

The Next Appearance of Christ Joseph Herrin (01-09-2009)

II Thessalonians 1:7-2:1

*When the Lord Yahshua shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yahshua. And these will pay the penalty of age lasting destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, **when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day**, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed. To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; *in order that the name of our Lord Yahshua may be glorified in you, and you in Him*, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Yahshua Christ.*

The common conception of the next appearance of Christ is a reflection of the church's lack of understanding of Christ in them. The church ever thinks of a Christ that is far away, sitting in heaven, who must return bodily to be among His disciples once more. Rarely does a believer understand the mystery of Christ dwelling in them, nor do they understand the desire of the Father for Christ to be fully formed in all of His sons and daughters.

The image of Christ returning bodily in the clouds of the sky to catch up His saints into heaven is commonly presented to the body of Christ to describe what His appearance at the end of the church age will be like. The idea of Christians suddenly being raptured out of this world, leaving cars careening wildly, homes empty, airplanes without pilots, and a host of other calamitous disappearances has been popularized by books such as the *Left Behind* series, as well as in movies, in thousands of sermons, and in a multitude of fiction and non-fiction books on the Bible. Such a concept is not Scripturally supported, and the next appearance of Christ will not resemble these fables in any way.

The apostle Paul in writing to the church in Thessalonica described the next appearing of Christ. The apostle spoke of "*when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day...*" The next appearing of Christ will not be in the literal clouds of the heavens. It will be a manifestation of Christ "in His saints."

Consider for a moment how much in error the Jewish believers were

concerning the appearing of the Messiah 2,000 years ago. They were looking for the Messiah to appear in a manner totally foreign to reality. Despite the testimony of Scriptures, and prophecies concerning a virgin giving birth, of a Savior whose form would not be one to stir desire, and of a suffering servant, the Jews had adopted a very different belief of the appearing of Christ. The Jews were looking for that which was pleasing to them, to their flesh, their ambition, and their religious pride. They anticipated a conquering king who would sit on the throne of David and loose the yoke of Rome from about their necks. They were looking to a Messiah who would re-establish the glory of Solomon's kingdom and who would elevate them among the nations.

Christians today should take a lesson from Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun.

Christians today are repeating the error of the Jews 2,000 years ago. The church has the Scriptures, and they study them after a fashion on a very regular basis. Yet the conclusions they are arriving at are wrong. They are expecting the Lord to return in a manner pleasing to their own carnal desires. They anticipate living for their own pleasures now, and when the world begins to enter into tribulation they expect to be raptured out and spared all suffering and judgment. How easy it is to neglect an entire body of Scriptures that speak otherwise.

Christ will only receive His bride to Himself *after* she has been purified. He will not rapture a fleshly, pleasure seeking, idol loving group of unrighteous confessors into His presence to spend eternity with Him. Judgment must begin at the house of God. Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will continue to act wickedly.

God has always been seeking a habitation. The tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament were merely physical illustrations of that spiritual temple God seeks to dwell within. Christ manifested great zeal when He found the money changers and merchants had set up shop in His Father's house. This was also a parable. The people of God today resemble the temple in the time of Herod. The church is pursuing all things material. The sound of the merchants and money changers rings loudly within the souls of the people of God. They are focused upon their next expenditure, their next acquisition, when God has

created them to be a house of prayer.

Christ must cleanse the house before He can appear in glory in the midst of it. Surely the church is deceived to believe that they will be partakers of the glory of Christ apart from first silencing all the noise and activity of worldly pursuit in their lives. All idols must be cast down. All trafficking in the things of a fallen world must end. The church must return to her first love. She must devote herself to Christ as a pure virgin, for the harlotry of her behavior has brought a great reproach in this hour.

When Christ has purified, cleansed vessels, then He will appear in glory *in them*. The glory of this appearing will differ for each individual according to their worthiness. Christians do not like to speak of qualifying themselves for reward and glory. They prefer to believe that all will be based upon grace and forgiveness and given as a free gift. This frees them from personal responsibility. They need not crucify the flesh, nor suffer, nor take up the cross. They prefer the fable that all will receive the same poured-out abundance of reward and glory at the appearing of Christ. Once more they have neglected a host of Scriptures.

I Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but *to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.*

To the degree that YOU share in the sufferings of Christ, you will also partake of His glory. *No suffering, no glory.* Do not be deceived. God will not be mocked. You will reap according to that which you sow.

II Timothy 2:12

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us...

I Peter 5:10

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

God is not unjust that He would pour forth the same reward upon all Christians simply because of their confession. He will examine each man's life and works. God will not be mocked. There are many who honor God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him. He will judge each man's life according to that which he has done.

Romans 2:5-11

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, *who will render to every man according to his deeds*: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. *For there is no partiality with God.*

People of God, you are called to obedience. You are called to hear the voice of the Spirit and do as He says in all things. All those who follow Christ with a whole heart will experience suffering. God will always lead His children to suffer that they might be perfected. He is a rewarder of the obedient. None who follow the Spirit, embracing difficulties and suffering, will ever come out the loser in the deal.

Romans 8:18

For I consider that *the sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory that is to be revealed in us.*

Let not the Christian who avoids suffering by failing to submit to the leadership of the Spirit of Christ be deceived into thinking that they will receive reward for their carnal actions. When Christ comes to be revealed *in His saints*, those who have avoided the working of the cross will find that His appearing is unobserved in their members. This is Paul's warning to the Thessalonian church. There are a number of Scriptures that reveal that not all of God's people will be partakers of the glory of Christ's next appearing. It is those who have made themselves ready who will experience His glorious appearing *in them.*

Hebrews 9:27-28

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, *so Christ also*, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, *shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*

Does not the apostle here speak of the second appearing of Christ? He qualifies this event by saying His appearing will be “to those who eagerly await Him.” Those who eagerly await the appearing of Christ are those who are making themselves ready. Those who are living for pleasure, rather than for the will of God, will not experience the next appearance of Christ.

Christian, take this to heart. Be warned. You may very well miss the appearing of Christ just as the Jews failed to discern His appearing 2,000 years ago. There is nothing new under the Sun. Just like the Jews, when many Christians observe the appearance of Christ in His saints, many Christians will deny that this is that which was prophesied. They will declare that it cannot possibly be the appearing of Christ, for they are not partakers of it. They will even set themselves to persecute those in whom Christ has appeared as the Jews persecuted the Son of God at His first appearing. “That which has been, is that which will be.” Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Coming In the Clouds

How is it that the church has so misunderstood the nature of the Lord's next appearing? How have they failed to comprehend that Christ must appear in His saints, when it is testified in Scripture. One of the means by which this has happened is that the church has taken a literal meaning of an expression that is repeated throughout the Bible, rather than seeing its spiritual understanding. Let me cite some of the verses that contain this expression.

Daniel 7:13-14

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, *with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming*, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

This is the first mention of Christ appearing “with the clouds of heaven.”

Prophecy teachers today would have you believe these clouds are literal rain clouds. This is a great error. The clouds are not the puffy white clouds we see in the sky, they are symbolic of the overcoming saints, ascended to heavenly places in Christ. The Scriptures use such language to describe the overcomers.

Please take time to read the following passage, as it is critical to understanding this symbolism.

Hebrews 11:32-12:1

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, *since we have so great a cloud of witnesses* surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...

This entire passage describes those who have led an overcoming life. These were those of whom the world is not worthy. Even as a cloud rises above the earth, so do these victorious people of God stand far above the level of this evil age. They are described as “a great cloud of witnesses.” This is a heavenly body of God’s elect, called out ones from the earth.

We can know with assurance that it is people that Daniel was speaking of when he wrote of the Son of Man appearing before the Ancient of Days with the clouds of heaven, for we are told that the Son of Man is given ruling authority over all people and nations and tongues. We know that Christ is not to rule alone in the age to come. Those who attain to the first resurrection will rule with Him.

Revelation 20:4-6

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Yahshua and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but *they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

The Son of Man will appear with “the clouds” to receive ruling authority over the earth. These clouds are not cumulus, nor cirrus, nor stratus. They are the souls of the overcomers. Let us understand the Scriptures to discern what they are truly declaring, laying aside the fables of Babylon. Many will miss the appearing of Christ, for they are looking for it to occur in the wrong place. Christ will appear in His saints, not in the clouds of the upper atmosphere.

Matthew 24:30-31

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 in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.* 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.*

Did you notice that this passage does not say that the people of God will be gathered from the earth. No! The angels will “gather together His elect from the four winds.” This speaks of an area above the earth. This imagery is repeated as He says, “from one end of the SKY to the other.” What is it that are found in the sky? It is clouds, and these clouds represent the overcoming people of God. These will be gathered together at the appearing of Christ. These are not physical clouds being referred to here.

Matthew 26:64

Yahshua said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, *and coming in the clouds of heaven.*"

Need I say it again. The clouds that Christ will appear upon are His people. It is that which Paul described to the Thessalonians. Christ must appear “*in His saints.*”

Mark 14:62-63

And Yahshua said, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and *coming with the clouds of heaven.*"

Notice that Mark says Christ will come *with* the clouds of heaven, but Matthew said *in* the clouds of heaven.

Both expressions are correct. Matthew uses the Greek word *epi*. Mark uses the Greek word *meta*. Both words express the idea that Christ is superimposed upon His people; accompanying them, being IN their midst. Strong's Concordance defines these words as follows.

epi; a primary preposition; properly, meaning superimposition (of time, place, order, etc.), as a relation of distribution [with the genitive case], i.e. over, upon, etc.

meta: a primary preposition (often used adverbially); properly, denoting accompaniment; "amid" (local or causal); modified variously according to the case

Does this not explain beautifully what will occur at the next appearing of Christ? Christ will be revealed “amid” His people. He will be observed accompanying them. He will be in them, and they will be in Him.

Consider also the dual statement in these Scriptures. Yahshua said that the Jewish leaders would “see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, AND coming in the clouds of heaven.” Was Yahshua saying that He would be seen in His own physical body sitting at Yahweh's right hand, and that He would be seen in His physical body coming in the clouds of heaven, both of these being separate events, or was he speaking of two things that would be concurrent with one another? I believe it is very possible He was speaking of two concurrent events. Yahshua would be observed seated at the right hand of power, and He would be observed coming in the clouds of power simultaneously. This will be fulfilled as He appears IN HIS SAINTS.

One passage that often confuses Christians is found in Acts where the

ascension of Christ is described.

Acts 1:9-11

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, *and a cloud received Him out of their sight*. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? *This Yahshua, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*"

Was it a literal, physical cloud that the disciples saw receiving Christ into the heavens. I do not doubt that this is what their physical eyes perceived. Very often the physical eyes of men do not see clearly into the spiritual realm around them. Consider the experience of Elijah and his servant when the mountain around about them was filled with angels and fiery chariots. Until Elijah prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened, he could not see them. Consider the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were conversing with the resurrected Christ but their eyes were veiled from recognizing Him. Yet at the moment He determined, their eyes were opened and they observed the Savior. He then vanished from their midst.

I believe that the disciples who were present at the ascension of Christ very probably experienced a similar event. They saw Christ ascending in the cloud, as their eyes were veiled from seeing the great cloud of witnesses that received Him triumphantly into the heavenly Jerusalem in the same way that He had ridden a donkey triumphantly into the earthly Jerusalem some weeks earlier.

Some may argue that these saints who made up the great cloud of witnesses were already dead and in the grave, awaiting the resurrection. Yet we read that after the crucifixion that these overcomers, prophets, and patriarchs came out of the grave and were seen by many, testifying of the Messiah. Would not these ones then have ascended to heaven to await their King?

Matthew 27:51-53

And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened; *and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.*

First the natural, then the spiritual. They appeared in “the holy city” Jerusalem on earth before appearing in its heavenly anti-type. These could not come out of the grave until *after* the resurrection of Christ, for He is the firstborn from the dead. Yet they did come out, for the One who is the resurrection and the life raised them from the dead. It seems likely that these did not return to the grave, for it is appointed to man “once to die.” Rather, they ascended to the Father and awaited the return of their Savior. Christ was received into heaven by the clouds, and He will appear again in the same way, in the midst of His overcomers.

If you understand that Christ is in you even now, why would you look for His glorious appearing anywhere else other than in you? It is an unbelieving church that is looking for the appearing of Christ outside of themselves. God, however, has a much higher and greater plan. He seeks to have Christ revealed in glory in the midst of His saints.

Matthew 24:30

And they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

John 17:22-24

"And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that You did send Me, and did love them, even as You did love Me.

The glory of Christ will be revealed in His disciples. Christ will appear in them. He will be seen in the clouds, that heavenly host of overcomers who abide in heavenly places, no longer bound to this fallen earth. These are those who have set their affections on things above, not on the earth below. These look to the return of Christ, for His appearing will be glorious.

Romans 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory that is to be revealed in us.*

II Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...

Ephesians 5:27

That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

Colossians 3:4

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

It should be abundantly evident from these verses and many more, that the clouds upon which the Lord will appear with power and glory are none other than His body of overcoming saints. This will be His next appearing - *in His saints*. Will you witness this appearing? Will you experience His appearing in you? All those who have this hope, purify themselves as He is pure.