

The Lord's coming

Part 1

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[00:00:00] This is a recording of the evening address given by Mr. Fred Pettman at Wildfell Hall, Catford, on the 2nd of March 1963. His subject, The Lord's Coming, positive, personal and peculiar to his own. Now will you kindly turn with me to John's Gospel, chapter 13, and we'll commence reading from verse 36, and then go on into the 14th chapter, reading the first three verses. John's Gospel, chapter 13, verse 36.

Simon Peter saith unto Jesus, Lord, whither goest thou?

[00:01:01] Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me hereafter. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.

Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice.

Let not your heart be troubled. Ye 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.

[00:02:02] 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 unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

And now turning over to the epistle, the first epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 4.

We'll read from verses 13 to 18. First of Thessalonians 4, verse 13.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye [00:03:03] sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not go before them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever [00:04:06] be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.

May God bless to us this reading from his word. It has been, I'm sure, apparent to you already from the hymns we have sung and the two scriptures we have read that my wonderful subject tonight, on which by God's help I want to speak to you a little, is the Lord's coming and especially the Lord's coming for his own. We received this afternoon some exhortation [00:05:01] as to our walk and our attitude, the kind of characteristics that should be seen in us here in the world. And that kind of teaching is very much needed. We are so apt to forget that which we should be. But tonight it is my privilege to give you another kind of teaching, objective teaching as it is, concerning the glorious hope that lies before us. The cheer and comfort of the pilgrim throughout the dark night. What a wonderful thing it is, isn't it, when the winter is past and the sun begins to shine again and the flowers begin to spring up and the time of the [00:06:01] singing of birds is come, as the scripture speaks of. We look forward to it, don't we, with great anticipation. And my friends, the hope of the Lord's coming is like that to the heart of the Christian. The Lord's coming is a very vast subject. There is, of course, firstly, the Lord's coming for his own, the precious promise that is for you and for me, beloved fellow Christian. And then, of course, there is the other stage of the Lord's coming, his own coming with his people, with his saints, to put the world right and to reign gloriously, when at last all wrongs shall [00:07:05] be righted, including his own wrong. For in that day he will be King of kings and Lord of lords. He will take his rightful place upon the throne of this world and reign gloriously. And then shall this earth know at last its true golden age. But it is not of that that I want to speak tonight. It is just the intimate, personal promise of the Lord Jesus that he is coming again for his own.

Such a simple thing that the heart of the simplest believer can grasp it. You will forgive me if I have told you this little incident before, but as some of you know, my boyhood's home was Ramsgate. [00:08:09] And often we used to see the donkeys being driven along the beach and taking the children for rides in the summertime. Well, my father was used, I think I'm right in saying, used to the conversion of one of the donkey men. An old man who hadn't very much learning, but he grasped the fact of the Lord's coming. And you will smile and you may smile at this. He used to tell my father that he always, when he went up to the little attic that was his bedroom, he always left the curtain drawn to the little window that looked out to the sky because he wanted to catch the first sight of [00:09:07] the Lord's coming. You may smile at the old man's simplicity, but I tell you that is a very beautiful thing. Would that our own hearts were so alive to the wonder of this promise as that old man was. I think that sometimes we have somewhat got used to this truth. I remember in my very young days, as a young brother in fellowship, there was a Scotch brother in the meeting where I was, some of you here will know to whom I refer, and he told me one day that when first he grasped the truth of the Lord's personal coming for his church, it was almost like a second conversion [00:10:05] to him. His heart was filled with joy. My friends, we sometimes lose the freshness of this. And yet I do think this, that when we come back to the simple scriptures, as we have tonight, that the bright hope of the Lord's coming burns before us again, and our hearts are cheerful, our hearts are glad. Now I want to speak of this in three ways tonight. The Lord's coming is positive. The Lord's coming is personal. And then thirdly, the Lord's coming is peculiar to his people, his own.

[00:11:05] A brother this afternoon, if I mistake not, gave us three peas in one part of his address on which to hang our thoughts. Well I'm giving you three tonight. The Lord's coming positive, personal, and then peculiar to his own. By God's grace I want just to speak of those in turn for a little while. The Lord's coming positive. We read in John's Gospel of how the disciples present with the Lord were questioning him. And among them is Simon Peter. And Simon Peter says, Lord where are [00:12:04] you going? And the Lord says, well where I'm going you can't follow me now. You will follow me hereafter but not now. And the warm-hearted Simon Peter, full of readiness, out of the love for his master, says, well Lord I'll go with you to death. And he meant it. I've not the slightest doubt about

that. But like every one of us here, Simon Peter had to learn the weakness of his own flesh. And the Lord says to him these words, Simon before the cock crows, you'll deny me thrice. I don't think Simon Peter believed the Lord. Yet it was true. But the Lord knew. He saw into the future, [00:13:10] even then he heard the oaths and the curses of this prominent disciple of his, when in the weakness of his flesh, the weakness of his nature, he denied his Lord. And yet, in the presence of that knowledge, after that remark of Peter's, our Lord says to him this, with the other disciples, let not your heart be troubled. I know all about you. I know what you'll be and what you'll do, but let not your heart be troubled. Ye trust in God, trust also in me. And then to those disciples, [00:14:03] erring as they were, just like you and me, to those disciples he gives this wonderful positive promise when he says, I will come again and receive you unto myself. I will come again.

It's as positive a promise as you could possibly have, isn't it? It's always been an amazing thing to me, rightly or wrongly, that the Christian Church throughout the years, the centuries, seemed to misunderstand our Lord's words and to interpret them as a kind of experience arising out of death. But that was the case. The hope of the Lord's coming, in the simple, beautiful way in which we are talking of it tonight, was lost. It was not known or preached in the Reformation. [00:15:07] They preached the wonderful truth of justification by faith, but they never grasped the truth of the Lord's coming. Even later on in the evangelical revival in England, the truth of the Lord's coming for his own was not understood, not preached. And it was left to those who about 130 years ago again looked into the Word of God and accepted simply from that Word the Lord's own simple promise and believed it. And it was a wonderful privilege to be able to pass that on. And today it is talked of and known throughout Christendom, the Lord's coming in a positive way. [00:16:07] I will come again. If you are interested in the addresses to the seven churches, as I'm sure you must be, in the second and third of Revelation, and if you will accept the teaching that those seven addresses to seven churches are typical of the church of all ages, going through its successive stages, you will find a very interesting thing. And that is that in, whereas in the first three addresses, speaking of the earlier ages of the church's dispensation, the church's history, [00:17:05] there is no mention by the Lord in his addresses of his coming again. In the last four, which I believe to be concurrent, in these last days of the church's history, in the last four, there is in each one a reference to his coming. As he addresses the church at Thyatira, he says, Hold fast that which thou hast, hold fast till I come. And in the dark night, when the true believers were persecuted for their faith's sake, they could look to the promise and take heart for their Lord was coming again. And then in the address to the church at Sardis, our Lord says, I will come. There [00:18:09] it's rather a warning. He says, I will come unto thee as a thief. That is to say, he was warning those who were settling down, having a name to live, but in fact were dead. He warns them that he is coming, but still there's the reference to his coming. The dawn is beginning to break as it were. And then in the address to Philadelphia, the last but one, he says a further thing. Not this time I come, I'm coming again, I come quickly. Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. He says he's coming quickly. My friends, does that thrill your soul to know that the Lord [00:19:06] is coming quickly? Indeed it should. I must just in passing, in fairness, remind you of what the Lord says there. He says, I'm coming quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast. And dear friends, today, above all other days in the Christian history, there is the temptation to give up, and not to hold fast that which we have. It's going on everywhere in Christendom today, the giving up of the truth of God. Our Lord says, hold fast that which thou hast, I'm coming quickly. And then lastly, in the evening, the address to the Church of the Laodiceans. Our Lord says he's [00:20:01] coming again. You say, I haven't quite seen that. Well, I suggest this for your consideration. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him and he with me. I know that that is very often referred to the Lord's own approach to the soul, when the soul is faithful to him. But I do believe personally that that also includes a promise of his coming. It will be a

wonderful day, when to those who are faithful, to those who have set their trust in him, and who are washed by the blood of Christ, as distinct from those who have never been converted, and who are yet taking the place of nominal Christians. Our Lord Jesus says, I will come [00:21:01] in and will sup with him and he with me. It'll be a wonderful thing, when that happens. Almost the last word in the Bible is a promise. In Revelation 22 verse 7, the Lord says, Behold I come quickly. Three times in that last chapter of the Bible, his coming again is mentioned. Behold I come quickly, and again in verse 12. Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me. Isn't that a wonderful thing? And then lastly, surely I come quickly. As though to assure our hearts, in the most positive way possible, that he is coming, and coming quickly. Now dear friends, has your soul relaxed itself in the precious, beautiful promise of the Lord's [00:22:01] coming? Do you think of it? Does it mean anything to you? Alas, there are some who have such plans and purposes, that perhaps it would be an inconvenient thing, if the Lord did come. Oh dear friends, we ought to hold our material things, even our plans and purposes in this world, with a very light hand, and be ready to leave them at a moment's notice, when he comes again. That is the right attitude for the Christian. And then he says, Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me. Oh dear friends, his reward, that's going to be a wonderful thing. There are some people who say, well I love him, I don't think about the rewards. Don't you? He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And for my own part, [00:23:04] and I know that you echo this with me tonight, it'll be a wonderful thing to hear his own blessed voice say to us, well done, good and faithful servant. We've just laid to rest, in connection with our own meeting, a sister who passed away very suddenly. She never was able to even take a Sunday school class. She was very nervous. But we all miss her. She used to come and when she listened to the preaching, or even in the Bible reading, she would always look as though she was enjoying it. And in truth she was. And we miss her. You may say, well she never did anything much, did she? Nay dear friends, perhaps not in your eyes and mine. But in our Lord's eyes, I feel [00:24:04] sure of this, that long ere this, she has received his well done, good and faithful servant. If we do what we can, and that's what our Lord said about one woman, didn't he? She has done what she could, that reward will be there. What will that be reward to you? Or may I fervently hope for me too?

Yes, it's a positive promise. I will come again. Paul bears witness to this when he says, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words, he says. I know that we read them very often at the burial service. [00:25:04] We comfort those who are mourning, and we think it well to do so, and we shall still continue to do it. But the Apostle wants us all to comfort each other with these words, the Lord's own positive promise for his own. Peter refers to it in his epistle, his first epistle. John refers to it, he says, it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when it does appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is, implying the Lord's own coming. And then Jude refers to it, he says another wonderful thing, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints. He's already come to take them away, and he'll come with them in that wonderful day. Now the second point, [00:26:04] the Lord's coming is personal. The Lord says, I will come again. He doesn't delegate an angel to do it. He doesn't delegate even the high archangel. He says, I will come again. Bear in mind for a moment, the glory in which he is today. He rose triumphant from the grave, and he went back to heavenly glory, and he's seated today at the right hand of the majesty on high, son of God, and son of man. Gloriously triumphant, and yet he says, I'm coming personally. I will come again. Don't you think that that shows the value he puts upon his own beloved ones in this day? You and I may not [00:27:03] be much to look at, I don't know. We may not be much, we may be sometimes awkward to live with. It's often the case, isn't it? There are many curious things about us, but we're his. He gave himself for us. He bought us with his blood, and he's coming personally to meet us in the air. That's what he thinks of

us. Yes, he thought that way of a Simon Peter whom he knew would deny him and betray and deny him. He knew that about Simon Peter, and yet he says, let not your heart be troubled. I'm coming again, and I'll receive you to myself. And to James and John whose wrong thinking [00:28:03] led them to great presumption, they say, grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand and the other on thy left hand, in the glory. Yes, for James and John, he's coming again. And for Thomas, so subject to doubts, he's coming again. And then for all the disciples who sometimes disputed among themselves alas, who should be the greatest? He's coming again. I've quoted these four instances as typical of the kind of people we are so often. And the more you know of yourself, my beloved brother and sister, the more you know that that's true, isn't it? You regret it? You wish it were not so, but it is. Well, the Lord loves you, and he's coming for you, himself, personally. And this [00:29:08] shows the intensity of his love for his own. Now that brings me to the last point, and that is, the Lord's coming is peculiar to his own. The Lord's words here in the 13th chapter and 14th chapter of John are addressed to his disciples. And his coming is peculiar to his own.

Formerly, throughout the generations, there was a kind of feeling that there would be a general resurrection of the dead, and that all should stand before God and be judged. But that is not exactly the truth of Scripture. Scripture says that the Lord is coming for his own, first of all. [00:30:05] Then he's coming with his own to reign over the world. And the dead in Christ, as well as those that are alive and remain in this first stage of his coming, they will be caught up to be with him, in the air. A secret coming, personal and intimate between himself and his own. And then afterwards, at the end of the millennium, there will be the resurrection of the wicked dead, when they shall stand before the great white throne. That is the scriptural teaching about the coming of the Lord. The Lord's coming, then, is peculiar to his own. It's the dead in Christ that shall rise first. Did you notice that? And by implication, we who remain and are alive, and it may be, dear friends, [00:31:03] that all of us here will be among those who are alive and remain, for he is coming very quickly. By implication also, we who are alive and remain are those who are in Christ. I haven't time to talk about that wonderful phrase, in Christ. It is a wonderful thing to be in Christ, secure and safe. Absolutely, utterly, what a place of rest, isn't it, to be in Christ. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. And then when he addresses his own, he says, Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. The unbeliever has nothing to hold fast. He has nothing at all. The first thing he must do is to come as a poor guilty sinner to the one against whom he has sinned and receive forgiveness through the death of Christ upon the cross. [00:32:06] But you know the most beautiful figure of all, I think, when we think about the Lord's coming, is that of Christ the Bridegroom coming for his Church, the Bride. It is a scriptural figure.

And the Holy Spirit has chosen it, the Bridegroom coming for his Church, the Bride. It is, of course, an Eastern figure, isn't it? In the parable of the virgins, you'll remember that the background of that parable is that the Bridegroom was coming to fetch his Bride. And the virgins, the ten virgins, were bidden to go out and to meet him, as was the custom. Of course, we preach the Gospel from that, don't we? And rightly so. And we warn those who listen to us, if they are not the Lord's, [00:33:05] we warn them that they must be, they ought to be ready when the Bridegroom comes. And we tell them, see that there is oil in your lamps. The oil is a figure of the Holy Spirit. And no one who is dead in trespasses and sins can receive the Holy Spirit. It's only when God gives you new life that you can receive the Holy Spirit. And so we use that parable, quite rightly, to preach the Gospel. But it's an Eastern figure, and the Bridegroom literally comes to claim his Bride. Now no earthly Bridegroom ever loved his Bride like Christ loves the Church. My wife and I were present this afternoon at a wedding. We heard again that wonderful scripture in Ephesians, spoken from, Christ also loved the Church. And no earthly Bridegroom, as I say, ever loved his Bride [00:34:09] like Christ loves the

Church. He gave himself in death for her, to start with. She could never have become his, she could never have been his, unless he had shed his own precious blood upon the cross. And then he gives himself in present service. That scripture says so. He cleanses his Church by the washing of water, by the Word. And he does it in so many ways, by the ministry of those whom he sends forth, by his own precious Word in direct reading, and in many another way. But it's himself who does it, giving himself in present service for her on high. And then at the end he will give [00:35:01] himself in that hour when he presents her to himself, a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Oh you say, what a contrast, isn't it? Well indeed it is. But you see, when God purposes, his purposes never fail. And they're coming to pass. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to, reverently speaking, see this thing through. He gave himself in death, his present service on high. And then the day comes when he will present his Church to himself, a glorious Church. The figurative language of the Song of Solomon sets this forth, you know, what Christ thinks of his own, his Church. I know that the first setting of that book is the love of Jehovah [00:36:01] for his spouse Israel. That is perfectly true. But I'm quite sure of this, that the Holy Spirit had a deeper meaning than that. And the language that we read of there is truly beautiful. And I'm sure sets forth Christ's love for his Church. Let us listen to it just for a moment. Oh my dove, he says, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs. Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely. That's what Christ thinks of his Church. Your voice or mine may not be very beautiful. Sometimes we say, well I can't sing, you know. I haven't got any voice for it. Well the Lord doesn't think so. He loves to hear your voice, dear friend. He loves to hear even my voice. We are precious to him. And now before I close, just a word or two about the Church's response [00:37:09] to the love of her bridegroom. What emotion does this excite in your heart and mine, beloved brother and sister? Oh you say to me, well it'll be an end of toil, won't it? Yes, it'll be an end of toil. You toil on in your life of witness and service for the Lord. And it isn't easy, is it? There's a hymn we used to sing sometimes when I was young. I feel like singing all the time. Well it's a beautiful thing to be able to say that. We do sing when we remember that our sins are washed away. But you know, I've often had to think since, I don't feel like singing all the time because there are the difficulties and the responsibilities. And you know, dear friends, forgive a personal word, [00:38:02] as we grow older amongst the saints of God, people expect very much more of us. And they are ready to put more of the burdens upon us. And we often feel at our wits end to know what to do. We feel we haven't wisdom for these things. And we feel it very much. Yes, it'll be an end of toil in that day when the Lord comes. I don't say that it's wrong to think of that. And then it'll be an end of sadness, won't it? How much there is of sadness around us here. We pass along and we cannot but be sensitive to what we see around us. What alas comes into our own circumstances very often, what comes into our meetings, our gatherings, there's sadness. Well, it'll be an end of sadness, no more sadness. And then it'll be an end of division and misunderstanding. Alas, [00:39:07] how much of that there is, isn't there? Well, the Lord is coming and he's going to put all that right. You say, you know, these are very simple things you're telling us tonight. They are, dear friends. And I'm not sure that I can do anything else. But if they cheer your heart and comfort your heart as they do mine, well then my ministry will not have been in vain. Yes, an end of division and misunderstanding. There are some things that you can't deal with today. They're too deep, they're too difficult. But he'll deal with them. And in that wonderful day when he comes, it'll be an end of all that. And then it'll be an end of sin and failure, won't it? How often have you longed to be free from the sin which does so easily beset you? No, the Lord is coming and [00:40:02] you'll be free of that. And failure too. Everything will be perfect in that day. And it'll be the positive realization of all our hopes, won't it? I love to think, you know, of the psalmist. When he spoke of this realization of all our hopes. In that day we shall see his face. What does David say? He says in Psalm 17 verse 15, As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. Ah dear friends, a wonderful day to see his face.

We may be glad to see an end of toil and of sadness, of division and misunderstanding and sin and failure. But the most wonderful thing of all will be that we shall see his face in that [00:41:05] day. Have you ever thought of what it'll be like? I've often thought of that blind man, blind Bartimaeus, who was there by the wayside. And he comes to the Lord and the Lord says, What shall I do for you? He says, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And the first one upon whom he gazed was his Lord. Well, we've seen him often by faith, but we've never seen him with these natural eyes. We shall see his face in that day. Again, you know in the language of the Song of Solomon, the bride expresses her love for the bridegroom. She says this, My beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand. He is altogether lovely. Is that what you think of Christ? Yes, you say, of course I do. That's what I think of him. The church's response to her [00:42:05] Lord. By the way, have you ever noticed in the Song of Solomon the progression of her love and affection? How can I put it? She grows more intelligent. She grows deeper in her appreciation of their relationship. In chapter 2 she says, My beloved is mine and I am his. Then in chapter 6 verse 3 she says something else. She says, I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. She reverses it, you see. I am my beloved's. That's the precious thing to her there. And then lastly, in chapter 7 verse 10 she says, I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me. I was going to say [00:43:06] she leaves herself out entirely. In one sense she does. And it's her Lord's appreciation of her that she values. And now in conclusion, I want just to draw an Old Testament type, then I'm finished. You remember how in the purposes of God, Abraham purposed that his son Isaac should have a bride. He was very particular about this because the line of promise was in question. And one told him one day about some of the descendants of Shem that were living far away. And Abraham, a type of God the Father who purposes all things, he sends his servant, a type of the Holy Spirit, the one who loves to carry out the purposes of God in human hearts and in so many ways. He sends [00:44:14] his servant to fetch a bride for Isaac. Isaac is a type of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Read that wonderful story. Look at it that way and you'll find blessing in it. And the servant leaves and he goes many, many weeks journey across the deserts. And although Abraham doesn't designate who the bride shall be, he leaves the choice to God. A very wonderful thing to do, you know. The servant comes and it says, Behold, Rebekah came forth, God's choice. And the first thing that the servant does is to lift up his heart and his voice and give God thanks. And then he brings [00:45:12] her across the desert and the cavalcade of camels move off from her home. She's willing to leave her home, her father's house, and they go across the desert. And there comes a day when Isaac went out to Eventide. It's Eventide in the history of the church now. We're almost at the end of the day. Isaac goes out at Eventide to meditate in the field. I wonder what he was meditating about. I think he was thinking about the bride.