

## Blessed is the One Who is Ready for His Coming

Revelation 16:15

It was September 4, 1988. I had gone to church at College Heights Christian Church with my roommate from Ozark Christian College. After church, I found this little booklet tucked under my windshield wiper, "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be In 1988."

I was only a second year Bible student, but I already understood enough to realize something was wrong with this. I knew that Jesus warned us, "*about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" Jesus tells us He doesn't even know when it's going to happen, and this guy's got it all mapped out.

I don't know how many of you remember this. His name was Edgar Whisenant. He was all over the place in 1988— the radio, television talk shows. Millions of people got caught up in this, pun intended. There were people who sold their possessions when the day came gathered on hilltops and mountain tops to await the coming of the Lord.

So there we were, my roommate and I talking about this after church, and we decide to go to Hardees for lunch. As we were standing line I noticed the girl that was taking orders seemed rather shaken up. Her eyes were red and teary, and she seemed rather distracted. Finally, it was our turn to order, and I couldn't help it. I said, "Excuse me, miss, but are you okay? You seem like something's really bothering you."

She says, "Haven't you heard? Jesus is coming back, and I don't think I'm ready." That's like setting up a tee ball for a Bible college student. I said, "Yes, he's coming back, and I can help you get ready, but he's not coming on the day this clown says. I don't know when he's coming. No one does. Jesus says no one knows the day or the hour. He says his coming will be like a thief. It will be suddenly and unexpectedly."

In Revelation 16:15 we find our third beatitude our third blessing of seven in John's apocalyptic vision. In this blessing Jesus himself says, "*Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!*"

This is a word of caution to the churches to be alert and ready. Our vigilance is necessary because it will not be obvious when he is coming. There's a constant temptation to try and nail down the timing of Jesus' return. People tend to look at revelation as some sort of

Cracker Jack box decoder ring and they want to come up with some sort of precise timeline of end-times events. However, Jesus tells us we won't know when it's coming. We have to be alert and vigilant, for it could come any time. No one will publish a book telling us its coming. If we are not ready, we will miss out on the blessing of His coming. I want to share with you this morning three realities of this blessing.

### **I. Jesus is Coming**

First, is this Jesus is coming. Long before Arnold Schwarzenegger ever uttered the words, "I'll be back," our Lord Jesus made this promise, "*Behold, I am coming...*" Let's just stop there for a moment and let that sink in. Jesus is coming. It's not a question of if, but when. There is no doubt. There is no debate. Jesus is coming. "Look," Jesus says, or "Behold." This means pay attention to this. This is a big deal. Don't miss it. I am coming.

Jesus' return is a sure and certain thing. It will happen. Knowing that he is coming, should totally change how we approach life in this world. We have not been abandoned here. We have not been forgotten. Jesus is coming for us and he is coming to set things right.

Jesus says he is coming. This is a promise and a threat. These words are meant to both comfort and warn. To the seven churches who were suffering. To Christians who live under oppression and persecution, these were words of assurance and promise. This is Jesus saying, "Hang in there. I am coming. Don't give up. I am coming. It will be worth it. I am coming."

However, to the beasts that persecute the church, to the oppressors, to the mouth-pieces of false gods and false religions, this is a threat. "Your time is short. I am coming. Your days are numbered. I am coming. Repent while you still can. I am coming."

If you are ready and waiting when Jesus returns, there will be no more joyous, victorious, jubilant experience in all of history. It will be the day all your hopes and dreams come true. If you are not ready, however, it will be the day of your worst nightmare.

In World War II, General Douglas MacArthur was placed in charge of defending our close ally, the Philippines. The Japanese invaded and overwhelmed the American and Filipino defenders. President Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to withdraw to Australia. It was at this time that MacArthur made his solemn vow. "I shall return." He was saying "I'll be back. I am coming."

Think of what this promise meant to American POWs in Japanese prison camps. Think of what that promise meant to the Filipino resistance who continued the fight against the Japanese. "Hang in there. Don't give up. I am coming." That's what Jesus' words mean to us.

Think of what MacArthur's promise meant to the Japanese though. Think of what it meant with each island that fell, with each Japanese ship that sank, with each bombing run. MacArthur is coming. That's his warning to the oppressive governments, the false religions, the godless universities that seek to demean the Christian faith, and the militant faithless who do more than just refuse to believe. They want to make sure no one else believes either. That's Jesus' warning here. I am coming.

## **II. We Must Wait on His Coming**

So first, we know He is coming, but second, we don't know when he is coming. We must wait on his coming. He says, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. That means his coming will happen suddenly and unexpectedly. There is a reason you lock your doors every night. Because the thief isn't going to call you and let you know the day and time he's coming.

Not knowing when Jesus is coming, doesn't mean that he isn't coming. Knowing that Jesus is returning is more important than knowing when He is coming. Let's not become too dogmatic in our interpretation of end-times. And we need to quit trying to come up with some sort of schedule or timetable.

I get tired of all these so-called Bible teachers who want to make predictions. They give themselves wiggle room by saying like "We can't know the day or the hour, but we can know the season." They say something "might" happen, or "could" happen. They sell a lot of books and DVDs convincing thousands of Christians that something's right around the corner.

One of the things about the way Revelation is written is that every generation of Christian since the time of Christ has thought their generation was it. Every generation thinks they are the last generation. They look at the Bible and they look at their own day, and they think this is it. How many times have we heard someone say we are the last generation? Jesus will most likely return soon. Let me read to you four quotes:

Of all the signs described by our Lord as presaging the end of the world some we see already accomplished...For we now see that nation arises against nation and that they press and weigh upon the land in our own times as never before in the annals of the past.

Earthquakes overwhelm countless cities, as we often hear from other parts of the world. Pestilence we endure without interruption.

The last day is at hand. My calendar has run out. I know nothing more in the Scriptures.

We are the terminal generation and we are well on our way to the road to Armageddon. If you listen closely, you can hear the hoof beats of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, racing toward the battle.

The first quote is from Pope Gregory in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. The second quote is from Martin Luther in 1532, and the last one is from John Hagee in 2011. I could spend all morning giving you such quotes from Christians who were absolutely convinced they knew when Jesus was coming.

- Montanists in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Proclaimed the imminent appearance of the New Jerusalem.
- Novatian in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century.
- Donatus in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.
- The sack of Rome in 410 was supposed to bring the end.
- Joachin of Fiore 1135-1202
- Russian Mennonites undertook a "Great Trek" to Siberia in 1880-84

They were all convinced Jesus was returning in their own lifetime, and every single one has been wrong to this point. Part of this is the genius of Revelation. It was never intended to give us a precise timeline of events. It pulls back the veil and uses symbols to show us the spiritual realities of what's going on behind the scenes in our world. It shows us the spiritual forces at work behind governments, and militaries, and religion, and economic policy, and foreign trade. These forces were at work in John's day and in the world of the seven churches of Revelation. They are at work in our day, and they have been at work in every generation in between. They will continue to be the puppet masters behind the scenes pulling the strings until Jesus comes back. We don't know when that will be, and that's on purpose. The reality is we have been in the last days since the time of Christ. Christ's first coming ushered in the period called the last days. So what do we do while we wait? That brings us to point #3.

### **III. We Need to be Ready for Jesus' Coming**

Do you remember as a kid when you were finally old enough that mom and dad would leave you home alone? First, it was just for the evening, and then maybe they decided to take a

weekend trip and leave you home for a couple of days. Then mom and dad would come home. Was that a good thing or a bad thing?

It all depends. Were you ready for them to come home? Did you do the chores you were supposed to do? Was everything clean and in good shape? Or was the house a complete disaster? The living room looked like an F4 tornado ripped through there. Dishes were piled high in the kitchen. Mountains of dirty laundry lay on the floor. If you were ready, it was a joyous moment. You wanted them to see how well you did. You wanted them to know how trustworthy and responsible you could be. If you weren't ready, let's just say your little party came crashing down.

That's the way it will be when Jesus comes. We will either be ready or we won't be. The point of this blessing is that Jesus wants every generation of Christian to be ready. Our verse goes on to say. *"Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!"*

"Stay awake." Be watchful. Be alert. Be on guard. Don't go to sleep behind the wheel of life. You have to be ready whenever He comes. 1 Peter 4:7 says, *"The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert."* Stay awake! Don't fall asleep! Because it will happen when you least expect it. Jonathan Edwards the great American 18<sup>th</sup> Century theologian exemplifies the mindset we need to have. He said, "I have no idea if Jesus will return in my lifetime. But I do know that if he doesn't, I will go to him at the end of mine." He then resolved, "never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."

Not knowing when, is not an excuse for not being ready. We become too comfortable in this world. We are living behind enemy lines. In this third beatitude of Revelation Jesus promises blessing to all who keep their garments on, that they may not go about naked and be seen exposed. Clothing symbolizes your morals, conduct, and behavior. What you wear reflects how you live your life. White linen shows holiness and purity. Jesus told the church in Sardis they had only a few people who had not soiled their clothes with evil (3:4). The saints in heaven, however, are portrayed as wearing white.

However, the point of this verse isn't the color or condition of the clothing, but it's the fact that they are wearing them at all. This is a picture of someone who's gone to bed with their

clothes on. It's almost a universal that we get undressed for bed. There's only a couple of reasons you go to bed with your clothes on. Either, you got in so late that you just crashed without getting ready for bed, or you know that you might have to get up at a moment's notice.

Jesus doesn't mean for us to literally sleep with our clothes on. This speaks to our moral and spiritual readiness. That they have their clothes on means they are living their lives in such a way that if Jesus came back, it's okay, because they were ready. They are living their lives in such a way that Jesus doesn't catch them off guard. Go back to my earlier analogy of your parents leaving you at home as a kid. If you keep everything clean every day, it doesn't matter if mom and dad show up early. You're ready.

I began the sermon with a story of a girl my roommate and I met at Hardees after some nutlog predicted Jesus' return in 1988. I'll let her pick up the story from here:

So many emotions were gripping me during that time. If it was to happen I felt I would be gypped out of so many firsts in life that I hadn't yet experienced. But, my greatest fear was not knowing if I would go to heaven. I wasn't a bad person doing horrible things. I just came from a family who didn't put any emphasis on church, God or religion. The times I went to church, I did so on my own through a local church that did an annual thing called a Round Up. They'd bring by a bus and we'd sing songs such Jesus Loves Me and Deep and Wide.

I knew I wasn't prepared for the end of the world and my unknown fate of where I'd spend eternity. One week before the day prophesied to be our last earthly day I was working, unable to control my fear and emotions. Tears were falling as I waited on customers that afternoon. Two guys approached the counter inquiring if I was okay. I explained a little what was weighing heavy on my heart.

Dan reassured me I had nothing to worry about. No one knows the date or time of the return of Christ. He asked if he could come back when I got off work and if I'd like to talk further and get to know more about Jesus. I accepted. He then invited me to a local bible study group and to join him at College Heights Christian Church services. That November I accepted the Lord as my Savior and was baptized into my new life with Christ. God used my fear to invite you into my life as an instrument to introduce and lead me to Him.