstrated his remarkable creativity when he created many kinds of bodies in this

Genesis creation. We can trust him to use this same creativity again when he creates our new kind of bodies that are adapted for the new heavens and new earth.

The Second Coming Occurs on Judgment Day

Throughout the preceding chapters, I made the case that Christ comes again on the last day to:

- Destroy this Genesis creation
- Create the new heavens and new earth
- Sit on his Great White Throne and judge all mankind
- Rapture the sons of God—asleep or alive—into immortal bodies like his glorified body and take them to the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven
- Resurrect and send unbelievers to the eternal lake of fire

There will be two sets of books opened on Judgment Day. One is the Book of Life, which records the good deeds of all believers. Believers will be judged to determine their rewards in heaven for their faithful good works as they followed Christ. Another unnamed book records the evil deeds of unbelievers. Unbelievers will be judged to determine their level of punishment in hell based on the extent of their evil deeds. John described Christ's return when he sits on his Great White Throne and judges all mankind:

Behold, I am coming soon [the second coming], bringing my recompense with me [rewards and punishments], to repay each one [the believer and unbeliever alike] for what he has done [based on what is recorded in the books]. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning [of this Genesis creation] and the end [of this Genesis creation]. Blessed are those who wash their robes [believers], so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates [the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth]. (Rev. 22:12–14)

The second coming can be outlined as follows:

“Behold, I am coming soon”

- + Judgment Day: “bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done”
- + The end of this Genesis creation: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”
- = Believers “enter” the eternal city, or the New Jerusalem, and have “the right to the tree of life”

In the Days of Noah and Sodom

Postrestorationism proposes that when Christ returns to rapture the saints after the millennium, the world will still be experiencing an age of peace and righteous humanity. There is a final deception of the nations at Gog and Magog, but this short-lived rebellion does not succeed, and the world remains at peace under Christ’s governance.

Some theologians, however, believe the earth will be characterized by evil when Christ returns. They arrive at this conclusion because Christ referenced the days of Noah and Sodom, times of great evil, in relation to his second coming. Jesus told the disciples: “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man [at his second coming]” (Luke 17:26). The days of Noah were indeed a time of corrupt and violent humanity:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. (Gen. 6:5, 11)

At first glance, the evil conditions at the time of Noah seem to present a problem for the postrestorationism. But we should be careful not to read too much into Christ’s analogy. Christ was merely describing the unexpected nature of his coming to unbelievers, like the flood was unexpected. He was not describing the evil conditions of the world when he returns. Rather, unbelievers will be experiencing normal everyday activities. Because of the apparent tranquility of everyday life, Christ’s return on Judgment Day will be an unexpected event for these unbelievers. But for believers, like Noah and Lot, his

coming will be expected, because they know him and have believed his forewarning. Jesus taught:

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage [normal everyday life], until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all [sudden judgment and destruction]. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building [normal everyday life], but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. . . . There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. (Luke 17:26–35)

Christ made no mention of a grossly immoral people, such as those at the time of Noah or Sodom. He was simply describing the goings-on of ordinary life:

- People are “eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage.”
- They are “buying and selling, planting and building.”
- Women are “grinding together.”

Christ did not make this analogy to communicate the depravity of the world at the time of his coming; rather, he made it to reveal how ordinary life will be at his sudden appearance on Judgment Day.

The purpose of this comparison to the judgments poured out in the past is to teach that Christ's second coming will be unexpected by *unbelievers*—just as the flood was a surprise to unbelievers living normal lives in Noah's day, and the fire and sulfur were a surprise to unbelievers living normal lives in the days of Sodom. Both Noah and Lot believed the Lord's warning about his impending wrath, and they were prepared for it. As a result, they escaped God's judgment. Likewise, believers expect that Christ will one day come back to destroy the world with fire and to judge all mankind, and they will be prepared. When Judgment Day arrives, believers will not be surprised and will escape his wrath.

Christ Is Coming Soon

The Scriptures have a unique way of approaching time. Toward the end of Revelation, Jesus said, “I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7). Of course, Jesus said this right after he had sent an angel to inform John that there would be at least a thousand more years of the earth’s existence before he comes again on Judgment Day to destroy this earth! The New Testament authors often depicted their world as being in the last days—and that was two thousand years ago.

Numerous examples throughout the Bible express the idea of long periods of time condensed into but a brief moment. King David said that “in just a little while” the meek would inherit the land in the messianic kingdom, even though he wrote this psalm more than three thousand years ago:

Be still before the LORD and *wait patiently for him*;
 fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
 over the man who carries out evil devices!
 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
 Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.
 For the evildoers shall be cut off,
 but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.
In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;
 though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land
 and delight themselves in abundant peace. (Ps. 37:7–11)

The millennial reign of Christ might not occur for another two thousand years, but from David’s perspective, time collapsed for the departed meek who would “shortly” inherit the land. The departed saints whose spirits are in heaven probably experience time differently than we do. They do not have natural bodies with biological clocks that relate to the twenty-four-hour rotation of the earth. In effect, David only had to wait for the end of his lifetime to be ready for the restoration to take place. His body is now asleep in the Lord, and his spirit waits in heaven for the messianic kingdom to take place “in just a little while.”

The prophet Isaiah offered another example of condensing many years into a brief moment. Like Paul, he prophesied that the Jews would be hardened but someday would be grafted back in:

“For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer. (Isa. 54:7–8)

This “brief moment” has lasted more than two thousand years, and the Jews have yet to repent and be grafted back in. Because of the way time collapses for believers when they die, the Bible can speak of events happening to believers “in just a little while” or “for a brief moment.” Christ can say he is “coming soon.”

The world has entered a period of history characterized as the last days. Christ’s first coming represents the pivot point in human history. All history that follows his first coming, including the restoration, is part of the last days. These last days will continue until Christ returns a second time on the very last day, when the earth is destroyed and the saints inherit the kingdom of heaven.

John Could Have Been Alive When Christ Returned

Jesus informed Peter in the presence of the other disciples that Peter would not be alive when he returned:

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) (John 21:18–19)

In response, Peter asked Jesus if John would be alive to see his second coming:

When Peter saw him [the apostle John], he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “*If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!*” So the

saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:21–23)

Christ left the disciples with the impression that all prophetic events yet to come, including the millennium, *could* take place in John’s lifetime and that John could still be alive when Christ returned at the end of the world! But Jesus only said that John *could* be alive when he returned—not that he *would* be alive on the last day.

In what scenario could John have possibly been alive at Christ’s second coming? There must be a logical sequence of all prophetic events that *could* transpire for John to potentially be living when Christ returned. Following is a hypothetical scenario that could have occurred to allow for the possibility of John being alive to witness Christ’s second coming.

John was a young man during this conversation between Christ and Peter. Let us assume that he was eighteen years old when Christ ascended into heaven. Forty years later, the Jews initiated a rebellion, causing the Roman emperor to declare war against them, destroying their temple in the process. The temple was destroyed in AD 70, so John would have been about fifty-eight years old at the time. Having been forewarned by Jesus of the temple’s destruction, John would have headed for the mountains to escape the destruction of Jerusalem.

Then, assume ten years go by and an influential Jewish person, such as the Jewish historian Josephus, was able to meet with the emperor in Rome and convince him that restoring both Jerusalem and the temple would be beneficial for the empire. The Jews had learned their lesson, and the empire would not be at risk for another revolt. Assume the emperor heeded Josephus’s counsel. The Romans were exceptional builders and could have rebuilt the temple in perhaps ten years. John would now be seventy-eight years old.

Assume another ten years go by and Paul’s prayers for the Jews are answered—their hearts are no longer hardened, and they are grafted back into the natural olive tree. John is now eighty-eight years old.

Next, the gears of the seven-year Great Tribulation start to turn. The Antichrist enters the rebuilt temple proclaiming to be God, and he pursues John and the saints with a vengeance. But when John sees the

abomination of desolation enter the temple, he would heed Christ's advice again and head for the mountains to hide from the Antichrist.

Having safely hidden in some remote cave in the wilderness, John would be ninety-five years old when the Tribulation ends. Satan is then bound, and Christ begins his 1,000-year reign from his throne in heaven. Nature is regenerated to an Edenic state. In this restored habitat, people can live for hundreds of years.

John survives the Tribulation and enters the millennium in a restored human body. As a result, he could possibly live for a thousand more years. At the end of the millennium, John would be 1,095 years old.

Next, Satan is released one final time to deceive the world. But before he can harm anyone, he and his army are destroyed. Ezekiel informs us that after the destruction of Gog and Magog, it takes seven years to clean up and burn their weapons for fuel (Ezek. 39:9–10). After this clean-up period, all the prophetic events have been fulfilled and Christ can come at any moment. John is a healthy 1,102 years old. He lives longer than Adam (930 years), Seth (912 years), and Noah (950 years). Perhaps ten more years go by, and Christ suddenly returns and finds John has reached the ripe old age of 1,112!

The early church operated upon the premise that all the prophetic events could take place within their lifetimes, so they could still be alive when Christ returned. Theoretically, as illustrated above, all those events could have taken place in the disciples' lifetimes (with the exception of Peter), with Christ returning while they were still alive.

The Sequence of Events on the Last Day

Many events take place at the second coming of Christ on the last day. Determining the exact chronological order of these events is not an easy task. For example, Christ comes again at the final resurrection of all mankind on the last day. But which comes first, the rapture of believers or the resurrection of unbelievers to face judgment? The answer is more complex than one might expect, because Christ used numerous parables to describe these events and each parable depicts a slightly different sequence. The point of the parable might not be to teach the exact sequence of the events that take place, but simply to teach that all these events take place on the last day.

Consider the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:27–30. Jesus taught that the angels will first gather and remove the weeds (unbelievers) and then gather the wheat (believers) into his barn (heaven). In contrast, when the second coming is compared to the days of Noah and Lot in Luke 17:26–37, one could conclude that the righteous are removed first and the unrighteous are left behind to be destroyed along with the earth. On the other hand, when Christ described two women grinding grain together at the end of the passage, he said that one is taken to where “the vultures will gather,” which would represent unbelievers. Thus, believers are left behind. Even within the same illustration of his second coming, one can come up with two seemingly opposite scenarios as to the exact sequence of events at the final resurrection of all mankind.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1–13 provides yet another version of the sequence of events of the final resurrection. Those prepared for Christ’s return enter into heaven to meet the coming bridegroom, *leaving behind* those who are unprepared and shut out of the kingdom of heaven.

In the final analysis, it is difficult to determine the exact sequence of the events on the last day. I am not sure that determining their exact sequence is even an important issue, for they all happen suddenly, “in the twinkling of an eye.” I have taken the position that unbelievers are removed first and then believers are raptured and transformed. *Then*, the current heavens and earth are destroyed by fire, and the books are opened with everyone being judged at the Great White Throne judgment.

Summary

In conclusion, the last day can be outlined as follows:

1. People will be leading normal lives; they will be eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, building, and grinding grain when Christ comes again (Luke 17:22–36).
2. Christ suddenly appears in the clouds like a bolt of lightning that is seen all over the world: “For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day” (Luke 17:24).

3. Christ sends angels to gather all unbelievers, alive and dead, for judgment and destruction (Matt. 13:41–42).
4. Deceased unbelievers are resurrected into bodily form from hades, where their fallen spirits have been held until the day of judgment (Rev. 20:13).
5. Christ sends angels to gather all the saints (Matt. 24:31). Those whose bodies are asleep are resurrected first to rejoin their spirits descending from heaven, and those who are still alive on this earth “will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:15–17).
6. Christ then transforms their natural bodies into glorified bodies that are immortal, incorruptible, imperishable, and adapted for heaven (1 Cor. 15:52–53).
7. The Genesis heavens and earth are completely destroyed by fire—they flee from his presence (2 Peter 3:10–13 and Rev. 20:11; 21:1).
8. Christ then sits on the Great White Throne in heaven to judge all mankind, because all judgment has been given to him (John 5:22).
9. All the saints whose names are in the Book of Life are judged first and given their rewards (1 Peter 4:17). They are judged by fire to test the quality of their works. The good works that survive affect their eternal existence in heaven (1 Cor. 3:11–15).
10. Unbelievers are judged according to their evil deeds and are sent to the lake of fire to experience the second death (Rev. 20:12–15).
11. Christ then creates the new heavens and new earth as the eternal home for the children of God: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:1–5).
12. The Adamic order of being comes to an end. What we will be like as children of God remains a mystery, “but we know that when he appears we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).
13. Christ announces, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 21:6). He has finished the work the Father has given him.
14. Now that Christ has destroyed every rule and every authority and power including the last enemy, death, he delivers the kingdom over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24–28).

15. In the Father's kingdom of heaven, we will dwell with the triune God in all his glory. And we shall reign in his heavenly kingdom "forever and ever" (Rev. 22:4-5).