

# **The End Times**

*Encouragements and Challenges from Bible Prophecy*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



**MYRTLEFIELD**  
HOUSE

[www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

## Contents

1	<a href="#">Christ's Personal Return</a>	3
2	<a href="#">The Coming United Nations</a>	14
3	<a href="#">The End of Religion</a>	27
4	<a href="#">World Without End?</a>	39
	<a href="#">About the Author</a>	51

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2020

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. You may not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Dr Gooding occasionally uses his own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of four talks given by David Gooding at Cargans Orange Hall, Tandragee, Co Armagh N. Ireland) in 1961.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust,  
PO Box 2216  
Belfast, N Ireland  
BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)  
e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

Myrtlefield catalogue no: prp.005/bh

## Christ's Personal Return

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, first of all let me thank you for the warmth and sincerity of your welcome here this evening. I think it fitting that we should begin our studies with a quotation from the holy Scriptures.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb 9:27-28)

I am well aware that the topics upon which we embark this evening are held in the gravest suspicion in many quarters. I do not mean merely that people who are not Christians, and do not receive the word of God, have no faith in such topics as these. That is to be expected, for if a person does not believe in God and does not accept the inspiration of this book, then we cannot expect him or her to have any faith in the prophecies which are described in the Bible. But I mean that prophetic subjects have been widely held in the gravest suspicion among genuinely Christian people. The reason for that is not hard to find and it is quite easy to understand.

I suppose of all subjects prophecy easily lends itself to misrepresentation. None of us is very much impressed by the prophecy monger; and from the very beginning of the world there has been a race of people, among the superstitious of mankind, who have seized upon prophecies and sayings of seers, witches and mediums, and have spread them abroad with all the art of the soapbox preacher. Those whose taste is for sober exposition of God's holy word have very often been disgusted by such things.

And then again it has been a curious trait in humankind, particularly among the more superstitious, that every earthquake, every famine, every tornado has been heralded as a sign that the end of the world is about to approach. Of course, when these things have passed by and the end of the world has not come, people have understandably lost their faith in such empty predictions.

So it has been with people who have dared, in flat contradiction of the warning of our Lord Jesus, to fix dates on which he was supposed to return again, or the earth was to come to its end. Those dates likewise have gone by, and have but caused the laughter and the mockery of people who are unsympathetic to the gospel.

Not to pile on the difficulties too much, it is the fact that those who read their Bibles find that prophetic things so often are full of strange symbols that are difficult to understand. It is seen to many that the interpretation of prophecy is bound up with such uncertainty and irresponsibility, that it is anybody's guess. Anybody with a fertile imagination might predict

all sorts of things and build all sorts of schemes, professedly on holy writ, but so fanciful and far-fetched that they command the belief of very few people.

In consequence, as I say, even Christian people have turned away from the study of prophecy with the gravest of suspicions, and sometimes not a little disgust. They have regarded it at best as a luxury to be indulged in by very few people; but certainly something that is not really necessary and vital to our Christian faith. They have looked askance on lectures and on lecturers, to be sure, who have indulged in speaking on these subjects.

And yet for all that, to dismiss prophecy from our notice is both extremely unfortunate, and really, when we think upon it, a completely impossible thing to do for anybody who believes that this Bible is, in fact, the word of God. I say it is unfortunate, for in this advanced age, when men are beginning to be perplexed and fearful about the future, to dismiss prophecy is to rob all Christian people of that glorious hope that will help to keep them sane and serviceable in this world.

I was travelling up from London to Heysham on Tuesday evening, and to while away the time on British Railways I spent two shillings and six pence and bought myself Bertrand Russell's<sup>1</sup> recent Pelican, *Has mankind a future?* While we may not all agree with Bertrand Russell's political outlook and his activities, certainly he has done a good service in reminding us of this extreme peril that now overhangs humankind. He would have us remember that, even as we sit here, great radar screens in America are screening Russia, waiting for the slightest indication that Russian bombers are setting off or Russian rockets have been launched, to land hideous atomic bombs on the USA. At the same time, radar screens in Russia are screening the West for that very same purpose.

It only requires that a flock of geese should come across the radar screens and be mistaken for approaching enemy aircraft, and it is quite conceivable that America would let go a torrent of atomic bombs, and Russia would immediately reply by a similar torrent. In those circumstances, it is almost certainly true that no living person would survive in the British Isles.

'It is quite possible', says Bertrand Russell, 'that somebody somewhere has already invented and produced the machine that, being set going, would end human existence but for a few mangled forms.'

### **Prophecy is part of God's word**

In that kind of a situation it is an extremely unfortunate thing for Christians to neglect what God has told them plainly for their comfort and encouragement regarding the future. With the world around us gripped in fear, at least those of us who care to think that we who know our God and know our Bibles have no need to be unduly alarmed. And the more we grasp the solid things that God himself has told us for our encouragement, the stronger we shall be and the more equipped to help our fellow men and women. But I say more: to dismiss

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Arthur William Russell (1872-1970) was a British philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, writer, social critic, political activist and Nobel laureate.

prophecy from our knowledge is to do an impossible thing for anyone who really accepts this Bible as the word of God.

I have no time now to start to prove to you that the Bible is the word of God; I am going to suppose that. When we do in fact open this Bible we find that about three-fifths of it is given over to prophecy. We can no more dismiss prophecy from our minds than we can dismiss the whole Bible from our minds. The majority of the Bible is prophecy.

### **The Lord's return is an integral part of the Christian gospel**

The things that relate to our Lord's personal return are so bound up with the fundamental facts of Christianity that we cannot possibly dismiss them, unless we are prepared to completely dismiss Christianity, for they are inextricably linked. Our Lord's personal return and all the events that are related to it are an integral part of the Christian gospel. And what is more, they are told in such simple and direct language that if only we would accept the words to mean what they say, we should have no more doubt about these facts than we have about the primary historic facts of our faith.

Let me cite some examples of the way the New Testament talks about the personal return of our Lord Jesus, so that I might make it clear to you that, while there may be some things that are obscure and difficult to interpret in the prophecies of the Bible, when it comes to the main details they are as clear as anyone could possibly desire.

Our Lord Jesus himself told his apostles before he left them, in plain straightforward language, 'if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also' (John 14:3) Words of one or two syllables: 'If I go away, I will come again.'

And what he told his disciples privately, he told his judges publicly. You will remember that they brought him before the priestly court and challenged him openly, "'Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'" Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven"' (Matt 26:63-64).

I remind you of the circumstances. He was being tried for his life, and to confess that he was the Christ was for him to tread perilously on the brink of condemnation and death. For him to claim that he would sit at the right hand of God, or that one day he would come in the clouds of heaven—the insignia of divine majesty—was to court death. And yet, knowing what these remarks would cost him, facing death, he nevertheless clearly said that one day he would be seen coming on the clouds of heaven.

These are not isolated proof texts. We shall find remarks like these threading throughout the whole of the New Testament.

We are told that when the apostles watched our Lord ascend from earth to heaven, there stood by them two men (angels) in white robes, who said, 'This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11). He went bodily; he went visibly. Said the angels, 'he will come in the same way as you saw him go'.

And what the angels said, so did the Christian theologians, inspired by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. I quote the example that I read at the beginning. The writer to the

Hebrews informs us, 'And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but *to save* those who are eagerly waiting for him' (Heb 9:27–28). It will not then be a case of giving himself as a sacrifice for sin; it will be a matter of his personal return for the *salvation* of those who are looking for him. That is to say, for their *bodily* salvation: he will remove his people bodily to heaven. 'He is coming', said the theologian, 'a second time, to those that wait for him, for salvation.'

It is an integral part of the Christian message. If you deny that our Lord is coming again, then, for the same reason, you will deny that he came the first time. For the verse says the two things hang together: 'And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, *having been offered once* to bear the sins of many, *will appear a second time* ...'

This was not only what the theologians wrote. As the Christian evangelists travelled around the Roman world, you will find that they too preached this fact as part of their gospel message. The youngest of their converts knew clearly from the very beginning that the personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ was an integral part of the gospel message. So much so that when the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to people at Thessalonica, reminding them of their conversion, he stated it in these terms: 'Now, look, when you were converted this is what happened':

You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, *and to wait for his Son from heaven*, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess 1:9–10)

This was no luxury; no obscure thing that only the deep theologians of the Christian church knew anything about. The various beginners, the newest converts, knew and rejoiced in it. In fact, this was an integral part in the searching of heart that brought them eventually to trust the Saviour and take their stand as Christians. They were asked to believe that this Jesus of Nazareth, who for their sakes was crucified upon a cross and whom God raised from the dead, was coming again. He was coming personally to deliver them from all those tides of divine wrath and judgment that shall bring this age in which we live to a close.

They knew it from the start, and it would be well for us Christians here in 1961 if we had these focal points of our salvation clear from the very start too. We have turned to God from idols, not only to serve God while we live here on earth, but 'to wait for his Son from heaven' to complete for us the salvation which he has begun.

#### *How the early Christians expressed their belief in the Lord's return*

This sense of our Lord's personal return and the living expectancy of it was fostered week by week as those early Christians gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Right to this very present, wherever the Lord's Supper is truly celebrated—whatever name is given to that institution by various Christian bodies—it is calculated to foster this great expectancy. We are told that we are to break the bread and drink the wine in memory of Christ: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup', said the inspired apostle, 'you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*' (1 Cor 11:26).

It was such a living expectancy, such a deep and powerful factor in the lives of early Christians, that very often when they ended their correspondence to one another they signed themselves in the usual manner, and added in Aramaic, '*Maranatha*' — 'The Lord is coming'.

I'm delighted to see that what the early Christians did, somebody has done it in the Presbyterian church on University Road in Belfast. You will find those very same words written across the porch of the church in Greek, not in Aramaic, 'Until he come'. A living testimony in our own day that our Lord is personally coming again.

I do beg of you, my dear people, to notice that this is a fact stated clearly and simply in the most direct language. Do not be beguiled of your hope and comfort, or blinded from the warning, whichever it may be. The words in which it is stated are as simple as the words of John 3:16, that glorious verse of gospel truth upon which many of us rested our faith when we first came to the Saviour: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'

#### *Prophecy is not all fulfilled simultaneously*

Just as the statement that our Lord is coming is clear and indisputable, so are the happenings that shall attend that great event stated in clear and precise language. At least, the major events are stated clearly. There are some things which the wisdom of God has left shrouded in symbol; perhaps that they might be evident to the people living at that time, who shall need special comfort. There are indeed many events related to the coming again of our Lord Jesus which some people find exceedingly difficult to piece together. That is understandable enough. Our Lord's first coming to earth did not take place in a pinpoint of time; it was an extended period.

We shall be helped if we observe how the Old Testament prophesied his first coming. If we had been living in those far off days before Jesus Christ came the first time, and had we been reading our Bibles that prophesied of his coming, we might have been very perplexed. Some prophecies talked of his birth: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son' (Isa 7:14). And some talked of his entry into Jerusalem, 'mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey' and of the welcome he would be given, 'Hosanna in the highest!' (Zech 9:9, fulfilled in Matt 21:9). Others talked about rejection, suffering and death.

With their many varieties, if anybody had expected all those prophecies to be fulfilled at one particular moment, it would be very difficult to see how they could possibly have happened simultaneously. Doubtless it will be so when our Lord comes again. Hundreds of statements of Scripture converge upon that period — it will be a period rather than a point.

So this evening my task is not so much to discuss with you the many details and sort them out within their various stages in the divine calendar; I am merely concerned to make the point that our Lord is, in fact, coming again.

### **There will be two major impacts of his coming**

1. *The first impact of his coming will be for people who are Christians and what will happen to them at the moment when our Lord appears.* I propose to read to you the words of holy Scripture, lest you should think that I am emotional and excited, and painting glowing, but imaginary, scenes in the future.

The inspired Apostle Paul tells us this foundational hope for Christians. These are the calm, true sayings of God:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13–18)

Those magnificent words need no embroidery from me, but let me repeat them: ‘For the Lord himself will descend from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will, together with them, be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with him.’

This is a foundational hope for Christians; their standby in those sorrowful moments when they commit the last remains of their loved ones to the dust. We do not sorrow as those who have no hope. We do sorrow—we should be inhuman if we didn’t, but we do not sorrow with that blank, dark despair of those that have no hope. We believe, because God has said it, that our Lord is coming. One day he shall speak the voice personally that shall call up from the grave every Christian that has departed, and shall take up, together with them, all living Christians who have survived until his coming. The Apostle Paul also told us that in the moment of our Lord’s coming—which will take place for this particular purpose in a split second—the dead shall be raised incorruptible and the living people shall be changed, no longer subject to death (see 1 Cor 15:50–53).

Will you allow me to point out to you that if this is true, then it is the most wonderful news that human ears ever heard? Perhaps its very wonder holds you back from daring to believe it fully. This is such a ‘dream come true’, yet the biggest and best of all human longings is stated here not as a dream, but as the positive, sure saying of God. Perhaps some of us feel it is almost too good to be true. But this is not an isolated thing; it is the calm, considered statement of all the New Testament that the Lord is coming. And I pause to exhort all of us who are Christians, right here and now to rejoice in heart and to give thanks warmly to God.

We do not sorrow as those that have no hope. This is *evolution* true and good. There was, first of all, a *natural* body, but there shall just as certainly be a *spiritual* body. Our natural bodies, as they are sown in the grave, are sown in dishonour, in corruption, in weakness; but they shall be raised in glory (vv. 42–44). Or, if we are alive when the Lord comes, they shall be changed and made immortal (vv. 51–52).

2. *The second major impact of our Lord’s return will be for those who reject the gospel.* The Bible paints this with equal clarity and equal certainty as it does the glowing picture for all who trust the Saviour. For those who reject the gospel, his appearing will mean judgment and perdition. I



realize, ladies and gentlemen, that these are hard words. But we should be mere sentimentalists, illogical, and guilty of putting our heads into the sand, if we accepted with joy the gladness of our Lord's return for Christians, and hid our eyes from the equally plain statement that our Lord's return will mean perdition for many.

Writing to Christians, the Apostle Paul said:

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. (1 Thess 5:1-4)

Again, these are not isolated remarks in Scripture. Our Lord spoke more of this than anything else.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:26-27)

It was the tender-hearted Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who died for us on the cross, who told us plainly and bluntly that he shall come when men are not thinking and shall find many unprepared. His coming will mean that they perish.

*Are we to take these statements literally?*

But somebody will object to me and say, 'But all these statements in the Bible are surely to be interpreted in another fashion; they are not meant to be interpreted as literally as you have interpreted them.'

So then, you would make them more difficult, would you?

You say, 'Surely we're not to think of our Lord literally and bodily coming out of heaven, are we? Surely the Bible doesn't mean that. Are we really to think literally of people coming up through the graves and being literally raised from the dead? Are we to think of people going up bodily from earth—living people being changed and taken up bodily? Surely that cannot be taken literally?'

But then I ask you, 'why not?' What grounds have you to say that this is not literal? It is a canon of interpreting holy Scripture that where the literal meaning makes sense, no other meaning need be sought for. Moreover, we have the example of Old Testament prophecies that prophesied his first coming. They prophesied he would be born of a virgin, and he was literally born of a virgin. They prophesied that he would be rejected and crucified, and he was rejected and crucified.

All those Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled *literally*. There is no reason to think that the prophecies that relate to his second coming are anything but literal. But more than that, we have the word of God upon this matter: 'This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11). That settles it once and for all: he went literally. After his resurrection men handled him and saw that he

was not an empty spirit, he had flesh and bone: they saw that he was human (Luke 24:39; 1 John 1:1). He was seen to go literally, and the Bible is explicit: he will come in the same way as he was seen to go.

Somebody says, 'But surely our Lord comes again when we die. Isn't that what the verses mean? He "comes again" when he comes to each deathbed and takes his believing child safely to heaven.'

Well, I wouldn't like to deny that our Lord accompanies people to heaven. Certainly he said: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death' (John 8:51). But that is not what these words mean. It is impossible to make them mean this, for we are explicitly told that 'the dead shall be raised'; and *at the same time* as they are raised living people shall be 'caught up *together with them*'. That has never happened at any deathbed yet that I heard of—it has never yet happened at all.

That is your answer to people who come knocking on your door, trying to persuade you that the resurrection is already past and Jesus Christ has already come again and you have no chance now of entering heaven. I do not hesitate to say that this is wicked nonsense. For, when the Bible talks of our Lord's coming again, it says clearly that all the dead in Christ shall be raised at once, 'in a moment'; and the living shall be caught up 'together with them'. It is manifestly not talking of a Christian deathbed. It hasn't happened yet; but it will happen.

*Is this not escapism?*

And you will say, 'But doesn't all this hope of our Lord coming again lead in the direction of escapism? People who do not have the nerve to face life here comfort themselves with dreams of pleasure later on. Wouldn't it make us unfit for life if we really believed that Jesus Christ was coming again?'

Well, certainly I must confess to you that some of the early Christians seem to have got the thing the wrong way round. Because they believed that Christ was coming again, they left off their daily work and said, 'Why bother to work if Christ is coming again?' (see 2 Thess 2:1–3; 3:11). I have known men and women in modern times to take a similar attitude. Instead of getting on with their work and living life to the full as they ought to live, they have become escapist and crept into a corner. They go through life in a slovenly kind of a fashion: 'What does it matter how we live here, because Christ is coming again? It's all so very temporary that we needn't really bother.'

The Bible itself is loud in its condemnation of such attitudes, but to have a hope in the future is not escapism. People say that we ought to live in the present and not bother about the future, but that is evident nonsense. You can't live in the present without having regard to the past and the future. Have you ever considered what a tiny, tiny fraction the *present* is? When is *now*? Why, by the time I've got the word out of my mouth, that 'now' has past and gone for ever. You can't live in the present; it isn't big enough to live in. Every tick of the clock is bringing the future at you, and it wouldn't make sense to live in the present.

I wouldn't like a holiday that lived in the present. What would you think of a person who took no account of how he was going to plan his holiday? He had no idea where he was going, or what he was going to do. He just got up in the morning and never had any thoughts about the present. Would he not go through the day just doing nothing?

You've got to decide to play the piano before you can get on the music stool and start to play. You've got to decide the future before you do anything. And in the biggest sense of all, life would make sheer nonsense without a future. Christianity isn't so stupid as to come to us and tell us to live merely in the present. It expects men and women to be sane enough as to ask, 'what is the purpose of life and where are we going?'

Maybe modern people have become afraid to look the future in the face. If we have no hope in Christ it stares at us with the ghastly possibility that some fool or other could press the button that would set loose the atomic forces and kill millions. If any survived, it would mean that their children would be born 'freaks'.

I'm glad to say that God's word is not escapist. It brings meaning into life that there is a future, and that future is that Christ is coming again. This world's disorder shall not go on forever. Christ is coming again and he will not allow men to destroy the earth before his time. He has his hand upon the controls, and he himself is coming again to reign. What a glorious hope that is. It makes sense of the present. Says the apostle, 'You may know that your present labour is not in vain' (1 Cor 15:58). Get on with your work, live to the full. It makes sense because Christ is coming again.

#### WE SHALL NOT GET TO HEAVEN WITHOUT MAKING A PERSONAL CHOICE

As I exhort Christians here to enjoy this prospect and to live to the utmost, to the edge of all their abilities, believing in life because there is a worthy future, I wonder if I talk to any who find themselves somewhat uncomfortably disturbed at the prospect of these things. It would be disturbing to anybody to listen to the word of God telling us that Christ is coming again, and for that person to be unsure whether he or she is ready for his coming; unsure whether for you it would mean glory and fulfilment or destruction and an eternity of misery.

I beg of anybody who is so disturbed to take this thing to God. You need not be disturbed; you need not be uncertain. My dear people, you can be as certain as anybody and live your life in the radiance of this certain hope that when Christ comes you will be taken to be with him. But let us all mark it well that this does not happen automatically. We came here without our personal choice, but we shall not get to heaven without our personal choice. This is a realm that God has given to men and women in which to choose, and whether Christ's coming means glory and fulfilment or eternal disaster will depend completely on our personal choice.

We must settle it now before he comes. Christ was forever saying, 'be ready'; 'Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect' (Matt 24:44). Christ was not among those who told people that his coming was a long way off and they had plenty of time. His insistence everywhere was 'get ready soon'. Let us be clear that his coming again is not 'the end of the world'. Thousands of years before the end of this world Christ will come again and himself reign personally, and that coming is imminent. Never has he given any other impression than 'get ready, get ready, get ready'. He shall come unexpectedly and shut the door, and those who are outside shall be lost (Luke 13:25).

'Get ready,' said he. And in his name I dare not do anything else but exhort us all here this evening that we make sure of this, that we are now, this very moment, ready. I cannot guarantee you that if you delay this matter, you will have opportunity tomorrow.

## HOW DOES ONE GET READY?

I close by quoting you the description given of those people whom Paul says are ready — *the dead in Christ* are ready (1 Thess 4:16). Not all the dead die 'in Christ'. It is only the dead in Christ who are ready. The experience of personal salvation that here on earth brings a man or a woman into Christ is a distinction that lasts eternally. The dead in Christ shall rise, but not the others.

With the living, the account of their conversion is given: '... you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess 1:9–10).

Have you ever personally turned to God? It behoves us all in the closing moments of this day, and in view of God's clear word, to ask ourselves if we have ever turned. Have we had a personal conversion, or have we just drifted?

And you say, 'I've never been an idolater'.

I'm not so sure. Certainly you don't worship hideous monsters of wood or stone, and nor do I; but an idol is anything that we trust, short of trusting God. And when we come to think of our Lord's return and our readiness for it; when we think of eternity and whether we shall be in heaven or not; tell me, what are you trusting? If it is anything else but Christ and his atoning sacrifice, then I must warn you that you are trusting an idol.

Something that your own hands have made; that is an idol. If you tell me that you are depending on your good works and your honest living, then I shall say, that is something of your own doing, and it's an idol you trust. Good as those 'golden' good works of yours may be, if you trust them, that is an idol you trust and it will let you down at last. Only those who have learned in their sinfulness and need to cast themselves completely and utterly on Christ, on his great sacrifice for sin, on his living power and person—only those who have trusted him, and him only, will be saved when the Lord comes. To you all I commend this tremendous decision.

Let us seek grace of God this very night to examine our hearts honestly, to ask ourselves whether we have had this personal turning to God; whether we have learned to abandon faith in all else; and whether we have put our faith in Christ, his death and his rising again. Are we, in fact, unshakeably sure that we are ready for his coming? May God lead us all into that glorious peace and certainty to know from his own lips that already here in life we have passed from death to life and we are ready for his coming again.

Shall we bow for a moment in prayer before we go.

So now, our gracious God, we pray that thou wilt bless thy holy word that we have studied together. We thank thee for its simplicity and directness. We ask that all of us may see clearly the spiritual implications of this thing, that we may not read it as a tale that is told and straightaway forget it.

Cause us to see that thou art in earnest, we beseech thee. Cause us to see that if we would be sure that we are ready, there is something that we must do. Cause us all to understand clearly what that something is, so that, doing it, we may be saved. And, being saved, may we know thy good assurance and live our lives in

this radiant hope. Living them deliberately and carefully, serving the living God until our Lord shall come.

To this end, may thy blessing be on this lecture and upon all subsequent addresses that we come to, if our Lord has not come meanwhile. Through that same Lord Jesus Christ, we ask these things. Amen.

## **The Coming United Nations**

Last week, with our Bibles in hand, we traced what God has to say on the subject of our Lord's personal return. With that same book in hand this evening, we are to draw aside the veil of the future and see what God has said about the future of politics, at least in the Western world, in those days immediately before our Lord's coming again 'in power and great glory'.

### **The future of the Jewish people and Jerusalem**

#### **The political future**

For that purpose, we may need to take some well-known landmarks, so that we shall not be altogether lost in the detail of biblical prophecy that we are about to consider. For that purpose, I suggest first of all we take as a prominent landmark the future of the Jewish people, and in particular of Jerusalem, their city, as it was outlined in prophecy by our Lord Jesus Christ himself a few days before he went to the cross.

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:20–24)

These words in themselves are a remarkable prophecy; for the most part already fulfilled. You will observe it was on the eve of his execution that our Lord outlined to his disciples what was to be the future of the nation that were now rejecting him and would hang him upon a cross. He indicated that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies, and warned his believing disciples that, when they saw the city encircled with the armies, they were to flee. He was, of course, referring to the famous Siege of Jerusalem, conducted by Vespasian and Titus, that ended in the complete sack of that city and the burning of its temple (AD 70).

Our Lord's words ring with wisdom. We know from the secular historians that when the Romans came towards that city, many Jews, quite mistakenly, fled into the city itself. For many, many months that siege continued, until the inhabitants of Jerusalem were reduced to the very extremities of famine and, at last, the pressure becoming too violent, they were forced

to submit. The streets of Jerusalem literally ran with blood, and thousands upon thousands of Jews were massacred.

But I do not want to dwell upon that historic event, save only to point out in passing that this is an example of prophecy fulfilled. Fastening our attention on it for just for a moment, we may be reassured in our faith that, just as this prophecy spoken by our Lord some forty years before the event occurred was literally fulfilled, so all those other prophecies which he spoke will be just as literally fulfilled.

Our Lord not only indicated that the city would be sieged and sacked, he said, if you observe, that ‘the people shall be led captive into all the nations’. That is precisely what happened. There came an uneasy peace after the sack of Jerusalem, with the Jews now and again trying desperately to revolt once more and to break free from Roman domination. But in the end they were completely defeated and absolutely crushed, and they were led captive into all the nations. And our Lord added, ‘Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled’.

That too is precisely what happened. The Jews lost their capital city, and from then on it fell into the hands of the Gentiles and has been in Gentile hands right up until this very present day. ‘Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, *until*,’ said our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is upon that word ‘until’ that we fasten our attention particularly this evening. Jerusalem is still downtrodden by the nations; for the Jews, though they have founded their State once more and are back in many parts of their original country, still do not have full possession of their capital city, Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

‘Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, *until*’—so, as we read that word ‘until’ and look forward into the future, we are now penetrating the prophecy of God’s word. We are in fact scanning the coming horizon, and from these simple verses we learn that, whereas the Jews were besieged, sacked and defeated and eventually dispersed by the Romans throughout the Gentile countries and their city has for centuries been in the hands of Gentiles and still is, yet there is coming a moment when that situation will be reversed.

‘Downtrodden until’—‘until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.’ And naturally, we wonder to ourselves, ‘Well what does that curious phrase mean, “the times of the Gentiles”, and have we any indication in holy writ when those times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled: when in fact Jerusalem shall be restored to the Jews?’

We find our answer in the immediate context, for our Lord goes on to say:

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (vv. 25–28)

<sup>2</sup> ‘As a result of the Six Day War . . . in 1967, Jerusalem has become a focal point of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In 1980, Israel passed the *Basic Law: Jerusalem Capital of Israel*, reaffirming the unified Jerusalem as its eternal, undivided capital. Palestinians insist Jerusalem must be the capital of their intended state’ (sixdaywar.org). In 2018, therefore, Jerusalem still remains a divided city.

In other words, our Lord is plainly indicating that Jerusalem shall be restored to the Jews, and the times of Gentiles shall be fulfilled somewhere in those days or months, just before our Lord is about to come in power and great glory. So that we are once more looking forward into the future, to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not now so much to take up from this world those who have trusted in him, but coming to establish his reign in power and great glory; and we learn that in those days Jerusalem shall be given back to the Jew.

And that becomes exceedingly interesting, because we in this generation have seen a happening, which has been full of significance. We have lived to see the state of Israel formed (in 1948). We have lived to see the Jews, who for centuries had been scattered throughout the nations of the world, literally going back to their land and, what is more, firmly established in Palestine. The United Nations said they shouldn't go; the Arabs said that they would fight to prevent them. Against all who said they shouldn't, they went, and they have established themselves and, moreover, made to themselves an independent country under their own national government and flag.

We see a remarkable thing of this nation revived: reviving their language, no longer speaking Yiddish, but what is in fact basically the original and classical Hebrew in which the Old Testament was written. Modernised and developed, it is true; but there they are back in their land. While many thousands of them are completely godless and atheistic, yet there never was such a tremendous interest in Israel and in Israel's book, the Old Testament, as there is at this present time. National competitions are being held in Judea and Jewry to award prizes to those who will study their Bibles and know them as best as may be.

I say we have lived to see an exceedingly interesting development, but you will observe my caution. While the Jews are now in their land as an independent state, I point out to you once more that they still do not possess their capital, and shall not possess it completely until the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled and our Lord Jesus personally returns. I have no authority to tell you how long or short the gap will be between this present moment, when the Jews are back in their land and established once more as an independent nation, and that time when eventually they will have their city. But we cannot read these things in light of present situations without being taken a step forward in the development of human history, in observing the Jew back in his own land as a sovereign nation once more.

### **The religious future**

We may take as another landmark, not merely the political future laid out for the Jew, but the religious future. The Apostle Paul, writing to Gentile Christians in Rome—and therefore to all of us who are Gentile Christians in this age, said these words:

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved. (Rom 11:25–26)

It is the lamentable fact, foretold in Old Testament Scripture, that when our Lord Jesus came the first time as Israel's Messiah, 'He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him' (John 1:11). And for centuries, the vast majority of Jews have stoutly rejected the claims



of Jesus of Nazareth to be their Messiah, to be the Son of God, and Jews officially still do. Back in their land, they show no signs of repenting of their decision that put the Lord Jesus on the cross. And yet the Bible clearly indicates that, while a hardening has happened to them and they are the enemies of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is coming a time when they shall be saved. A hardening has happened to them, 'until the fullness of the Gentiles are fulfilled'. And once more we meet the phrase similar to that other one, 'until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved.'

You say, 'When will that be?'

The Scriptures once more are precise: 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob' (Rom 11:26). It shall be when our Lord Jesus comes again. Then shall the prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled in its fuller sense, as many people in the nation of Israel have it revealed to them that this Jesus, who is coming in power and great glory – this Messiah whom they stand to welcome, is none other than the Jesus of Nazareth that their nation once put to the cross.

As that glorious Christ surprises many nations, the Jew shall come with the words of Isaiah 53 upon his lips:

... he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (53:3–5)

Again, I cannot tell you how long there is to be between this present moment and then. But once more, no Christian who knows his Bible can hear with indifference the tremendous resurge of interest in the Old Testament that is taking place in Israel at this time. It is not merely that the Jews here and there individually are reading their Bibles; it is that, in the interest of national politics, the government itself is sponsoring large movements for the reading of the Old Testament. I admit to you at once that as they read the veil is on their hearts. But they are getting ready. With the revived interest in the programme of the Old Testament they are surely getting ready, though unknown to them, for the biggest revelation that that nation has ever had: this Jesus whom they crucified is in fact the Christ of God that shall come from heaven.

### **The times of the Gentiles**

But we must turn to the matter that more particularly concerns us this evening. I have quoted to you the Jew and his future as landmarks by which we may begin to map out the outline of Gentile politics in the days just before the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have come across this phrase 'the times of the Gentiles'. Its significance is briefly this. There was a short period of history when God appointed the king of Israel to be the government on earth that immediately represented God. David was God's anointed king, and for some few centuries the dynasty that King David set up lived on earth and reigned on earth as a government immediately under the appointment of God. But the Old Testament tells us

that those kings sinned against God and against their privilege, for which sin God cast them away out of their land and caused them to be taken captive in Babylon.

Ever since Nebuchadnezzar the Great took captive the Jews from Judah and transported their kings to Babylon, there has never sat on the throne of Israel a Jewish king of the tribe of David. Since that time God has given over the leadership of Gentile nations to Gentile people, and from time to time certain very strong empires have come to the fore in Gentile politics.

In fact, way back in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, God himself gave Daniel the prophet a preview of the rise and fall of many Gentile powers. As they pass in array, we see various forms of government that have at one time and another held sway in the course of history. It is not too much to say that men have been searching for centuries for the ideal kind of government. Government after government has been tried: absolute monarchies, constitutional monarchies, democracies, republics, oligarchies. A whole array of all sorts and kinds of governments has been tried down the centuries, as nations have jostled with each other for supremacy and have struggled with their own political problems to devise a form of government that would be suitable and beneficial to the majority of their subjects.

#### *An international central government*

We are particularly interested in the final form of government, at least in the West, in those days just prior to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want immediately to read to you a figurative description of the kind of government that shall be existent then. I shall take some words from Revelation chapter 13, some from chapter 17, and again from chapter 19.

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. (13:1-2)

I would like you to notice first of all that this power—this government figured here in the typical biblical way as an animal, is a strange amalgam of animals. Those of us who are not frequently engaged in reading these prophetic parts of God's word may find the figure a little bit strange. And yet it is a common thing in Scripture: witness in the book of Daniel that various governments are described under the figure of different animals. For instance, the empire of Alexander is likened in Scripture to a leopard, because of the tremendous speed of Alexander's lightning-like conquests.

But in these last days there shall arise a government, and, under the figure of this animal, we begin to see what kind of government it shall be. It shall be an amalgam; not a straightforward leopard, bear or lion, but an amalgam: '[it] was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth' (v. 2).

We notice that it has ten horns (v. 1), and I want to read a further description of these horns from chapter 17.

And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind,

and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings . . . (vv. 12–14)

Notice that this coming great power is not only in itself an amalgam of various forms of government, but in its final phase it shall have ten independent kings who shall agree to give their power to the beast. 'These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast' (v. 13).

This is a remarkable statement upon which I want to dwell for a moment. It describes a form of government that we have never yet had, to my knowledge, in the course of human history. This is a question of ten independent kings agreeing to cede their sovereignty to one central government. We have had all sorts of governments before; we have had monarchies, as I say, and republics, oligarchies and democracies. Never yet, to my knowledge, have we had an international government. We have known powerful nations go to war against other nations and subdue them, and take under their wing what were originally independent countries. But that did not compose an international government; it was the case of the conquered being ruled by the conqueror. But in these last days the world shall witness this new form of government, when independent sovereign states shall agree to give their sovereignty, to cede their sovereignty, to another and to form this amalgam under this great central figure.

You say, 'How do you know that this is describing the future?'

'Is it not true,' somebody will say, 'that some people hold that the book of the Revelation merely describes the politics such as they were in John's day?'

It is true that some people do so read it. I want to point out to you the explicit statement of Scripture that this shall take place *at our Lord's coming in power and great glory*. We read together that these ten horns, these ten kings, give their power to the beast and they make war together on the Lamb.

'But,' you say, 'there have always been powers hostile to Christianity.'

So there have, but the occasion when these shall make war with the Lamb is precisely told us in the Revelation chapter 19. I shall read at length to establish the point:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against

his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (vv. 11–21)

This great battle is the battle which is to be fought in that historically notorious place, the field of Armageddon. I submit to you that we cannot do other than take this description as a description of fearful judgment: a time when our Lord Jesus 'will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty' (v. 15); a time when heaven shall be opened and Christ shall come. This is not talking of that war between God and mankind that has been simmering for centuries; this is talking of that great outburst in those final days, which shall be led, we observe, by this beast and those ten kings making war against the Lamb.

I trust I have established the point that this international government shall be in those days when our Lord is coming again, and it makes very interesting reading. You will not need me to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that we are on the very eve, it would seem, of the establishment in Europe of an international government. I am not of course referring to the Common Market, but to that considerable body of opinion amongst political experts and others that holds that the only way out of the present dilemma among the modern nations is the forming of an international government.

There are some who would say so outright. Bertrand Russell, in his book *Has Man a Future?*, explicitly devotes chapters to this very theme, and none of us shall accuse Bertrand Russell of trying to expound Scripture or trying to make prophecy come true, because Bertrand Russell, as you know, is a confessed atheist. But he argues that if we are to tame the fearful horrors, the fearful potential of the atomic bomb, the only way it can possibly be done is by the establishment of an international government. He points out that an institution such as the United Nations, well intentioned and good in its way, is utterly powerless in this particular situation. The member nations have right of veto; and if the United Nations says to one nation, 'You shall not explode that atomic bomb,' then that nation has the right to go on and explode the atomic bomb.

The hideousness of the possibilities has not come home to many people. I pointed them out at this lecture last week, and I remind you of them again. Mankind now has a fearful instrument in his possession. It was once only the Americans who possessed the secret. Now Britain has it, Russia has it, France seems to have it; and, with every additional nation that gets the knowhow to make an atomic bomb, the risk that one of these bombs shall go off accidentally grows and grows. It needs merely an accident, or some nation to get it into its head that it's being attacked by another Pearl Harbour,<sup>3</sup> for the nations to begin lashing out at one another with atomic bombs, until the whole thing goes in an utter debacle.

I do not say these things to be alarmist; I point out to you the actual state of affairs. It is a fact that American bombers have already been airborne by mistake, starting off on their

<sup>3</sup> The attack on Pearl Harbour was a surprise military strike by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service against the United States naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii Territory, on the morning of December 7, 1941. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack\\_on\\_Pearl\\_Harbor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack_on_Pearl_Harbor).

mission to hurl atomic bombs against Russia. Fortunately, the mistake was found out in time. And to stop that, and somehow get a control of this fearful possibility, men are beginning seriously to consider what seems to be the only way out: the formation of an international government.

I say we cannot read these things without being exceedingly interested. The Bible says that, in the days before the return of Christ in power and great glory, an international government shall be in power. I point out to you that that is not common place. International governments haven't sprinkled the pages of history — there haven't been any before.

We begin to tie the threads together. For centuries the Jews were not in their land, but they are now. The land has recently been established and a tremendous interest in the Old Testament has begun once more amongst the Jewish nation, officially encouraged by parliament. Now at this moment, men's minds are increasingly turning to the possibilities — almost to the necessity — of setting up an international government. As much as it might hurt Britain (who loves to sing 'Britons never shall be slaves') to cede her sovereignty, yet we are told that ten nations shall do it in those final days. To say the least, it looks peculiarly clear that the stage is rapidly being set for this final scene before the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before I add anything else, I want to say clearly that nothing I have said or shall say is meant in detriment to honest, well intentioned, noble citizens and politicians, who have given of their lives — some of them at great sacrifice — to serve and rescue mankind from such hideous possibilities. Nothing, I repeat, is meant to be derogatory to them. All honour to them, and as Christians it is our duty to pray for them, every one, that God may prosper their efforts.

#### *The head of this international government*

But when I have said that, ladies and gentlemen, I must add that all shall not be well in this international government. Certainly, men shall say of it when it comes, 'Peace and safety', but the Bible warns: 'While people are saying, "There is peace and security", then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape' (1 Thess 5:3).

This is for some very obvious reasons. The head of that international government shall be the wickedest man earth has ever seen. I say that advisedly. The Apostle Paul in his inspired writing tells us of that coming day when the head of this great international government 'takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God' (2 Thess 2:4). By his latest inventions he shall do things that border on the miraculous and deceive many nations. He shall set himself up, demanding that men worship him and the State. He shall outlaw all other forms of religion.

I say again, this is not excitement; nor is this figurative language, for I quote from the plain, straightforward letter of the Apostle Paul. It hasn't happened yet, said the apostle. As yet there is a power that restrains him, although 'the mystery of lawlessness is already at work' (2 Thess 2:7). But when that restraining power is removed he shall come with all his deceivableness and utter genius. Men shall accept him; he shall seem to solve their problems and bring them peace. And then he will show his true colours: he shall sit in the temple of God, claiming to be God.

The Scriptures speak again with consentient voice: 'The Lord shall consume [him] with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming' (v. 8 KJV). When shall it happen? We are being told here in precise language how the stage will be set politically when Christ is coming again. I say again, all is not well. In his hatred of God, he and his ten confederate kings shall lead the armies of men, and they shall make war on the Lamb (Rev 17:14).

But somebody says with a smile, 'But, Mr Lecturer, you don't take these things literally, do you? Surely you don't imagine this thing literally happening, that Christ is coming again personally with a great army in heaven, and this government that you talk of is going, literally, to oppose him?'

But I do.

'Surely it's absurd to think of a man, however powerful, trying to fight against God?'

Absurd? Why absurd? We saw last week, and I took trouble to prove it to you from holy writ, that Christ's coming again is literal. It is not absurd, but quite conceivable that, when the sign of the Son of Man is seen coming in heaven, men will literally attempt to oppose him by force.

I remind you, we are now living in the space age.<sup>4</sup> A world-famous astronomer was telling us recently in Queen's University that, in his opinion, life exists in other parts of the universe, and we are on the verge of getting in contact with this kind of life. I do not comment upon the likelihood of those things; but I point out to you that man is already out in space. His mind is being prepared that there are beings out there, and he has his weapons to take into space if need be. It is quite within the realms of possibility that, when Christ literally comes with the armies of heaven, this dictator on earth will persuade mankind that this is an invasion from another planet, and he shall attempt in his puny strength to hurl back at Christ the latest devices that science has been able to achieve.

The minds of your children are being daily fastened into the idea of space travel and spacemen and Martians, or whatever they are, are they not?

#### *Human nature is against God*

But you say, 'The very idea of man trying to *fight against God*, surely that is absurd?'

I ask you to remember what they did to God the first time he visited our planet. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate? The first time he came they hadn't atomic bombs to fling at him, but they had spears, and they had nails, and they had a horrible form of execution—crucifixion, and they used the lot.

These are not fairy tales. 'Fight against God'—my dear good people, that is what man has already done. If this book is true, mankind stands guilty before God of having taken the Son of God incarnate with bestial cruelty and hounding him to a cross. And what has happened once, will happen again.

'Why so?' you say.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to reflect in 2018 that the first space flight of the Vostok programme and the first manned space flight in history was launched from Baikonur Cosmodrome on April 12, 1961—the year these talks were taking place. On board was Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, making him the first human to cross into space.

Because fighting against God, though it flares up more prominently on some occasions, is what the human heart does daily. I don't want to be melodramatic, but if you will ask what is the cause of political confusion and what is the trouble of the human heart, ladies and gentlemen, the word of God says the trouble is that man is out of gear with God. Men and women are born with a nature (the Bible uses the technical term 'flesh') that is at enmity with God—'For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot' (Rom 8:7).

That is the dreadful verdict, but it is the diagnosis that God writes over the human heart; and these prophecies shall come true and mankind shall fight against God because that is what he is doing now.

You say, 'But I dispute you on the topic. I think this is an altogether unjust reading of the human heart. Are there not many kindly people in this world? They are not all convinced Christians, yet they are kindly people. They bring up their children well; they are affectionate; they engage in a great deal of social work—how can you dare accuse them of being enemies of God?'

Please get me right, sir, I bracket myself along with them. The great Apostle Paul, in describing his unconverted days—and his converted days as well—had to confess that, with all his zeal for God, he found within him a law that was antagonistic to God.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom 7:21–24)

God's law said, 'You shall not covet' (Exod 20:17), but he did covet. He didn't want to, but he did. 'Wretched man that I am,' says he, 'I've got a something inside me that is a traitor to God's law.'

And would not you admit the same? In your quieter moments you don't agree with that piece of spite, or that act of selfishness, or that uncleanness, or whatever it be. Would you not bracket yourself with the rest of us? Though we don't want to sin, we find that in our members there is this enemy; try how we will, we cannot put it down one hundred percent.

'Yes,' says God, 'and I will tell you what that enemy is. It's an enemy that fills every human breast and it's called *sin*.' A sinful nature that cannot be subject to God's law and is at enmity with God. That's why our Lord Jesus Christ laid it down in categorical terms. Said he, 'If men are ever going to come under the government of God and live to please God, the first essential is this: "You must be born again"' (John 3:7).

The human nature is so wrong in God's sight it can never be put right except it goes through this experience, which God calls 'being born again'. Otherwise it never will be subject to God's law: it cannot be.

And that brings me to another point. I do not know you folk here in Tandragee; and four Sundays seem too short in which to talk to you. I am obliged, therefore, to seem to be blunt and direct and personal. I don't want to preach at anybody, but for time's sake I must be explicit. We may all test ourselves just here, whether or not we are enemies of God at this very

moment. You believe Jesus is God's Son? Then, looking us straight in the face and diagnosing our need, God's Son says, 'You *must* . . .'

Must what?

'You must,' says Christ, 'be born again.'

Are you born again? It would be useless for us to fiddle about with prophecy, unless we are prepared to see its moral impact. The human heart is against God, says Scripture (Rom 8:7).

Test it out here. Christ says, 'You must be born again.' Have you been born again? We cannot surely plead ignorance. Surely none of us here present can say, 'I've never heard this before'? Yet if there is anybody who's never heard before of the decree of Christ that says you must be born again, then come now and prove that you're not an enemy of God. Come and be born again. Make it your first thing in life to see that this thing is done. 'You must be,' says Christ.

And what about those of us who have known about this for years, maybe? I want to lay it upon everybody here, who can hear Christ saying, 'You must be born again,' if you have not yet been born again, isn't that a typical example that the human heart so very often kicks against doing what Christ says? It will talk about 'doing its level best'. It will talk about serving God. It will talk about making people happy. It will talk of leaving the world a better place than it found it. God brushes that aside and says, 'Look here, your trouble is deeper than that. *You must be born again.*' Not to be born again is one more example of that awful flaw in the human heart. It won't be subject to what God says. It will be *religious* before it will bow to what God says.

#### BELIEVING 'THE LIE'

The final tragedy, as we look forward to this future, is told us in words that are so terrible that I almost hesitate to quote them publicly. I read them from the calm statement of God's word itself. They are in their way so awful as to be hideous; but in describing the time when this great international leader shall have welded together the Western nations, at any rate, on the eve of our Lord's coming to destroy him, we read:

Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.  
(2 Thess 2:11-12)

In explicit language, God says that there will be people in that day, when this giant of a politician comes, who will believe him and share his ultimate, terrible fate at the hands of God's judgment.

'How do you know they'll believe him?' someone asks.

'They'll believe him', says the Bible, 'because God shall send them a strong delusion and they will believe the lie (KJV), so that they might be condemned.'

You say, 'Mr Lecturer, that is hideous beyond all reckoning.'

Just a moment. I remind you that the God, who will in those days send people this strong delusion that they believe the lie and be damned, was the God who so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that they should not perish (John 3:16). He is the God who for



centuries has been beseeching men and women and telling them lovingly that they must be born again or else they'll perish. But there are some people who will continue on without being born again and, though they know God's gospel, and though they know his entreaty to be born again, they refuse to be born again. What shall God do when the human heart maintains its enmity like that? Shall God come in and force people to be saved? No, no. The God who made human personality and gave men and women a free will, shall never squash that free will. He will never do you that insult.

God has given us all that free will of choice, and God will honour our choice. If we choose to be careless now, he warns, and he warns, and he warns us. If we temporize and procrastinate, he comes and woos us and loves us and woos us again, saying that he so loves us that he gave his Son that we shouldn't perish, pointing out that his Son is 'the truth' (John 14:6).

But if men and women say no to God there will come the time when, honouring their personalities, God will say, 'Right, have it your way and perish.' It will cut God's heart to its very core that any creature of his own hands could possibly take that view of him, and say, 'No, God. No, God. Eternally no, God.' But those creatures that do, God shall say, 'Well have it your way', though it breaks his heart to let them.

### **The practical lesson to be learned from prophecy**

There is a moral in these things. Why should I trouble you with this recount of the future, if there were no practical benefit to be gained? It is so that we learn to read our own hearts before God now. We cannot claim to be different from our neighbours; we are each made of the same stuff. God says of us all that we must be born again or else we shall perish. Not even God himself can save us if we refuse.

God offers us life. There is only one alternative to life in the nature of things and that is death. God offers us light. There is only one alternative to light in the nature of things and that is darkness. God offers us his Son, his Christ. There is no alternative to Christ but antichrist. God offers us the truth in his incarnate Son, and to reject the truth there is no alternative but the lie, is there? At the cost of his own Son's sacrifice, God offers us heaven. But, ladies and gentlemen, there is only one alternative to heaven and that is hell.

I pray God that his kindness, in showing us beforehand where the future leads, may bring us all to ask ourselves upon what road we are treading. May all of us see to it in time that we have fulfilled the obligation that we have been born again. And if anyone doesn't know what that means, but would like to know, any Christian here will tell you, or I myself. You see, it is not a thing of special merit or special difficulty. Millions have been born again and are eternally saved. You too may have this experience of God and pass from death to life. You too could be saved and certain and sure.

Shall we bow our heads in prayer.

We thank thee, blessed God, that in thy kindness thou has revealed as much of the future as is beneficial to us all. We pray that thou wilt write the words of thy Bible upon our hearts and in thy goodness cause us to understand the things that are written there. And though maybe we see the future darkly, we thank thee that thy present requirement stands out abundantly clear. We thank thee for the possibility that we may be born again.

We praise thee for the clarity of thine urgency that tells us categorically that we must be. And we pray that in thy grace thou wilt so speak to us all that none of us here shall be disobedient to this demand. Coming to the Saviour and receiving from him this life of which he speaks, we shall receive his Holy Spirit now; and, in the conscious knowledge of being right with God, we shall enter into peace now, and into heaven when he comes with that same Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## The End of Religion

*Reading: Revelation 17*

I spoke to you last Sunday evening on the political situation as it will be in those days just before our Lord Jesus returns again. This evening, with our Bibles in hand, I would like you to follow me as we think together about the state of religion universally in that same period before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The end of false religion**

We shall be thinking especially of the end of *religion*; that is to say of the end of false religion. Because I shall have so much to say about false religion in the course of this lecture, I want to make it abundantly clear from the start that I do not thereby wish to be disrespectful to any true religion, wherever it is found. I am not here this evening to throw stones. Far be it from me to discourage any true religion, wherever it is found.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (Jas 1:27)

The very fact that the Bible talks of true, or pure, religion will show us plainly that there is a religion that is not true. We shall be thinking especially of the end of false religion.

So, to begin with, I propose to read to you from the book of the Revelation chapter 17, where we have in symbolic form a picture of the state of false religion just before our Lord Jesus shall return again in power and great glory. Painted for us there, in the most lurid colours, is a picture of what I submit to you is false religion as it shall be at the end of this age.

### **Why I say that this woman is a picture of false religion**

At the beginning, perhaps I'd better justify my suggestion to you. How do I know that this woman, this filthy, unfaithful woman, here called 'Mystery, Babylon' (v. 5 KJV), is meant by God to be a picture of false religion? I submit to you there are many reasons for so thinking.

*The vivid contrast with what is true*

First of all, this woman stands in vivid contrast to another woman mentioned in this book of Revelation. In later chapters we are introduced to the great heavenly city, called 'new Jerusalem' (21:2). We are told to watch this city coming down out of heaven from God to men,

and it is specifically stated that this new, heavenly Jerusalem is 'the Bride, the wife of the Lamb' (v. 9). The bride of our Lord Jesus; the bride he loved.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. (Eph 5:25–26)

As we saw in our first talk here two weeks ago, at the end when our Lord shall come he is to remove from this earth all genuine Christians. Whether they are still living, or whether they have died and been buried, he is to remove them to heaven. Then shall take place in the presence of God that glad event, styled in Scripture, 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev 19:9), when all the redeemed from every country shall be united together with their Lord, and so shall they ever be with the Lord.

It is evident indeed that this dirty, unfaithful woman is meant to stand as the complete contrast to all that is genuine and true and holy. Instead of being 'a pure virgin betrothed to Christ' (2 Cor 11:2), she is an unfaithful woman that has granted her favours to all for her own present advantage.

It ought not in fact to surprise us that there is false religion on earth, and it will become even more evident. If we have perhaps been thinking on the charitable side of this consideration—how good it would be if there were no divergences of opinion in religion and all people thought the same, we shall just be a little reluctant to think that anybody ought to say that there could be false religion.

ISN'T IT ENOUGH IF WE ARE ALL SINCERE?

Somebody may in fact say to me, 'But, Mr Lecturer, isn't it more the Christian attitude to think that all people, whatever their religion, are trying to serve God in their own way, and however much we may personally disagree with somebody else's religion, we oughtn't to call it a *false* religion? We ought to think that all people are honestly trying to serve God, and if they are sincere all will be well in the end.'

I submit to you very strongly that we cannot possibly take that view. Did not our Lord himself speak repeatedly and clearly beyond all doubt on this very point, telling us that there would be false religion? Not merely false religions completely outside of Christianity, but within what he called *the kingdom of God* our Lord indicated that there would be spurious elements, false professors.

I remind you of the parable in which he likened the kingdom of heaven to a field in which the farmer sowed good seed, but while he slept his enemy sowed bad seed (Matt 13:24–30). He sowed weeds in among the wheat (v. 25). When they came up, at first they were practically indistinguishable. But as they bore grain the difference would become slowly manifest: mixed in with the genuine good wheat, there were these false, counterfeit, weeds. The Lord Jesus told this parable to indicate that even within the fold of the kingdom of heaven, all would not be well. It would not be unmixed good; there would be the counterfeit as well as the true.

We must brace our hearts and minds to face this unpleasant truth. I say again, we are not now thinking of 'outside' people, who make no profession of Christianity, no profession of God whatsoever and are against the things of God; we are thinking now of the kingdom of heaven itself, which our Lord Jesus said would be composed part of good and part of evil.

In fact, the Bible is insistent upon this. Nowhere in all the field of human experience is deception more dangerous and more widespread than in the field of religion. Deception here, the Bible says, can come from one or all of three sources.

### 1. OUR OWN HEARTS

To start with, the Bible reminds us that 'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick' (Jer 17:9).

We have waited for the psychologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to begin to point out to us how true those words are. How it is possible for people to develop strong feelings or fears against God, or about sin, and to smother them completely by rationalising them. They quieten the voice of conscience until they have convinced themselves that all is well. The Bible unmasks this tendency of the human heart to rationalise and to excuse itself, and warns us that the human heart in us all is deceitful; we cannot trust its notions. We must always bring them to the pure, holy, true word of God, or we all stand to be deceived by the rationalising of our own minds.

### 2. FALSE PROPHETS

Not only are our own hearts deceitful, but our Lord once more explicitly warned us that there would be false prophets among the people. I remind you again that these words were not spoken by some quack in religion, some soapbox parson, some alarmist. These words were spoken by our Lord himself:

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matt 7:13–15).

You see the connection between the remarks, I hope? 'Beware of false prophets,' said Christ—beware of imitations in the realm of religion. The true thing is marked by its entrance being narrow, and by a path that is difficult. But said Christ, 'Be warned that there are false things around.' False imitations of the true; they too have a gate and they too have a road. There's a way in: ceremonies and what have you, according to your choice. It is followed by a way of life: a system of teaching. But the vital difference is that that gate is a wide gate and it follows a very broad, easy way that does not lead to life but to destruction.

### 3. SATAN HIMSELF

And then our Lord and the Bible consistently warn us that deception in the realm of religion can come, not merely from the human heart and its deceitfulness, nor only from false prophets with their counterfeit conversions and religions, but it may come from Satan himself.

It surprises many people, when first they read it in the Bible, that it describes Satan, the devil, as 'the god of this world' (2 Cor 4:4). I say it surprises many people to find out how intensely Satan is interested in religion. In many people's minds, their conception of Satan is somewhat like they depicted him in the Middle Ages, a great dragon with horns and hoofs; and certainly in the Bible he is pictured in the form of a dragon. But he has many characteristics. Elsewhere the Bible describes him as 'an angel of light' (2 Cor 11:14); posing as

a minister of God. It describes him as ‘the god of this world’ (4:4); head of its religion—its false religion. He is busy engaging people with religion to satisfy their sense of need, and all the while it is a false religion. Of those people who do not believe the gospel, the word of God explicitly says in this verse, ‘In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God’.

Oh, my dear people, I again wish to stress it heavily. I am not here setting up Aunt Sallies<sup>5</sup> that I may knock them down; nor am I attempting to be alarmist or melancholy and gloomy. I am merely repeating to you what Scripture itself says with a common and unanimous voice, that it is possible for us to be deceived in the realm of religion from these three deadly sources.

### **Religion just before our Lord comes again**

Therefore, we may spend a few moments thinking together this evening, with the help of Scripture, of that fearful state of affairs in which religion shall end up in those days just before our Lord Jesus comes again. It is pictured here in this woman whose description we have read, and I pause for a moment to point out to you what right we have to think that this description is in fact a description of what shall be in those days when our Lord is about to come again.

We were thinking together last week about the international government that eventually will make war against the Lamb at the moment of our Lord’s coming again, in an attempt to prevent his coming by force. Tonight, I want to point out to you that this woman, called Babylon, representing false religion, is found sitting astride that beast, which represents that international government, in an attempt to control it. Having long forgotten her calling to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, she is dabbling now in the affairs of politics; struggling to control this beast that represents an international government, which is altogether hostile to God and to Christ. And if it is evident that this government is the final form of government (at least in the West), in the days prior to our Lord’s coming, then it must be evident that the woman who sits on that beast, and who is eventually destroyed, depicts religion—not so much as it is now, but as it shall be in those last days.

### **Her name is significant**

She is called ‘Babylon’. That very name indicates that the principles for which she stands did not originate in New Testament times. In fact, you will trace this name way back into the remote parts of history, described in the very first book of the Bible. Babylon is but another form of the name ‘Babel’. If we would get some idea of this religious system, we must follow the clue that is given in her name back to the city of Babel that men attempted to build in those far-off days (Gen 11:9).

<sup>5</sup> Something set up as a target for disagreement or attack; after an old English fairground game, where the figure of an old woman’s head was used as a target for balls and other objects.

*It was the first big effort at unification*

After the flood, you remember, God commanded mankind that they should separate and scatter (KJV) with their families, and ‘fill the earth’ (9:1). There were certain very influential people in those days who said,

Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth. (11:4)

‘We will do nothing of the sort; we will not scatter. Let us make a big name in the earth. Let us build us a tower,’ said they, in their poetic language, ‘that shall reach unto heaven.’ It was a tremendous get-together in defiance of God’s explicit command that mankind should disperse over the face of the earth and fill it; and that defiance would have been successful if God himself had not intervened and confounded their language and forced them to scatter.

**What Babylon stands for***1. False unity*

It stands, first of all, for that great desire in the human heart to get a big, organized togetherness—‘so that we might make ourselves a name in the earth’. It will lead us to think and to scrutinise very carefully all the movements aimed at the unification of religion that nowadays have become prominent,

I hasten to make my meaning clear. I do not speak in any way disparagingly of all those good Christian people who are sincerely grieved at heart—as we all should be who call ourselves Christian—at the shocking state of disunity in the Christian church. Let me take my blame—and you too, if you feel guilty—for anything that we have done or still are doing to perpetuate those sad divisions, which so dishonour the name of the Christian church and of Christ before men. May God encourage all who are true peacemakers amongst his people; all who have it in their hearts to see that the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ is fulfilled, ‘That they may all be one . . .’ (John 17:21).

I mean that with utter sincerity, but I should be false to my charge this evening if I did not warn myself and you that there are dangers lurking just here. As in Old Testament times, so it is true in New Testament times; it is possible to cry, ‘Peace, peace; when there is no peace’ (Jer 6:14).

*How does true unity come about?* There is a true unity of Christians; it is a natural unity. We see it clearly expressed in that very prayer of our Lord that I have just quoted. He prayed that all who believe on him might be one. How shall they become one? ‘. . . just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’

‘The purpose for which I have come,’ said our Lord Jesus, ‘is that I should give eternal life to all that God hath given me. The very life of God within them, eternal life, I’m come for that end’ (see John 17: 2–3). This is Christianity.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12–13)

In other words, our Lord Jesus is talking about a unity that is achieved when people receive this very life of God within their own hearts. If you have eternal life within you and I have eternal life within me, though you and I have never met before, yet we are truly and deeply one. In fact, I would go as far as to say that the only thing that can possibly produce unity amongst people that is true and genuine is this miracle of ‘the new birth’ by which this life of God is imparted.

Find me two people, be they ever so peaceable, ever so well intentioned, ever so religious, if they do not possess this eternal life that Christ has come to give—if the life of God is not in them—then any unity they have is but a façade and a counterfeit of the real thing. It is because the human heart is so ready to be deceived by what is not good enough, and by a counterfeit that does not come from God, that our Lord himself was consistently insisting upon this.

Of course let all be one; how glorious if it were true. But let us see clearly that the only way it can be is by receiving the very life of God within.

## *2. False salvation*

Now let me put a blunt question to you. The Bible says, ‘to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’. They must be born of God to receive this common life. You cannot become something that you already are, can you? When we receive him, we become what we never were before. We become ‘children of God’, and my blunt question is this: Are all of us satisfied that we have become what we were not to start with—have we become the children of God?

But you say, ‘Surely we are all children of God? Why should we fight amongst ourselves, when all mankind are his children?’

I must bring you up there. We are not all his children, are we? All mankind are not God’s children in this sense, and I am not preaching party politics; I am preaching you the word of Christ himself. Only they who receive him are given the right to become what they couldn’t have been before: ‘to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’.

*How does true salvation come about?* In other words, our Lord is indicating that, at the base of true Christian unity, there is this personal work of God in the heart, by which God imparts his spiritual life; and in so doing, he thereby constitutes all who have it ‘one in Christ’. I am happy to say that every person that has truly believed on Christ, and so received him, has this eternal life and knows it. And every single one is in God’s true church. We are, all of us, one, with an indestructible union. May God help those of us who have this eternal life, who are one in this spiritual sense, to show that oneness to our fellow men.

But do I speak to anybody here who cannot honestly say, ‘Yes, of course, by natural birth I wasn’t a child of God; but I have received Christ and I have become a child of God’? If you are not sure on this matter, I beg of you to notice that there is no true Christian unity without it. All else is a horrid deception, and if unchanged it will take you away from God eternally.



#### THE CITY OF BABYLON

This name 'Babylon' does not only remind us that this woman stands for a very big join-up of religion, false religion; it reminds us of what Babylon came to be as that famous city in ancient times. Babylon, for instance, over which Nebuchadnezzar was king, was a city famed *par excellence* amongst all the idolatrous cities of the ancient world. A city where idolatry, black magic and occult science were practised so widely that the Gentile name 'Chaldean' came to mean a *soothsayer*, somebody dealing in occult science and black magic.

Idolatry is, for the most part, a perversion of something that is basically true. For instance, if you research the idols and mythologies of ancient times, you will frequently come across the motif of a mother and child. You don't have to wait until the Christian era before you begin to find statues of the mother and child. You will find motifs of a mother and child sprinkled about history long before Christ ever came, before Christianity was.

Where did it come from? From the original promise of God to Adam and Eve after the fall, surely, that 'the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head' (Gen 3:15). But gradually it was perverted by means of idolatry, until its original significance was completely lost sight of, and it had descended to something exceedingly unworthy. Babylon stands for idolatry; for perversion of the truth of God.

#### **The unique claims of Christ**

Once more, as we think of the great movements that are afoot in the world for the unification of religions, we need to think very, very carefully. There can be no true religion based on anything but God's holy word. There are movements abroad, and you may know of some of them—they crop up even here in the north of Ireland—that would tell us that there is good in all religions. There's good in Islam, Hinduism and Shintoism, as well as in Christianity. They would bid us Christians not to be so exclusive and exclude all the others: 'Can we not take the good out of all religions?'

#### *He is the Son of God*

I say that a unity formed on such methods would be disastrous in the extreme, for central to Christianity is the claim that Jesus is not *a* son of God, but *Jesus is the unique Son of God*. 'No one comes to the Father, except through me', said Christ (John 14:6). If you find fault with the exclusiveness of Christianity, then surely you must find fault with Christianity's founder himself? It is not with some narrow-minded interpretation of Christianity that you have to do; it was the very head of Christianity who claimed it, 'No one comes to the Father, except through me.' I must ask you, as Christian people, do you think that you can keep Christianity and contradict the basic claim of Christ himself? Oh, it sounds so charitable, but it's a false charity.

It's the kind of thing this woman shall do in the end. Instead of remaining a faithful, chaste virgin to Christ, she shall compromise his interests. May I remind you that the great Apostle Paul used this same figure. Talking to some Christians at Corinth, he said,

I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:2-3)

Before she is betrothed a girl may keep her heart open; but let that girl once give her word of betrothal, then it becomes immoral for her to entertain other possibilities. Christ is unique because there is only one Son of God; and to compromise with religion that challenges his exclusive claim, the Bible calls that spiritual fornication (see e.g. Rev 2:14, 20).

Let us not be softly sentimental; all the value of true, holy love to God is involved here. If we would claim the name of 'Christian', we must be true to his person. But let me speak sympathetically as a Christian. It has not been outside Christendom that we have heard these kinds of claims. In the last one hundred and fifty years Christendom has lived to see people professing Christianity, and professing to teach it, but denying practically all the basic facts about our Lord Jesus.

It is commonplace nowadays for his virgin birth to be denied in many a theological seminary. I am not throwing stones; I am quoting you plain facts. It is commonly taught that our Lord's views about the Old Testament would only be the views of the people of his day, and in some particulars he was quite mistaken. If one were to challenge this statement, then one would be told in these quarters, 'If he couldn't make mistakes, he wouldn't have been human', which is utter nonsense. It is a part of fallen, sinful humanity to make mistakes. It is not a part of *unfallen* humanity to make mistakes. To suggest that our Lord Jesus made mistakes in the important realm of the revelation of God to mankind, is to suggest that he is a fallible and erring guide in the very particular in which he came to speak to us.

#### *He rose from the dead*

In my short life<sup>6</sup> I have known prominent Christian leaders to tell us that to be a Christian we needn't necessarily believe in the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; we can find room within the folds of the Christian church for people who refuse to believe that he rose from the dead. While God's own word tells us plainly,

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor 15:14-19)

There is no hope: we are found to be liars, if Christ did not rise from the dead.

#### WE MUST NOT COMPROMISE HIS CLAIMS

We have lived to see it taught in many a pulpit and in the classroom to many a child, that the Old Testament is but a patchwork of myth and primitive unworthy pagan ideas, witnessing

<sup>6</sup> Dr Gooding was thirty-six at this time!

to us the gradual evolution of religion; much of it being unworthy of God and being seen now to have been mistaken, false and untrue.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I say again, I'm not wanting to raise Aunt Sallies. I'm not wanting to foster any party strife in the church of God; but what Paul warned the Corinthian Christians about has in fact come true. There is abroad even now a wide outlook that would claim to be Christian and yet deny these fundamental things. That is unfaithfulness; that is spiritual uncleanness, and precisely what the description of this woman is calculated to teach us. She is described as forgetting her absent Lord and trying to control the political government of the day. She allows her great authority and the fascination she holds over mankind to be used by these political authorities to gain their political ends, and so she gives her favours.

Let us, who would profess allegiance to a Christ who is still rejected of men, watch that we do not compromise his claims; watch that we do not be guilty of what the Apostle Paul warned the Corinthian believers about. 'Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!' (1 Cor 4:8).

There's coming a time when the Christians shall reign: when Christ returns and Jesus himself shall reign from shore to shore. Most certainly he will reign and then Christians shall reign with him. But let us remember the words, 'If we endure, we will also reign with him' (2 Tim 2:12).

### **The fall of Babylon and false religion**

A professing kingdom of God that so far forgets that her Lord has been rejected that she can be unfaithful to his character and person, reign herself as a queen in the very world in which he was and still is rejected, will never reign with Christ. Her end is depicted here in Revelation 17–18. Being unfaithful to her Lord and dallying with powers hostile to Christ, she is used by them for their convenience, and in the end, when it suits them, they 'devour her flesh and burn her up with fire' (17:16).

Christendom—false religion the world through, that has become unfaithful to God and his revealed truth and unfaithful to Christ—shall meet its end at the hands of ungodly men, who have nothing but utter contempt for religion that professes the name, but all the while has dilly-dallied with those who quite freely confess that they've no interest in God, or Christ either. My dear Christian friend, you gain nothing in the respect of this world if you compromise the claims of your Lord in an attempt to spread your influence for good.

And while we have been thinking so much about the final doom that shall overtake such an unpleasant state of false religion, we should not be wise merely to pass an hour thinking of those future things without perceiving that they have an exceedingly eloquent voice for ourselves.

#### *Could we be deceived ourselves?*

We may not live to see those times. I have no authority for saying when these things shall take place—when Babylon shall be judged or when our Lord shall come. I cannot tell you and I do not attempt to do so. But that same false thing that shall be seen in full then is already working

now, and has been working for centuries. And if it is the fact that humans can be deceived, we surely should be exceedingly pharisaical and foolish if we didn't own to ourselves the possibility that we too could be deceived.

Are we somehow special? Are we so much cleverer than all the rest of humanity that it is possible that we should never be deceived, and they would? Surely not. None of us would be so proud. In face of the clear, positive warnings of God and of Christ and his apostles, surely it behoves us all to ask ourselves, 'am I sure that what I have is the right thing?' After all, Scripture is given to us not that we should throw stones at somebody else, or attempt to cast beams out of other people's eyes, or motes either; but to examine ourselves (Matt 7:3-5).

In the few moments remaining to me, I propose to lead you in such an examination. Have we the real thing? This is such a vital question that you will find our Lord and his apostles constantly talking of it. Several of the letters that the apostles wrote to Christians in those early days were aimed at warning people against false religion. For instance, the letter that the great Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Colosse was aimed at holding them back from three spurious forms of religion.

- There were those who observed days and months, as though there was some special value in observing days and feast days and fast days.
- There were those who thought there was some value in penance, in rigorous treatment of the body, as though that made them somehow holy.
- There were those who went in for the worship of angels and saints; and those on the other hand who felt that they could not be complete without philosophy.

The letter to the Colossians is the inspired warning that all these things are will-o'-the-wisps. They are no use when it comes to the human heart finding God and being saved. 'They are of no value,' says Paul (2:23).

Let us be warned, there is no value in penance. There is no value in feast days and fast days; and philosophy apart from Christ will but lead you into the dark. There is salvation only in Christ.

But Paul had to write even to those who professed faith in Christ. He wrote another letter that we call the Letter to the Galatians. From the very beginning to the end of that epistle, the whole argument is directed to warning us time and time and time again that when God talks of our being 'justified by faith', he means that we are saved by grace through faith, plus nothing (cf. Eph 2:8-9).

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal 2:16)

Oh, how we need to preach that to a Christendom that somehow has at its heart that our works contribute to our salvation. Ask many men and women, 'Are you saved?' and they will say, 'Well I do my best, and I really hope so.' Clear evidence at heart that they think that being saved does depend on what they do. A fatal error; so eternally injurious to the human soul that the inspired Apostle Paul called down two anathemas upon the heads of anybody who

dared to tell people that they were saved by any observance, any ritual, any work that they did themselves.

This is not bigotry; it is the warning of a heart that loves. God would never have given Christ to the cross if we could have been saved by our own efforts or rituals. It calls for men who are faithful to preach to people that there is no salvation in your ritual; not even if it is a Christian ritual. There is no salvation in works. There is salvation only for those who, abandoning faith in all else, trust only and personally in our living Lord Jesus Christ: in his death upon the cross and his sacrifice for sin, and in his resurrection to God's right hand.

This was not only a constant theme with the apostles, but as I close I would remind you once more of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. With him, we started; with him, let us finish. No one loves us more than he. These are the words of him who died for us to make it possible for us to be saved, and I say again that no one loved your soul more than he.

*The parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13)*

He said that, in the last times, the kingdom of heaven would be like ten virgins; five of whom were foolish and five were wise. I could hope that his proportions were wrong, but he said five foolish and five wise. Outwardly they all looked virgins, and were. Outwardly they all dressed the same, and they all knew that the bridegroom was coming. They all went to meet him, they all had lamps, and they all had oil in their lamps. But five not only had oil in their little vessel, but they had great pitchers full of oil ready to replenish their store; whereas the other five had no oil in their pitchers and they were not linked with the great supply. They all went to meet the bridegroom; but in the moment that he came, five found that they were not prepared, and the door was shut against them (v. 10).

I suppose all of us would like to be thought of as decent characters, 'virgins' in the spiritual sense; and so we well may be. All of us have some kind of a lamp of profession. Haven't you? Do you not profess to be decent? Yes, you have some light. Have you not read the Bible frequently? Are you not to be seen carrying it sometimes? Have you not sung those delightful hymns, full of Christian truth and light? Yes, you have some little light. But may I plead with you to make sure that, in addition to all that, you are linked personally with 'the great supply'; that you personally have the Holy Spirit of God; that you have received his eternal life. Unless you have eternal life here and now before this life ends, before the Lord comes; unless you receive this eternal life, the very life of God within; I must tell you that the little flicker of light that you may have will go out in utter darkness and the door will be shut against you.

When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us', then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' (Luke 13:25)

People shall come knocking the door, saying, 'but look, we ought to have been inside'. They honestly thought they were qualified to be in heaven, but they find out too late that they were never qualified at all. This is what Christ said and he cannot be accused of raising up Aunt Sallies to knock them down. He was no scaremonger; he told us the truth.

*No one needs to be deceived*

Shall we not ask ourselves now, clearly and plainly, 'Have I that oil—have I eternal life? Am I right with God? Have I received the Saviour? Have I become what I never was before: have I become a child of God? Am I a member of his body, or am I just religious?'

I ask myself that question, and I ask you. I have no desire to make anyone unsettled who is a Christian. Let it not be thought that this is a difficult thing in which deception is so easy that none of us can be sure. I would do you wrong to say that. As I let you go, I point out that it is the birthright of all who trust the Saviour to be sure. It is the hallmark of genuine children of God that they are sure. 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). Not only that you might have eternal life, but, thank God, that you might know you have it. I freely confess that if you don't know you have it, it is quite possible that you haven't got the real thing at all.

May I ask you now in God's presence to use that as a kind of test as to whether you've got the real thing? Do you know that you have passed from death to life? Do you know that you have become what you were never before—a child of God? Do you know, without any fear of contradiction, that you are ready for Christ's coming? Do you know it?

I pray that, if you don't know it for certain, you will take the steps to get that knowledge as soon as ever you can. The glorious thing is that you can have it. You, even you, could have it this very night. You could know it, because God says it to you with unshakeable certainty, and yours will be the wonderful experience. You could go in peace: the very peace of God within you, and peace between you and God.

Because that is such a great and real possibility, these warnings are given so that none of us might rest short of getting the real thing; and none of us, being deceived with mere religion, should eventually find ourselves unprepared and shut out from heaven.

Shall we pray.

Now, blessed God, while we have read these things from thy holy word, we especially pray thy help for us all. Give us the grace and the courage and the honesty to open our minds and hearts to what thou hast said in thy holy word. Give us, without exception, all of us here now bowed before thee, to challenge our own hearts, to ask ourselves in the light of thy word whether we are in fact sure; whether we have received this eternal life; whether we are ready for the coming of Christ.

Because the alternatives are so fearful, and because it is so gloriously possible for all of us to be saved, we pray that none of us may be so careless, so indifferent, as to go out unready, unsaved, and maybe to be eternally lost. Rather, grant that thy blessing coming to us all shall bring with it that peace and that joy and gladness; that certainty and brightness that come to all who dare to take thee at thy word and receive our Lord as a personal Saviour. In his name we ask these things. Amen.

## World Without End?

You perhaps have noticed that the subject for this evening is printed on the card in the form, not of a statement, but a question. It raises the question whether this world as we know it at present is destined to continue for ever, 'world without end'. There is a phrase in our lovely Authorized Version of the Bible that runs like this, 'Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.' (Eph 3:21). And that beautifully sounding phrase, repeated in many a prayer, has caused some people to think that this world will, in fact, go on indefinitely, without end, for ever.

The phrase, however, is somewhat of a mistranslation. In the original language it plainly states, 'To him be glory in the church through Christ Jesus, and to all generations of the age of the ages,' which is quite a different proposition from 'world without end'. In fact, the thing is not disputable at all, for the plain words of holy Scripture tell us explicitly that this present earth and the present heavens around it shall one day be dissolved. I read you the description from the calm, sane words of holy writ. They are found in the second Epistle by Peter, and chapter 3.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet 3:5-13)

I submit to you that no intelligent person, after reading those explicit statements, can any longer doubt what the word of God says on this important topic. The day of the Lord will come and the heavens and the earth shall pass away (v. 10). Here before us is stated the fact that this world shall not go on for ever and the means of its destruction. Just as the ancient

world was formed out of and through water, and God used the very elements of which the world was made to destroy it—the earth was deluged with water and perished; so, in that great final day, we are told here that God will use the very constituents of earth to destroy it. ‘The heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire’, and in that coming day God shall allow the elements to be loosed, dissolved, and the earth shall pass away with great noise and with great heat.

Our scientists have shown us in these recent years how vividly meaningful these words are. When the elements that compose any individual atom of material are loosed, the process is accompanied by tremendous heat and terrific noise. In days when humans knew nothing about atomic fission, the word of God says that there will come this great day of the Lord when the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat and the heavens and the earth shall pass away with a great noise.

I know that to many people these statements must sound fantastic in the extreme, and the inspired apostle is not unaware of the arguments that were urged against his statements. The argument that this promise had been made for many centuries and never fulfilled; the argument that the earth has always continued from the very beginning as it is now, and therefore might be expected to continue for ever as it is now. He is not unaware of the difficulties that some people try to urge against these statements, and he has answered them.

### **The occasion of this great event**

It is not my particular purpose this evening to rehearse before you his arguments. Rather, I wish to concentrate our attention on the occasion of this great event, for we are likewise explicitly told when it shall happen. We may lay it well to our hearts that humans will not be allowed to blow up this earth just when they please. Behind those great electrical forces that tie together the stable atoms that compose our universe lies the divine and limitless power of this earth’s Creator. We are told that in our Lord Jesus Christ ‘all things hold together’ (Col 1:17); and not until he gives his word of permission will this mighty atomic fission occur and the earth and the heavens flee away.

Our Lord has already informed us on what particular occasion he shall give his word for the dissolution of all things. The destruction of the heavens and the earth are ‘being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly’ (2 Pet 3:7). In the last book of Scripture we have described in vision that august occasion when heaven and earth shall flee away:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (Rev 20:11)

A great throne shall be set up, before which mankind shall be compelled to stand, and a voice that is no less than the voice of the Son of God shall speak, as he himself promised he would: ‘an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice’ (John 5:28). The dead shall stand before that great white throne, and so terrible will be the aspect of the majesty of our Lord as he sits upon that throne to judge, that we are told ‘from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them’ (KJV). It is the occasion, therefore, of the end of this heavens and earth that I want us to consider this evening.



## Temporary things are now eternally fixed

We are again told explicitly that on that occasion the temporary arrangements for the existence of humankind will be finished.

And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:13–14)

Death and Hades is the temporary abode of those who have died, and temporary modes of human existence beyond the grave shall be done with for ever. At this august point in history, *time* is giving up its content to *eternity*. Temporary things are now going to be eternally fixed and what has been a temporary condition will now become eternal.

That is perhaps the most significant and most thought-provoking thing of all these great things. It is not the thunderous roar of the dissolving of heaven and earth that impress our minds most profoundly; it is, I submit to you, the concept of eternity. Our minds reel as they try to grasp the infinite. As we look up above our heads on a starry evening, out into space, and try to grasp the concept that there is limitless, limitless, limitless space, it goes beyond us. And yet, if we were to try and set limits to it, we should find ourselves arguing like Lucretius, the old Latin poet: 'Suppose there is a limit, and suppose one could travel to that limit and stand on the very border, what would be the outside? And if one threw a javelin from the border, where would it go?'<sup>7</sup> Our minds fail before they can understand eternity.

Nor is it only the infinity of space and time that strikes us with awe; the very mention of eternity necessarily conjures up in our minds the question of the *fixing* of human destiny for good or ill, and it has a way of making people feel uncomfortable. Understandably so.

### *Why do people find eternity a gloomy subject?*

Being concerned for men and women who seemed to go on heedlessly without paying attention to spiritual things, some friends of mine down in the south of England once hired a large hoarding on a railway bridge on the outskirts of a very popular seaside resort. It was enormous, such as the petrol companies advertise their goods on. They put on it a poster with the one word, *Eternity*.

After it had been there for a few weeks, an agitation occurred in the town, and when the time expired, the advertising firm told them, 'Sorry, you can't have the space again. We could get more money for it, and I'm afraid we can't let it to you any more.'

'We will pay anything you like to ask,' said my friends. 'Name your price.'

Then they were embarrassed and the truth came out. The advertising manager had to admit that the Chamber of Commerce had strongly objected to this poster being on the outskirts of their holiday town. They said it was bad for business. 'We don't want people coming down here for a holiday to try and forget their cares and their worries, being confronted with a poster like that the moment they enter the town. We don't want any such gloomy posters.'

7 De Rerum Natura.

That is understandable, and yet a very strange attitude, isn't it? You can't dismiss eternity by agreeing not to think about it. You won't hold it off. And anyway, what is it that makes eternity a gloomy subject?

I would say at the outset to anybody here who finds the question of eternity gloomy, there is no need. God has a salvation for his creatures that can set their hearts agog with happiness and joy—genuine joy, not merely excitement—as they contemplate eternity. But obviously, for anybody who is not sure of salvation, eternity must be an exceedingly troublesome thought. The possibility of passing from time into eternity, unsaved and lost—to find one's condition permanently and eternally fixed without any possibility of alteration—understandably enough, that is a terrible thought.

If I am speaking to anybody here and my words bring shivers to your very core, please be persuaded that I do so because I love you. It is no good just trying to forget it, if we are not yet sure. All of us are marching on. We may not be present on earth at the time when heaven and earth shall flee away, yet we too shall be involved in eternity. Death is not the end; after death comes the judgment. We shall do no good to ourselves by trying to forget this uneasy fact.

Rather, I bring it to your attention this evening, and I press it home with all the powers of my being. There is the real opportunity—the genuine, God-given opportunity to everyone sitting here this night, that we might embrace and receive God's salvation now, and know with a clear heart and a clear conscience that we have it. I say again, it is possible for all of us here, without exception, if we have never done so, to enter into peace with God, and then the prospect of eternity would be bright with God's glory. Towards that end, I ask you to listen to what I have to say.

## **Does eternity mean that human destiny is fixed?**

### **1. Is salvation eternal?**

First, let us consider the matter from the point of view of those who are already Christians. When eternity dawns shall our salvation prove to be eternal, as something that never can be lost or overthrown or diminished? Is that a fact?

Oh, how we should thank God for the clear statements of his holy word, so many times repeated. Let me remind you of what he says about the glorious resurrection body that shall be given to all who trust the Saviour.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor 5:1)

The Apostle Paul tells us that our present body is no more than a tent, a temporary dwelling, a thing that is so obviously collapsible. In all of us there is evidence that the body we inhabit is a collapsible thing, and to some, perhaps, the final collapse is not a long way off. But to a Christian there comes the radiant reassurance, 'we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'.

The human body is a wonderful machine indeed, adapted to express human personality. The more it is investigated, the more the mind wonders at the marvellous skill of God. But the word of God informs us assuredly that, compared with what our bodies will be then, even the marvellous machine that we have now is but a temporary thing. It is like a tent, a collapsible tabernacle, compared with a permanent building. The body that you will inhabit, my dear fellow Christian, will be perfect, not collapsible; it shall not decay, it shall not grow old. It shall be part of us, not merely a house to live in but eternally an essential part of our personality, because the people whose body it is, they too shall live eternally.

Their eternal blessing has been guaranteed because of the effect of the work of Christ upon the cross. Scripture does not hesitate to say that when our Lord died upon the cross and rose again, he secured an *eternal redemption* for us (Heb 9:12). Being the infinite person that he is, his work has infinite effect: 'he became the source of *eternal salvation* to all who obey him' (Heb 5:9). He is the author, not of a temporary salvation, but of an eternal salvation and the life which all shall enjoy there is called in Scripture *eternal life*.

### *God is eternal*

We shall have no patience with 'logic choppers', who would tell us that this Greek word does not really mean *eternal*. Within the covers of holy writ, this word is applied to God himself, and eternal life is eternal because of what it is. 'And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (John 17:3). Life is having to do with a person; life is receiving the spiritual life of the eternal God.

You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end. (Heb 1:10–12)

He has made his creation, the heavens and the earth, so that they can be collapsed and folded up; but the life which he implants by generation into the heart of his children, this is his own very vitals infused into them. They could as easily perish as God himself could perish; but if God cannot perish neither can they.

By faith in Christ they have become not merely creatures, but children begotten of the seed of God through his indestructible word. 'You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God' (1 Pet 1:23).

All true believers may know assuredly that they shall never perish. 'I give them [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand' (John 10:28). A vivid metaphor that, and the thing that links a soul with God is faith.

Somebody might say, 'My faith as a Christian is so weak that one day I fear a blast may come and scatter it to the winds.'

You have no need to fear. If you are a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus, certainly there are enemies that will constantly attack your faith, but our Lord has guaranteed that no one will snatch you out of his hand. No one shall be able to snap or break that link that ties you to Christ and to God.

It was with the word of God in his heart that Paul could stand as a mature man and survey the future, not only calm, but happy and confident.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38–39)

With such certainty we may watch the mounting fears of men with no undue excitement, and the developments on earth, confident that God sits and rules. Though one day heaven and earth will fall down and disappear, yet we shall be eternally safe.

### *Entrance into the eternal kingdom*

That does not mean Christians are to be idle. As believers in our Lord, assured that we shall never perish, we are not to take the view that it does not matter how we live here. It matters immensely. The weakest soul who dares to trust the Saviour is given eternal life, and every person who is born again of God's Holy Spirit enters the kingdom of God and shall enter that eternal kingdom. But Scripture again makes it clear that, while all Christians shall have an entrance, some shall have an *abundant entrance* into that eternal kingdom. 'For in this way will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet 1:11).

The Apostle Peter wrote to believers, urging them that, far from growing slack because they knew they were eternally secure, by God's grace and the power of his Spirit they were to 'make every effort to supplement their faith' with all those qualities that define a Christian (vv. 5–8). If a Christian neglects his or her spiritual progress, nevertheless he or she is saved and shall enter into that eternal kingdom, but that will be all. Eternity shall fix that difference between them and other Christian men or women who diligently sought God's help to develop their Christian character. 'For star differs from star in glory' (1 Cor 15:41), and so the way we live here as Christians will mark us eternally.

May God help us as Christians, in a world given over to materialism, to show by our conduct what our real and true values are. All material things shall one day perish with this world; it is the eternal things that are valuable. The clothes, the home and the car: self-evidently these are of so much less importance than the man and woman in the clothes, who uses the car. God help us to get our sense of proportions right in view of eternity, so that when that great day dawns ours may be not just an entrance, but an *abundant* entrance into that eternal kingdom. God grant that when eternity dawns we shall have used time well, and that unique and never-returning opportunity that is life shall have been used to its maximum, to prepare us for eternity.

## **2. Is suffering eternal?**

What, then, about those who have not believed in Christ? Perhaps the biggest question that rises in our mind as we consider eternity is the matter of the destiny of those who are impenitent. Does it really mean that men and women who reject God's salvation in Christ shall be eternally lost? Does it really mean that our fellow men and women that we have learned to love, if they reject Christ they shall experience unending and eternal sufferings?

The thought is horrendous; the prospect is so awful that no one that is human at heart could face it without flinching. Must we believe that?

*Those who have never heard the gospel*

As I begin to discuss this matter with you, I hasten to narrow down the limits to what we may profitably consider here this evening in our limited time. I wish to write completely out of our discussion the question of all those who have never heard of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not wish to appear to be unfair or avoiding difficulty, and I know right well that with many people, particularly those who are not yet Christians, this is a real and serious concern.

As they face the claims of Christ to be the only way to God, they may find themselves asking, 'Well, is this really fair? Can it really be true that Christ is the only way to God? What about those millions of people—the vast majority of the human race of all time—who have never heard of Christ, or, hearing of him, have never really understood?'

For some people this is a real difficulty. Sometimes with others, one is forced to believe it is a smokescreen to hide themselves from the necessity of making a personal acquaintance with Christ. It's a trick of our subconscious mind, maybe, that when we are pushed to confront Christ and make our personal decision about him, we prefer to delay the decision and naturally think up objections, and suddenly become interested in the heathen. We were never interested enough to want to do anything about them before.

But I speak to people who are genuine, I trust, and I beg leave to omit from our discussion this question of those who have never heard of Christ, and think of people like ourselves, who have heard of him.

Let me say in passing that the God who gave his own Son that we might not perish, may be trusted to do what is just and right with the heathen. His own word has positively laid it down that men shall not be accountable for what they did not know. 'For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law' (Rom 2:12). God shall not add to them the solemn charge of his law, which they never knew. God is fair; and when judgment comes it is 'his strange work' (Isa 28:21). God shall not hold people responsible for what they never knew.

Not only so, but our Lord tells us exceedingly encouraging words when he indicated that, in his divine knowledge, he knows not only what people did with the light they had, but what they would have done had they had bigger light.

You will remember his discussion on Capernaum and Chorazin, cities that had witnessed his own personal presence and his miracles.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgement for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgement for the land of Sodom than for you. (Matt 11:21–24)

He said that it would be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, and for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for Capernaum and Chorazin, because, if the miracles that had been done in them had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have repented. Only a divine person could have told us that. God knows what men and women would have done had they heard the gospel.

A God who gave his only begotten Son so that we should not perish, shall not send one person to hell that he has any just reason for saving at all. We are told that the value of the sacrifice of Christ extends not only to this present and to the future; it extends backwards to the beginning of time, and all who turn to God, however little they knew, are covered by that great atoning sacrifice.

*Those who have heard the gospel*

So, we leave them out of this discussion, selfishly maybe, but for this moment we are necessarily concerned with ourselves. We have heard, haven't we? Not one of us here does not know that the Bible talks about Christ. We know that the Bible insists that we must be born again, and the Bible offers us a salvation that is so pressing that God's Son died to secure it.

We know too, surely, what it would mean for the likes of us to reject it. Would it mean that, in passing from time to eternity, our doom would be irrevocably sealed? Would it mean eternal conscious suffering? The thought is so tremendous that men and women everywhere have not been slow to raise their protests.

*Protest 1: The doom of the unsaved can't be eternal*

'Surely the God that we have come to know in Christ as a loving God and Father could not stand by and witness eternal suffering? I could not believe that. I could not bring myself to believe in a God who could watch human beings writhe in torment for ever.'

I understand how you feel, and we must be careful not to let sentiment run away with us. We are not dealing with what we think things ought to be, nor what we imagine God should be like. We are dealing here with God as he has revealed himself, and the argument that God would not stand by and see people suffer has already been shown to be false. In his word he has given certain examples to establish the fact that within the limited time of human experience on earth God will look on and see suffering.

Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown by fire and brimstone, and flaming asphalt. The judgment there was temporal; yet the New Testament reminds us that, as they suffered their punishment, they are set forth as an example of something bigger. They are set forth as an example of *eternal* fire, of *eternal* judgment. God once stood by and watched those human forms utterly perish in those flames, but not before he had done his utmost to get them out. When at last they were impenitent, God did send his judgment. It's futile for us to argue that God wouldn't do it; he has done it. He set them forth in their temporal judgment as an example of that bigger thing of eternal judgment.

Or may I quote you the example of the city of Jerusalem?

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Matt 23:37)

With infinite patience how often he had stood and pleaded with them to come, but they would not. There came the time when a heartbroken Christ stood outside that city and wept. He was no sentimentalist. A man who could endure the sufferings of the cross and cry triumphantly, 'It is finished,' with a loud voice—that man is no sentimentalist. Yet he stood outside Jerusalem and sobbed. What for? He told them that the days were coming when their enemies would heap a mound outside it: 'Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down' (24:2). With divine sight he was looking on to AD 70 when the Roman armies would encircle that city, and Jerusalem would go down in a terrible bloodbath of carnage and killing.

*Protest 2: A God of love wouldn't let such things happen*

My dear friend, it's useless for us to say that, because they have happened. The God of heaven stood by while the Romans did their worst. He didn't stand by unfeelingly; he didn't stand by rejoicing; he stood by with eyes wet with tears. But he had to let human choice go its way, and if they chose death, even a broken-hearted Christ would not go against their will. He must let them meet the end that they chose.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have evidence supreme in this: 'he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Rom 8:32). I tell you, if the doom of men and women were not eternal God's Son would never have died. Here is the extreme to which the love of God has gone: he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish. That's a God who surely must call forth the admiration of every human heart. Mighty God that he is, in whose sight I must be nothing more than an infinitesimal midge, yet he gave his only begotten Son for me.

'The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me', cried in the desolation of his heart, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Gal 2:20; Matt 27:46). The answer to that question is obvious. It was so that God might not have to forsake those who trust Christ. But I tell you the Godhead is not playing around; Calvary was not for effect's sake. God didn't devise such an extreme effort to save us unless there was a real and good cause. It was so extreme because the doom from which the Godhead would save us is nothing short of eternal.

But the love of God will not impose itself upon our will. If men and women choose to reject Christ, the very love of God will compel God to honour their choice. If God suppressed human will and choice, the result would be something less than human—a mere machine. God wouldn't do you such a dishonour, that if you chose to reject Christ he would make you be saved against your will. He wouldn't do it; he loves you too much for that. What he gave you in giving you a free will, he doesn't propose to take away. He will honour your choice, even though it breaks his heart as he watches you perish.

*Protest 3: Why should finite sins bring down infinite punishment?*

Some have said, 'But it's unfair! Within the brief space of seventy years a person makes a mistake and doesn't get saved. However badly he or she has sinned, surely it's an unfair thing that a finite crime should bring down an infinite sentence and punishment?'

That argument looks good. At first sight it would perhaps seem unfair that a finite crime, however big or small it is, should be met with an infinite punishment. But again it's a fallacious argument.

There are some things in this life from which we can recover. I may make a mistake and get my leg caught in a machine; the leg is cut off, and yet I survive. But if I point a gun at my head, thinking it's empty, and accidentally pull the trigger and the bullet goes through my brain, that's the end. I can't undo that.

God points out to us that the thing he is offering us is eternal, and to reject an eternal thing has eternal consequences. You see, it's not a matter of accepting dogmas and doctrines, and assenting to a few creeds. When we think of salvation, we are dealing with persons. God is a person; he's not a collection of doctrines. And we are told that if the Holy Spirit deals with men and women, and they know for certain that God is speaking to them, and they say, 'No,' then they have committed an eternal sin.

To reject life is to choose death. To reject God is to choose the devil. To reject eternal salvation is, in fact, to choose eternal perdition. Let us open our eyes to see that what Christ is offering each one of us now, this moment, is an eternal thing. If we say, 'No,' we are making an eternal choice.

*Protest 4: Surely a loving God will use the very pangs of hell and the sorrows of the lake of fire to allow men and women to repent of their earlier choice and be saved?*

The word of God holds out no such hope. Let me remind you of the extreme example of Judas, who rejected Christ. Christ knew his attitude of heart from the very start. He would take all that God had to give, but had no time for God. He would take God's money, God's time, the breath God gave him, God's everything, but he had no time for God. At the very last supper, as they sat around the table, when our Lord indicated that one of them should betray him, Judas was aware then that Christ knew who it was.

Yet there they sat together, God's only Son incarnate and a human soul destined to exist somewhere eternally. Knowing Judas's heart and all his history, Christ took the sop and offered it to him, thus indicating his infinite love. When an Easterner offered anyone a sop, he was offering that person his most intimate fellowship and unbreakable friendship. God would love Judas to the very last inch, but when Judas went out and made his final choice Christ's comment was, 'Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born' (Mark 14:21).

If Judas eventually ends up in heaven, then Christ's words are wrong. For heaven is so wonderful and eternity so immense that, if Judas were brought to heaven after ten thousand years of suffering, it would have been worth those years of suffering to get there. But it shall not be. 'Better if he had not been born', for he made an eternal choice, and he has gone 'to his own place' (Acts 1:25).

If I may paraphrase his words, Christ taught: 'If your hand or your eye is a stumbling block to you and keeps you back from salvation, cut it off or tear it out. For it's better to enter



into life crippled than having both hands to be cast into the lake of fire, “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (see Mark 9:43–48).

Annihilation is an empty hope, then. Where there is no fuel a fire goes out; but the worm shall not die because there will always be something to gnaw. ‘And the fire shall not go out,’ said Christ, ‘for there shall always be fuel for the fire.’ ‘Because this is so terrible,’ says Christ, ‘anything is better than to end up in hell.’

This is not soapbox preaching. I preach with some warmth, I trust. You wouldn’t expect me to do anything else. If you believe this, you would do likewise. But this is not my word; it is Christ’s. It is about him that we have to decide; and I am not sure that those who decide against him will want to change when they reach their eternal destiny. Our Lord told of one man in hell (Luke 16:19–31). Tormented in a flame, he asked for alleviation and relief, but even when that was denied he never once asked to get out.

How do you know that the impenitent, once they enter eternity, will want to change their minds, if they don’t want to change them now? Who said they’d want to change? If they do not want God and Christ now, who said they would want them then? It’s a will-o’-the-wisp and a wild and empty hope. If you don’t want the Saviour now, I’ve no reason for telling you that you’ll ever want him. Why did that man get there at last?

*Protest 5: Nobody has ever come back from the dead to tell us that these things are true.*

You’ll never get anybody back from the dead more than you have got. We have one: our Lord himself rose again the third day. But beyond that, we may not expect any visions. To that man in hell, the answer came:

They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’  
(vv. 29–31)

Why don’t people believe if they have the Scriptures? It’s so difficult, as we read this calm word without excitement, to think that God really means what he says. Why should anybody want another chance? If salvation is available now, why would you want a chance of accepting it after death? Why wouldn’t you accept it now?

Do I talk to even one person here who is not yet saved, and you would like to think there is hope beyond the grave? May I ask you personally why you would like to think that? When you’ve got an opportunity, why won’t you be saved now? What’s wrong with God now? What are you playing with? Perhaps the trouble is that, for the moment, we want to go our own way, but it’s a delusion. If our hearts don’t want God now and we fight against Christ now, learn this, that what you decide in life will last eternally.

My lecture is done, but I want to make it abundantly clear that I have put before you God’s own word. It is not my word, but Christ’s, who in that coming day shall be the judge. Not all will be punished equally. The dead shall be punished ‘according to what they had done’ (see Rev 20:11–15). The dead are judged ‘according to their works’ (KJV).

And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. (Luke 12:47-48)

There shall be degrees of punishment; but only one thing decides whether or not a man or woman is cast into that eternal lake of fire: 'And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire' (Rev 20:15).

The wonderful thing is that we are required to have our names put in now, and we may know that they are. Said Christ to his followers: 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (Luke 10:20). 'My fellow workers,' said Paul, 'whose names are in the book of life' (Phil 4:3). Already they knew it, and it is the birthright of all who trust Christ to know for certain that their names are there and they shall never perish.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

That is Christ's own word, but it's his self-same word that says, if we reject him, if we fail to receive his salvation, even before we get to that great white throne, 'whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God' (John 3:18).

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.