

June 2017

Dear neighbours,

Welcome back! How excited young children get for mum or dad to return from work. How we long for a loved one to return after a lengthier absence than usual! Balloons may be in order or, if away on military service, up will go the flags. No matter what the circumstances, we all long for an end to separation when love is at stake.

No one was more loved or lovable than the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter famously declared to Him, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21.17). So it was that His followers were heartbroken at His death, but overjoyed at His resurrection. Then 40 days afterwards He ascended into heaven.

I had the experience once of watching the plane carrying my wife home while I remained in Africa disappear into the distance until it was just a speck. We watch a train out of the platform, or wave until the car has disappeared from the end of the road. And then we turn away with sadness and perhaps a tear, wondering when, or even if, we shall see those loved ones again.

So it was with the disciples. They watched Jesus ascending into heaven, The Bible says, "a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, two men stood by them in white apparel (they were angels) which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1. 9-11).

From that time to this, lovers of the Lord Jesus Christ have longed for His return. Those who have lived after the time of those first disciples have loved Him quite as much. They have known the truth of the words which the Saviour spoke to Thomas, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20.29).

So many millions down the years have loved Him because He suffered and died to make atonement for their sins of which they were only too aware. Because, in consequence of their repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, He has assured them of eternal life, "in my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14.2). Because He has been a constant friend in the spirit of their hearts helping at all times.

They longed for the Saviour's return. Up till now He has come for them in death to take them to be with Him, that where He is there they may be also (John 17.24). But every generation has treasured the hope of His return to earth here.

But what does that mean? "Of that day and hour knoweth no man...therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24.36,44). The day of the Saviour's return means the end of this planet as we know it. There will be new heavens and a new earth, according to the Bible. No longer will He be the despised, suffering Saviour (Isaiah 53.3-6) but the reigning King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 1.5).

The onset of that day is described in the Bible, some of it by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For example (Matthew 24 30), "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The sign of the Son of man in heaven is not a cross or some other symbol, but His own appearance. And as the disciples saw Him going into heaven so He will return.

"The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump (trumpet) of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever

be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17). "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them...and they shall not escape" (2 Thessalonians 5. 2-3).

Jesus said, (Luke 23. 34-36) "take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (excess food, the drugs scene, clubbing), and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

One day there will be a sudden sound, instantaneous across the whole world, whether under night or day. The brightness of that coming will outshine the brightest sunlight. There will be a shout of triumph from heaven over all evil. The voice of the angel will be such as the dead in Christ shall hear that voice and rise into life, being rejoined with their souls coming from heaven.

It will be the mightiest gathering ever witnessed. The Saviour will be there, all the angels will be there, every believer in Christ of all time will be there, and all alive on earth at the time will see. The only ones missing would appear to be those who have previously died in their sins. The believers at that time will not die, but be gathered up, body and soul, to join the crowd accompanying King Jesus to inaugurate His unopposed heavenly kingdom.

The Saviour warns, "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity...men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth...and then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." And then, to encourage believers, "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21.25-28).

Some of you may have observed the closing scenes of the 2017 World Snooker Championship. The little daughter of the champion rushed into his arms and was hoisted aloft as he took the plaudits of the crowd. The child's reunion with dad warmed the crowd and added to the emotional power of the victory. It will not be much different when the Lord returns. The emotions will be more powerful in kind, for more was at stake (the total victory over all sin), nor will believers express that delight at reunion by rushing into the Saviour's arms, but the overjoyed reaction of every believer in the triumph of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will very likely be the release of such powerful and permanent emotions as have never been witnessed before.

The very last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22) echoes this desire. The very last verse but one in the whole Bible proclaims, "come, Lord Jesus."

Yours affectionately,