

Date:

The second coming of Jesus

PRAY 'Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth' (Psalm 57:11).

READ 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

REFLECT

Recently I was given a book written by a Christian author I hadn't come across. The first thing I did was look at the back cover to see the list of his other books. I was surprised to learn that one of his previous bestsellers was described as 'the definitive book on the afterlife'. Really? I thought *that* book was written a long, long time ago. It's called the Bible. Our reading from it today gives us more puzzle pieces for the picture of the second coming we've been putting together.

We learn here that some people were sensationalising the second coming, or simply spreading misinformation about it and, as a result, many believers worried they had been left behind (2:2). Paul says, 'Don't let anyone deceive you' and he proceeds to remind them of the basics: when Jesus returns, his followers will be with him. In other words, when it happens, you'll know.

But Paul tells us about some 'trigger' events to the second coming. There will be some kind of rebellion and the appearance of 'the man of lawlessness' (2:3). What in the world is he talking about? In different places throughout the Bible we find references to a final showdown between God and Satan; that's the rebellion. Also, during that final conflict, a key instrument of Satan called 'the Antichrist' will oppose God and be defeated (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Revelation 19:19–21; 20:7–10). Although Paul doesn't take time in this letter to explain everything, that's clearly what he has in mind.

So what does all this mean for us today? Simply this: we shouldn't become 'unsettled or alarmed' (2:2) if world events seem out of control. The Bible teaches that God will let things get worse before he steps in to fix it once and for all. But remember: we've already peeked at the end of the story – Jesus is coming back and that's all we really need to know.

APPLY How does your understanding of the second coming of Jesus affect the way you react to world news today?

PRAY Lord, this world would be a really scary place if I wasn't sure that you were coming back someday. Please show me how I can serve you best until that day.

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PRAY Father, when it comes to the second coming, sometimes I feel like this: 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!' (Mark 9:24).

READ 2 Peter 3

REFLECT

I once saw a college production of *Waiting for Godot*, the famous play by Samuel Beckett about two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who spend the entire play anticipating the arrival of a person named Godot. They talk, they have conflict, they meet other characters, but in the end Godot never shows up. Although Beckett refused to explain the play, his message was clear: life is meaningless if we spend it waiting for something that never happens.

That's exactly how some first-century Christians were beginning to feel about the second coming of Christ. They were waiting, waiting, waiting... but nothing was happening. And, to make matters worse, sceptics were becoming more vocal with their taunts (3:4). Today, over 2,000 years later, Jesus still hasn't returned. Have Christians been misled into some meaningless play along with Vladimir and Estragon?

'Absolutely not!' is how Peter would answer, and he devotes the last section of this letter to explaining why:

The biblical response First, Peter points to the words of the prophets and the words of Jesus himself (3:2). Even though it's centuries later, we have access to both in the Bible. People have always doubted God's Word. So Peter reminds his readers that when God speaks, things happen – like at creation and at the great flood in the time of Noah (3:5,6). And, since God's Word says the second coming will happen, we can be sure it will (3:7).

The philosophical response God is outside of time, says Peter (3:8); he doesn't sit around marking his calendar as we do. As a result, what seems like a long delay is actually a big opportunity for more people to come to know him (3:15).

How then should we live as we wait for Jesus to return? We should focus on living 'holy and godly lives' (3:11). Then we'll be drawing closer and closer to Jesus while we wait for that day when we meet him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

APPLY Do you ever have doubts about the second coming of Jesus? What are they, and what helps you overcome them?

PRAY Lord, help me live a holy and godly life while I wait to meet you face to face someday.