

The Second Coming of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:1–3; Matt. 16:27; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Matt. 24:3–14; 24:42, 44.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also’ ”
(*John 14:1–3, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus, mentioned more than three hundred times in the New Testament, is the capstone of our teachings. It is essential to our identity as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. The doctrine is engraved in our name, and it is a crucial part of the gospel that we are called to proclaim. Without the promise of His coming, our faith would be in vain. This glorious truth gives us a sense of destiny and motivates our missionary outreach.

It could be argued that the stretching of time beyond our expectations would undermine our belief in Jesus' promise to return. However, this has not happened. For many, our passion for Christ's return is stronger than ever.

This week we will review what Jesus said about “the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (*Titus 2:13, NKJV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

The Promise

After the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples that He would go to a place where, at least for now, they could not go (*John 13:33*). The thought of being separated from the Master filled their hearts with sorrow and fear. Peter asked, “ ‘Lord, where are You going? . . . Why can I not follow You now?’ ” (*vss. 36, 37, NKJV*). Christ knew their desire and assured them that the separation would be only temporary.

Read Christ’s promises to us in *John 14:1–3*. Apply those words to yourself. Why should they mean so much to you?

Our Lord’s pledge could not have been more emphatic. In Greek, the promise “I will come again” is in the present tense, emphasizing certainty. It could literally be translated, “I am coming again.”

Jesus has given us the certitude of His second coming. He did not say “I may come again,” but “I will come again.” Every time He mentioned His return, He referred to it in certain terms.

Sometimes we make promises we later cannot keep, even in spite of our best efforts and determination. That’s not the case with Christ. Many times He proved unmistakably that His word is trustworthy.

Referring to His incarnation, the Lord prophetically announced through David: “ ‘Behold, I come’ ” (*Ps. 40:7, NKJV*). And He did (*Heb. 10:5–7*). The reality of His first coming sustains the certainty of His second.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus promised a despairing father: “ ‘Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well’ ” (*Luke 8:50, NKJV*). And sure enough, Jairus’s daughter was made well, although she had been dead. Christ announced that three days after His own death He would rise from the grave; and He did. He promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples; and He sent Him right on time. If our Lord honored all His promises in the past, even those that, from a human perspective, seemed impossible, we can be certain that He will keep His promise to come again.

How can you keep the fire burning in your own heart for the second coming of Jesus?

The Purpose of Jesus' Second Coming

The great plan of Redemption will find its culmination in the Second Coming. Without Christ's return to this earth, His incarnation, death, and resurrection would have no effect for our salvation.

What is one of the basic reasons for the second coming of Jesus? See *Matt. 16:27*.

Life is not always fair; in fact, often it is not fair. We do not always see justice in our society. Innocent people suffer while evil ones seem to prosper. Many people do not receive what they deserve. But evil and sin will not reign forever. Jesus will come “to give to every one according to his work” (*Rev. 22:12, NKJV*).

This assertion implies that a judgment must take place prior to Christ's return. When Jesus comes, the destiny of each human being will already have been decided. Jesus clearly hinted at this investigative judgment in the parable of the wedding feast (*Matt. 22:11–13*). The fact that we are judged by works does not mean that we are saved by our works or by our own merits. Salvation is by God's grace and received by faith in Jesus (*Mark 16:16, John 1:12*), which we demonstrate by our actions.

What's important about the promise in Matthew 16:27 is that justice will be done. We just have to wait for it.

Also, at the Second Coming, those who sleep in Christ will be raised to eternal life. As we saw earlier—because we know that the dead are asleep in the grave—the promise of the Second Coming and the resurrection to eternal life that follows is especially important to us.

“Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the length and breadth of the earth, the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

How Will Jesus Come?

In His prophetic sermon, Christ expressed concern about wrong teachings in regard to His second advent, and He warned His disciples against people who would come in His name, “ ‘saying, “I am the Christ” ’ ” (*Matt. 24:5, NKJV; see also vss. 23–26*). He doesn’t want His followers to be deceived. Therefore, He clearly indicated the way in which He will come.

What does Matthew 24:27 tell us about how Jesus is going to return?

Lightning cannot be hidden or faked. It flashes and shines throughout the sky in such a way that everyone can see it. So will Jesus’ second coming be. No advertisement will be needed to call people’s attention toward it. Every human being, good and evil, saved and lost, even “they who pierced Him” (*Rev. 1:7, NKJV*), will see Him coming (*Matt. 26:64, NKJV*).

How does 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 help us understand what the Second Coming will be like?

In His second advent, Christ will be seen with all His divine glory as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (*Rev. 19:16*). In the Incarnation, the Son came alone and without any external splendor, with “no beauty that we should desire Him” (*Isa. 53:2, NKJV*). But this time He will descend with all His majesty and magnificence surrounded by “all the holy angels” (*Matt. 25:31*) and “with a great sound of a trumpet” (*Matt. 24:31*). If all that weren’t enough, the dead in Christ will rise to immortality.

If we trust the Lord regarding an event as incredible as the Second Coming, why should we not trust Him about every aspect of our lives?

When Will Jesus Come?

When Jesus said regarding the temple that “ ‘not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ ” (*Matt. 24:2, NKJV*), the disciples were astonished. “ ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (*vs. 3, NKJV*), they inquired. In their thinking, the destruction of the temple would coincide with the end of history at Jesus’ return.

Jesus’ answer skillfully combined the signs for both events: the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and His second advent, because the disciples were not prepared to grasp the difference between them.

It is important for us to understand the nature and purpose of these signs. They were not given for us to determine the date of Jesus’ return, for “ ‘of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only’ ” (*vs. 36, NKJV*). Rather, the signs show the historical tendency of events in order to alert us that His coming is near, even at the doors. While we should never be date setters, we must never ignore the time we live in either.

Read Matthew 24:3–14, 21–26, 29, 37–39 (see also Mark 13 and Luke 21). What picture of the world does Jesus present here? In what ways does it fit the world in which we now live?

The most important idea Jesus wanted to impress on the disciples’ minds was that His coming is near. Actually, His entire prophetic sermon addressed the apostles as if they were to be alive when He would come (*see Matt. 24:32, 33, 42*).

In a real sense, from the personal perspective of each of us, the Second Coming is never farther away than a moment after our death. Death is a deep unconscious sleep. We close our eyes in death and, whether one year has passed or one thousand years have passed, the next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus. Thus, the idea of the nearness of Christ’s coming, which Paul, Peter, and James also shared, makes perfect sense. For each of us, individually, His coming is never more than a moment after we die.

How does this concept help us understand the “imminence” of Christ’s second coming?

Watch and Be Ready

Why is it crucial for us always to watch and be ready for Jesus' coming?
See Matt. 24:42, 44.

The keynote of Jesus' prophetic sermon is the imperative to watch, to be on alert. It doesn't mean to wait idly but to be actively vigilant, as is the owner of a house who remains diligent against any potential thief (*Matt. 24:43*). While watchfully waiting, we have a work to do, as did the faithful servant who carried out the tasks his master entrusted to him during the master's absence (*Matt. 24:45, Mark 13:34–37*).

What attitude would be fatal for us who claim to believe in the second advent of Jesus? *See Matt. 24:48–51; Luke 21:34, 35.* **How can we avoid falling into that attitude? Why is the error so easy to do if we are not careful?**

The parable of the evil servant is very sobering, especially for us as Seventh-day Adventists. This servant represents those who profess to believe that Christ will come again, but not immediately. Believing that the Lord is delayed, they think they still have time to live selfishly and indulge in sinful pleasures because, surely, there will be plenty of time to prepare for the Second Coming. Unfortunately, this idea is a deadly trap, because no one knows when Jesus will come. Moreover, even if Christ doesn't come yet, any one of us could be called to rest unexpectedly, suddenly ending our opportunity to make things right with God. But above all, repeated indulgence in sin gradually hardens and desensitizes the conscience so that it becomes more difficult to repent. The devil doesn't care that we believe theoretically in the second coming of Jesus, as long as he can make us postpone our preparation for it.

How can we be ready today? By repenting and by confessing our unconfessed sins to Jesus, by renewing our faith in His expiatory death on the cross for us, and by surrendering our wills totally to Him. Walking in communion with Him, we can enjoy the deep peace of being covered by His robe of righteousness.

How much do you think about the Second Coming? How much of its reality impacts your life? How do we strike the right balance in going about our daily work and yet living in anticipation of Christ's return?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pp. 627–636, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Heralds of the Morning,” pp. 299–316, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. . . . With anthems of celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend Him on His way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms—‘ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.’ No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 640, 641.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we need to believe in the nearness of Christ’s return, how can we avoid the dangers of fanaticism? That’s not always so easy. After all, how many fanatics really think that they are fanatics?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that the Second Coming is never far off from each one of us on a personal, individual level because our death is never really that far off, no matter how long we live. What does this idea tell us about just how close the Second Coming really is as far as we each are concerned?
- 3 How do you respond to those who mock the idea of the Second Coming? Before you respond to them, try to put yourself in their shoes, looking at things from their perspective. After you do that and see their arguments, think through ways that you can respond.
- 4 What about this idea that we, as a people, can either help hasten or delay the Second Coming? What are the arguments either way in that discussion?
- 5 If you knew that Jesus was coming next week, what in your life would change now?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 14:1–3*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the nature of Christ's promised return.

Feel: Feel the assurance of Christ's second coming.

Do: Prepare spiritually to meet the Lord in the air.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christ Clearly Outlines the Nature and Conditions Surrounding His Return.

- Ⓐ What are the distinguishable characteristics of Christ's promised return?
- Ⓑ What are the consequences of Christ's second coming for the redeemed and the condemned?
- Ⓒ What signals the nearness of Christ's return?

II. Feel: Christ's Coming Gives Each Believer a Sense of Peace, Security, and Assurance.

- Ⓐ What feelings might believers experience whenever contemplating Christ's coming?
- Ⓑ Why should signs of Christ's approaching return generate joy rather than anxiety?
- Ⓒ How does the purpose of Christ's return enhance our appreciation of God's love for humanity?

III. Do: Spiritual Preparation Is Necessary to Meet Christ in the Air.

- Ⓐ What daily routines and practices prepare believers for Christ's return?
- Ⓑ How can believers help nonbelievers to prepare for Christ's coming?
- Ⓒ What role might Christian fellowship have in contributing to spiritual preparation?

► **Summary:** The promised return of Christ is more than a distant dream. Nor is it religious escapism. It recognizes the fact of a loving Savior who deeply desires a reunion with His chosen people. Believers are admonished to daily spiritual preparation and constant watchfulness so that Christ's coming will neither find them unprepared nor unaware.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 14:1–3*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The glorious climax of the Christian's faith will be reuniting with Christ at His promised return.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize to your students that the importance of Christ's return is underscored by its frequent mention in Scripture.

Opening Activity: Think of a class or family reunion you may have attended. Perhaps it was for your graduating class in high school or college. How did it feel to see old classmates again?

Ask class members to imagine the moment of the most exciting reunion of all: the Second Coming. Based on the descriptions in Scripture, what will that be like? Encourage them to engage as many of their senses as possible, painting a picture collectively, as a class, of Christ's soon return. What might that event sound and look like, and how do they imagine it would make them feel? Most important, ask a few members to share in their own words the answer to the following question: What does reuniting with Christ personally mean to you?

Consider This: To reunite means to come together *again*. Even though most of those at the resurrection will not have seen Him face-to-face, why is the Second Coming, nonetheless, a reunion between Christ and His people? How have we already *seen* face-to-face the One whom we have not seen with our eyes?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Although sharply divided about other doctrines and the particulars of the Second Coming, many Christians agree that Jesus is coming again to reunite with His people.

Bible Commentary

I. The Promise and Purpose of Jesus' Coming (*Review John 14:1–3 with your class.*)

Matthew 16:27 alludes to Daniel's apocalyptic prophecy concerning final judgment (*Dan. 7:13, 14*). Christ's teachings brought together Old

Testament utterances from Zechariah, Daniel, Isaiah, and others to formulate the New Testament teaching about His return. The certainty of this teaching formed the foundation from which He commanded, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled.” On this planet, plagued by warfare, uncontrollable disease, genocide, nuclear accidents, racism, divorce, economic uncertainty, and so on, that assurance becomes a challenging command. Yet, whatever suffering we experience here cannot compare with God’s promised compensation. “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure” (2 Cor. 4:16, 17, *NRSV*).

Consider This: Many theologians dismiss or downplay the judgment as somehow diminishing God’s grace, justification, and forgiveness. Why are God’s grace and forgiveness meaningless without the judgment?

II. The Manner and Timing of His Return *(Review Matthew 24 and Revelation 1:7 with your class.)*

There are three basic theological positions regarding the timing of Christ’s return.

The postmillennialists believe that 1,000 years of progress will transpire, leading to Christ’s return. During the nineteenth century, when technological advancement was widespread, many accepted this belief. Diminished expectations, caused largely by extensive warfare, have nearly scuttled this belief altogether.

The amillennialist does not believe that there is a literal 1,000 years but understands this as figurative language. Therefore, the timing of Christ’s coming with reference to the millennium is irrelevant to the amillennialist.

The final grouping, known as premillennialists, is divided into two subgroups—dispensationalists and historicists. The dispensationalists believe that God works differently with people during different time periods. From Calvary until the beginning of the great tribulation is one such period, labeled the church age. The secret rapture of the church happens at the conclusion of the church age, with Christ’s second coming happening seven years later at the conclusion of the seven-year tribulation (there are minor variations within this group regarding the exact sequence). Sinners have another chance to repent during this seven-year tribulation period.

The biblical inconsistencies of this position are too numerous to detail in this limited space, but doubtless some are already apparent. The biblical position is best expressed through historicist premillennial exegesis. This teaches that *Christ comes at the beginning of the millennium* (and after the tribulation or “time of trouble”) to redeem both living and deceased saints (through the first resurrection). The living sinners are destroyed by the

brightness of that coming. They then sleep, together with all the unrighteous of history, until the end of the millennium when the resurrection of the condemned will take place. After that second resurrection, they are ultimately destroyed.

The manner of Christ's return is mentioned in several places, clearly revealing its distinguishing characteristics. It is (1) public (*contrast "secret," Rev. 1:7, 1 Thess. 4:15–18*), (2) simultaneously worldwide (*contrast "localized," Matt. 24:5, 23–30*), (3) announced with earsplitting commotion (*contrast "secret," 1 Thess. 4:15–18, Matt. 24:31*), (4) literal and personal (*contrast "figurative," Acts 1:11, Luke 24:36–43*), (5) unexpected (*1 Thess. 5:2–6; Matt. 24:43, 44*), and (6) cataclysmic (*Dan. 2:32–35*). Regarding the manner and timing of Christ's return, God gives us ample information that we might believe but not such abundance that we take it for granted.

Consider This: Procrastination afflicts many people; what will many do should they believe that they have two chances to prepare for Christ's return as the dispensationalists teach? What is the danger of this teaching?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Information can motivate. Information can anesthetize. Will information cause movement or drowsiness?

In Matthew 24, Jesus answers the disciples' questions regarding the timing of His return. Having abundant information, will they benefit? Will they become watchful or sleepy?

With Matthew 25, Jesus offers three parables of preparation and watchfulness, templates of spiritual preparedness. Review these templates with the class: (1) ten bridesmaids (virgins), (2) three servants (parable of the talents), and (3) sheep versus goats. What principles might we glean from these parables that would help our preparation for Christ's return? What actions might express those principles through our lives? How can our class be ready to meet Jesus? (Breaking the class into smaller groups, with each group assigned one parable, would be advisable for larger classes.)

Activity: Open Bibles to Matthew 25. Discuss each parable, looking for principles that can be applied to our twenty-first-century circumstances. These real stories have applications well beyond their immediate situations. *Think metaphorically.*

- What is being said about kingdom living?
- What is being said about spiritual preparedness?

Analyze content.

- What did the protagonists do right?
- What did the antagonists do wrong?
- How might the antagonists have made better choices?

- What was the turning point that separated them from the protagonists?
- What changes needed to take place to produce happier outcomes?
- How do these principles apply to individual spirituality?
- Why are differences between protagonists and antagonists stated in terms of actions taken rather than thoughts contemplated?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Another school session is underway. Teachers are distributing syllabi and course outlines, stating expectations for various courses. Some students will schedule themselves accordingly, meeting expectations promptly. Others will party, procrastinate, and ultimately fail. Better students will prepare themselves for final examinations; others will dawdle, postpone, and delay. The school of life operates with similar principles. Passing the final examination signifies gaining everlasting life. Failure is self-explanatory. Cramming will not produce success. Gradual progress throughout their lifetimes will.

Activity: This week, prepare a photographic review of your life. Study your personal history through pictures. Create albums of pictures that retell your life's narrative. Classify pictures according to what in life the pictured activity prepared you for. What made certain events successful? What spiritual lessons about preparing for eternal life might you draw from these events?

Substitute Activity: If you are unable to make a photographic display, use your memory and imagination to review your life. Study your personal history through these mental pictures. Create mental "albums" that retell your life's narrative. Classify these narratives according to which life event the remembered activity prepared you for. What made certain events successful? What spiritual lessons about preparing for eternal life might you draw from these events?