

Date:

The second coming of Jesus

PRAY Lord, 'guide me into all truth' about your death, resurrection, ascension and second coming.

READ Acts 1:1–11

REFLECT

Have you ever watched a film that leaves you feeling there's definitely a sequel on the way? Perhaps the bad guy has been defeated but is still lurking out there somewhere. Or maybe the good guy has overcome his struggles and is now ready for a new adventure. In a sense, that's exactly what's happening in this passage. Luke, the writer of Acts, is setting up the greatest sequel of all time; he's preparing us for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

He does that by describing the dramatic conclusion to Jesus' life on earth. Luke had finished his Gospel account with a reference to the ascension of Jesus (Luke 24:50–53), but here he gives a fuller description of that unforgettable event. Note that he makes a point of reviewing the growing body of evidence for Jesus' resurrection (1:3–5). There were many, many eyewitnesses. But, for some, seeing is not always believing. Even after all the 'convincing proofs' (1:3), some still hadn't grasped the truth about Jesus. They couldn't get over their assumption that he was Israel's national hero (1:6).

We all bring assumptions to our consideration of Jesus. We get the truest picture of the essential Jesus by reading prayerfully what the Bible says about him. Earlier, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would help his followers understand the truth of the gospel after his death, resurrection and ascension (John 16:13). Now Jesus says the Holy Spirit will give his followers power for sharing that truth with a needy world (1:8).

But, as Jesus disappears into the clouds, it is the two angels who have the privilege of announcing the great sequel. Jesus 'will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' (1:11). Just imagine if it happened today!

APPLY If you knew Jesus was returning today or within the next 30 days, what difference would it make to your plans and priorities?

PRAY Lord Jesus, I can hardly imagine what it will be like when you return. All I know is that I'm so thankful that you've made a way for me to be with you for ever.

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PRAY Father, 'keep us in (your) grace, and guide us when perplexed; and free us from all ills, in this world and the next' (Martin Rinkart).

READ 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11

REFLECT

I read the newspaper almost every morning and I have a pattern for how I go about it. First I look at the front page, then sports, then news and editorials, then celebrity gossip. But there's one other thing I always check – the obituaries. For some reason I'm always curious about who's died. Admit it, you are too! People throughout the ages have been intrigued by the question: what happens to me after I die? That's exactly the question the believers in the first-century city of Thessalonica were pondering, and our reading today is Paul's answer to them.

He starts by reviewing the basic teaching of the gospel on this subject: those who believe that Jesus died and rose again can be certain that they'll enjoy eternal life with him (4:14,17). Paul then offers a succinct description of what Jesus' return will be like (4:16); it's a description that sounds very similar to others in the New Testament because it's based on the explanation Jesus himself gave (4:15; Matthew 24).

Paul then gives the Thessalonians two practical teachings to help them maintain a balanced understanding of the second coming:

Don't try to nail down dates and times (5:1). People are still distracted by that debate today, and the truth is only God knows when it will happen (Matthew 24:36). What we do know is that if we're not prepared, Jesus' return will take us by surprise; it could be like a 'thief in the night' (5:2).

Do spend time living for God in the present (5:4–8). This is good advice for us too. We are to put off the deeds of darkness and put on the lifestyle of those who live in the light, which sounds exactly like the advice Paul gave to believers (Ephesians 4:20–24).

The truth is, we'll always be curious about the second coming. But Paul reminds us that the most important thing to know is simply that we are ready for it.

APPLY What is your answer to the question: what will happen to you after you die?

PRAY Pray about the ways you could become more ready for the return of Jesus Christ.