

Jesus' Unique Return

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[0:00] I want you to picture the scene. The rain is heavy. It's not difficult for us to imagine heavy rain.

! But this scene is different because tens of thousands of people lining the streets of London! in that heavy rain. There's rich people and there's poor people. There's young people and there's old people.

And they are united as they look on and see a funeral cortege pass by. There are muffled cries. There are tears that are gently rolling down certain cheeks that's getting mixed in with the rain. As they pay their final respects in the year 1885 to a guy called Lord Shaftesbury.

And you think, who on earth was Lord Shaftesbury? Well, let me give you a couple of quotes from the time that may fill in the blanks. That Lord Shaftesbury, according to the Times, the London Times, he changed the whole social condition of England.

[1:12] From working conditions to living conditions, ending child labour, schools for the underprivileged, mental health provision. In addition, he spent his life caring for others. That was what the Times of London described him as.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who was probably the greatest preacher of the 19th century in London, he described him in a different way. He described him as the best man of his age, who had a fervent love to God and a hearty love to others.

It's quite a description, isn't it? A fervent love to God and a hearty love to others. The man himself, this Lord Shaftesbury, when people would ask about the way in which he would live and why he would live in the way that he did, why he would be so motivated to do what he was enabled to do, he gave this very famous quote.

He said, King Jesus. Last evening we thought about his unique power.

This morning we thought about his unique suffering. Tonight we're going to be thinking about his unique return, and what that means for every one of us in here, and what that means for every person that we know, all the connections that God and his goodness has given to us.

[2:52] So Matthew 24. If you keep that open in your Bibles, we're going to be referring to different parts of it. It's a long chapter. At times it's a complicated chapter, but hopefully we're going to draw out truths from this chapter that will fix our minds upon the prospect of Jesus' return, and to see how God will use that prospect of Jesus' return to shape our lives as we seek to live for him in this world.

Our starting point this evening, of course, is that we remind ourselves that the death, the process of separation between body and soul, was not the end for the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the soldiers on Pilate's orders were asked about whether or not Jesus had died, because his death appeared to be so swift in comparison to how other people may die on the cross, Pilate was surprised to be informed that he was already dead.

To make sure, they stuck a spear into his side, piercing, giving that wound that would be so very visible. Jesus had died.

And of course, the people who had orchestrated in their minds the death of Jesus, of course, they were mere players in the divine drama that was unfolding.

[4:10] But in their minds, they're the ones that were pleased to themselves. They'd got what they'd wanted. Their ingenuity, their cunning had finally paid off, and Jesus was now dead. But to make sure he's dead, to make sure he stays dead, let's put some protections in place.

And so they come to Pilate, and they demand protection of soldiers to guard, and they demand that stones would be placed over the location where the dead body of Jesus would go, and that there'd be seals over that door.

And of course, neither the guards, nor the stones, nor the seals could somehow contain the Lord Jesus Christ, because three days later, death could not contain the Lord Jesus Christ. And the stone is rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let his people in, to see that he has indeed risen from the dead.

The process of death that Jesus endured, he as the firstborn would rise from the dead as the prototype, as the first, if you like, off the factory belt of all those who will one day rise from the dead. As the firstborn, death was not the end for the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, for the disciples, we can't blame them really, because if we were in their shoes, we would be no more predisposed to thinking of Jesus coming back from the dead than they were.

[5:27] As far as they were concerned, their hopes were dashed. Whatever prospects that they thought were about to unfold, well, they were shattered. And there was fear, deep, genuine fear, that having been so publicly associated with Jesus, they might be next.

What will happen to them? And of course, Jesus appears before them, and he reassures them, and he meets them in on successive Lord's days, and he talks with them, and he eats with them, and he deals with some of their doubts.

And it is, as far as they are concerned, without question, that Jesus had risen indeed from the dead. Sometimes he appeared only to a handful of them. Sometimes he appeared to hundreds of them at the same time, each of which could take the stand in a court of law, and bear testimony to what they saw and heard of Jesus, the risen Jesus, who was alive.

Because death was not the end. And many of these apostles would give their lives, refusing to say that the resurrection of Jesus was a lie.

People don't tend to die for a lie, if they can in any way help it. And these apostles, they weren't going to somehow deny the reality of the risen Jesus, and so they paid with their very lives with it.

[6:46] And so for Jesus, his death was not the end. And then Acts chapter 1 tells us about the ascension of Jesus, and having spent these 40 days with the disciples, teaching them, and encouraging them, and reminding them that they were going to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

And we are the ends of the earth. Reminding them that this is what's going to take place. They see Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, they see him physically ascend into heaven, with that risen human frame, ascending into heaven, and given the promise in Acts chapter 1, that the Savior who has ascended in that way is going to be the Savior who is going to descend in that way.

That not simply was death not the end, the ascension was not the end, because the current reign of our Savior is unfolding. Jesus is involved in every conversion.

He is involved in every pastoral conversation. He's involved in every evangelistic sharing of the truth. He knows, he's watching, he's involved, he is currently reigning.

But that dust of the earth that's now in the throne of glory, the Bible makes clear that the dust of the earth, the resurrected, risen, reigning human frame of Jesus, is coming back for the second coming, for the final coming.

[8:21] And he is going to come back in power and in glory. That's what verse 30 tells us. In fact, it's with power and great glory that he's going to come back.

So, with that context in mind, that death was not the end for Jesus, the ascension was not the end for Jesus, his current reign is ongoing, and his return will be imminent.

In the light of that, what do we learn from the teaching of Jesus about what will happen when these things take place? There's four things I want to draw your attention to very quickly this evening.

Number one, Jesus tells us, until he comes back, this is going to be a troubled world.

Until he comes back, it's going to be a troubled world. There's going to be trouble among the nations. He makes clear at the start of the chapters, verses 6 to 8. There's going to be trouble among the people of God.

We're going to be in all manner of persecution. There's going to be all manner of impact. There's going to be trouble in Jerusalem. Verse 15 talks about that trouble that's going to take place.

[9:32] So, all in all, if you want a word to describe the affairs of the world's existence, from the death of Jesus and the ascension of Jesus to his return, the word is trouble.

How accurate has that been? Are we not in a troubled world? Have we not always been in a troubled world since the ascension of Jesus?

That's exactly what takes place. Our generation is beginning to waken up to the fact that human nature is not evolving to a higher plane whereby things like war, we've somehow graduated beyond that.

as if human nature was somehow better now. But human nature is not better now, is it? Not at all. You think of the bloodshed in the 20th century, estimated to be more than the 19th centuries beforehand combined.

So what does that say for the 21st century? We're in a troubled world. We're in a troubled world. As you look to the far-flung parts of the nations, we're a troubled world in our own country.

[10 : 39] But none of this should surprise us. That's why the people of God should never be surprised by how things are unfolding. Jesus has told us. He's told us ahead of time. And if we're being realistic, we take what Jesus says very seriously, that it is a troubled world.

On top of that trouble, there's going to be a distinct form of trouble that's going to come for the people of God with people claiming two things.

Either claiming that they are the Christ, the one come from God to rescue humanity. We have that given to us in verse 5, where many will come in my name, claiming I am the Christ and lead many astray.

And we have this again in verse 25. We talk about other things there. So some people are going to come claiming that they are Christ, and other people are going to come claiming that they know where Christ is.

Well, he's in the wilderness, or he's in this particular location. And you put all these things together, and you realize that Jesus says for his people, until he comes, it's not going to be calm.

[11 : 48] It's not going to be necessarily peaceful. There's going to be unrest on multiple different levels. There's going to be unrest among the people of God as they take a stand for Jesus.

And there's going to be unrest for the people of God as they deal with all manner of false teaching and apostasy, and worst of all, that lovelessness.

Verse 12, because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. Jesus says, before he returns, it's going to be a troubled world. Second thing, the passage tells us, is that when Jesus returns, this is going to be something that everybody is going to see, and everybody is going to hear.

This is not going to be a select few, but as verse 31 tells us, that there's going to be this great trumpet call that's going to be sounded, then everybody is going to hear this particular sound.

They are going to hear, they're going to see that the return of Jesus is not going to be some small localized event, it's going to be a global event. It's going to be something spectacular.

[13 : 03] Two years before Lord Shaftesbury's funeral, so this would be in the year 1883, there was the loudest recorded sound in history when the volcano at Krakatoa in Indonesia erupted.

So loud that the measuring devices of the day, it was almost off the charts. So let me give you some statistics. 100 miles away from the eruption, it was measured at 170 decibels.

For human hearing, safe level is 70 decibels. The eruption sent a plume into the sky 17 miles high. The noise was heard 3,000 miles away. There were, unfortunately for them, there was a boat crew some 50 miles from the eruption.

All of their eardrums burst with the noise. It sent a pressure wave reverberating round the entire earth. When that trumpet is sounded, it will be a louder noise than that.

[14 : 23] There is nobody who is going to somehow be deaf to that noise. When that trumpet is sounded as the sign that the Savior is on His way, it's not going to be the noise of traffic.

It's not going to be the noise of machinery. It's not even going to be the noise that are in our headphones or earpods or whatever it might be. There is nothing that is somehow going to drown out or dilute or muffle the sound that's going to be present when this trumpet is sounded to tell us that Jesus is on His way.

Not simply will there be a sound, there will be a sight. Look at verse 26 and 27. People see, oh, He's out in the wilderness or He's in the inner rooms, don't believe it. Why?

Because Jesus says, as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. So, allied to the sound, there is going to be a sight.

2020, the World Meteorological Organization recorded a mega flash of lightning. This was a bolt of lightning that measured 477 miles long.

[15 : 48] And it lit up for 10 seconds. And it's the longest, the biggest mega flash that's ever been recorded. And everyone in that 477 mile corridor saw this and what on earth is going on here.

Again, when Jesus sees, as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. When Jesus returns, you're going to hear it and you're going to see it if you're still alive at that point.

Nobody is going to somehow miss it. It doesn't matter our location. It doesn't matter what the weather conditions are going to be at that time. It doesn't matter what the visibility is.

Everyone is going to see this global event as Jesus comes back. Third thing. Jesus tells us until He comes He's going to be troubled.

When He comes we're all going to see it. When He comes what we're going to see is going to be remarkable. Because we're going to see in the words of verse 30 we're going to see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and with great glory.

[17 : 09] He's going to come with divine splendor. There's a hint of this in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Remember this guy who is probably today we'd probably call him a terrorist or some crazed individual.

He's doing whatever he can to extinguish the cause of Jesus Christ and he's going to go to whatever place he possibly can to round up those who align themselves with Jesus and at the very least he's going to throw them in jail if he can get them killed even better.

And he's on his way to Damascus and he's arrested by Jesus. And when he's arrested by Jesus there is this there is the two things there's there's the sight and there's the sound.

They all saw the sight only Saul heard the sound. The sight was described that it was that it was a glory brighter than the noonday sun.

So you know it's like if you're stuck without any sunglasses any shades and you're looking in that direction if you're driving the winter sun driving it's so difficult isn't it when you see the sun there and you can't help but move away or condense your eyes well for Saul he's in the presence of the one whose glory is just absolutely blinding.

[18 : 32] Who are you Lord? Well I'm the one you're persecuting. I'm not persecuting you. Oh yeah you are. You persecute my people you persecute me. Why? Because Jesus is united to his people. Such is the closeness of the bond between you and me and our saviour that when we are attacked he is attacked.

So there's that glimpse there that we have of the glory that Jesus possesses because when he comes back it'll almost be the polar opposite to his first arrival in this world.

It's not that Jesus is going to somehow arrive in this world the second time into some forgotten stable in an overcrowded Bethlehem. It's not that he's going to be confined to the northern outposts of the land where nobody else wants to be.

It's not that he's going to be somehow treated in the way that he was treated up until how he was before because when the creator entered his creation it was characterised by humility.

There were glimpses of glory of our saviour and these glimpses were remarkable. Peter when he writes later on in the New Testament he remembers seeing that glory.

[19 : 47] Wow. What vocabulary does he have to be able to describe what it was like? Because it was characterised by that lowliness of status.

Characterised by being as we saw the man of sorrows. Taking our sorrows. Characterised by the opposition, by the persecution, by the rejection that he faced.

And yet this tells us he's going to come in great power and in great glory. The polar opposite if you like to the state of humiliation.

He's going to come in this state of exaltation. He's going to come as somebody said with all the paraphernalia of deity. So put together in your minds this is how my small mind works.

I think of Isaiah chapter 6 and Isaiah there is confronted with this image of God and the holiness of God and he's like woe is me for I'm a man of unclean lips.

[20 : 45] So you put that together with what Peter, James and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration, the glory that emanated from Jesus. And you put that together with some of the other glimpses that we have of his glory even as we saw last evening as he spoke the words, who are you looking for to the arresting party?

I am. And the words just flattened all those who came. You put all that together and so much more, so much more. And that is what we are going to see.

The all conquering, unrivaled power and authority and glory of our Savior. Savior. The Bible tells us that he's going to come with, we've got the angels who are going to accompany him in verse 31 here. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 tells us those who've gone ahead of us, who already see clearly in a way that we don't, they're going to come back. Somebody put it and left it by way of a discussion point as to could heaven possibly be depopulated on that day that Jesus comes. As he comes with the angels and he comes with his people and he comes in such glory.

[22:01] And we're going to hear and we're going to see that glory. And so the big thing therefore for us is that we need to be ready for that, don't we?

We need to be ready and waiting for that event to happen. The Old Testament people of God, we read off them and different folks as they were waiting in different periods and longing ultimately for the Savior of the world to come.

Well, we're on the other side, we're longing for the Savior of the world to come back and to bring his people to be with him. And what we learn about the coming of Jesus is that if the first arrival of Jesus came at exactly the right time in the Father's timetable, as we have specified for us in Galatians chapter 4, verse 4, just exactly the right time that God sent a son born of a woman born under law.

If it was timetabled to perfection, the first arrival of Jesus, and his ministry was timelined to perfection, according to the Father's ultimate purposes.

Jesus, remember he said to his brothers who thought he should take his miracle road show to Jerusalem and not hang about up north in the Galilee area, and he said, well for you any time is right, but not for me.

[23:31] What was he talking about? He was talking about his father's timeline. So his arrival came at just the perfect time. The unfolding timeline of his life and ministry was at the perfect time. He died at specifically the right perfect time in the purposes of Almighty God.

And he will return, he will return in the timing of his heavenly father. That's verse 36, concerning the day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son, but the father only.

Again, speaking reverently, if there is such a thing as a calendar, we would think of it in terms of a calendar, and we write things on a calendar, we circle dates, and we think, well that is, that's something that we're anticipating is about to happen.

Well, speaking as reverently as we can, if you think of that, is there a divine calendar? And on that date, that is when the eternal son comes back in glory.

He's going to come back in glory. It's going to be without warning. It's why when you read a passage like this, or you come across those people who get some prominence in our media every so often, some of these crazy wacky groups who conclude that Jesus is going to come back on a particular date, in a particular year, and they're telling all these people about it, and they get more and more media attention, and then what of course happens?

[24:51] Well, the day passes, doesn't it? Oh, yeah, we got something a little bit wrong there, didn't we? Oh, yeah, but it's definitely going to be this date now. And you think, you do not know. Read your Bibles. You're not meant to know, because the Father knows.

And that's the crucial thing. And so, if anybody says to us that they somehow know, we remind them that you don't. Because as 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 2 tells us that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

It will come without warning, which means there needs to be that constant readiness that you and I have, that the Lord Jesus can come back.

Now, of course, there are certain things, as the passage here makes clear, need to take place before he comes back. There's going to be this great tribulation that's going to unfold. There's going to be, the gospel is going to be preached in all nations, other parts of the teaching.

The New Testament tells us that the matter of sin is going to be revealed and there's going to be some of these things that will unfold. Many of them are, you could argue, have already unfolded.

[25:54] And so, the requirement, therefore, is for us to take on board what the Bible says. Because the Bible says, when speaking of the return of Jesus, that it is not something that is distant.

but that it is near. That our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. That we should not give up meeting together as someone in the habit of doing, especially now as the day approaches.

It is, if you want to have a biblical term for the return of Jesus, we're talking about the nearness of the return of Jesus and therefore the implications of what that means for me and for you in that. go back into the 19th and early 20th century again. I'm taking a wee history lesson this evening for certain things.

And the future lesson, we put that together. But back in the day, when there was one of the great social changes in our country where a lot of rural folks had to migrate to the urban centres for work, especially in different specific times.

[27:03] But it was problematic for some rural folks when they moved from the rural areas into the city. People who had been used to living their lives according to the seasons and people who were living their lives used to waking up with the cock crowing and various different things like that, that wasn't the case in certain cities.

So there was a job that existed in the 19th and early 20th century of a window knocker that just before dawn, it was somebody's job to go around and knock on the windows where people stayed so that they would be woken up and ready to then get to the factory for whatever work they were engaged in.

If they slept in, there was no unions as we have today, there's no employment legislation as we have today, it was the complete opposite. If you slept in, well that was you fired on the spot. And then that meant immediate danger for your family. How could you afford to feed them? How could you afford to house them? So it was absolutely crucial in an era before alarm clocks that somebody woke them up.

And that's what this window knocker would do, this pre-dawn call, so that they would be ready for what comes as they get to work.

[28:34] You see, that's a job that's so obsolete, isn't it? We've got alarm clocks, multiplicity off them. If we're late to work, there has to be a pretty good reason given the amount of technology that we have. But you see, the role that we have as a people of God, to tell people that they need to be ready because time is near.

That job, that role is not obsolete. That role is required as much tonight as it has ever been. So summarizing what we have here, we've got, it's a troubled world, let's not be surprised.

I know so many of the Lord's people that I deal with, and sometimes I feel it myself, I feel a level of anxiety about the people that are in charge of our world and what are they doing and what's the impact and all these things.

And Jesus has told us this is exactly the way it is to be. We remind ourselves that when he comes everyone's going to see and hear and what we're going to see and hear is going to be so overwhelming. And we need to be ready, we need to be waiting because the Bible teaches us the return of our Savior is near.

So in the light of all that, what are our takeaways, what are our applications for this evening? And I want to center them on a couple of things. To preamble before we get to our contrasting reactions and our concentration, I think it's probably helpful to remind ourselves.

[29:56] Remember sometimes preachers quite often refer to the fact that if you knew or you could hear the Lord Jesus praying for you in the room beside you, then all the fears that you have and that I have, they would somehow dissipate.

If we heard the Lord Jesus praying for us the way he does because he ever lives to make intercession for us, if we heard that, then our fears and our anxieties would settle instantly. And the recognition of that truth is there.

But along that same line, if we remembered that the return of Jesus is near, then that sense of holding back and that sense of discomfort about actually genuinely, warmly, winsomely speaking to somebody about their soul, that would disappear too because he's coming back and time is short. And so there's going to be contrasting emotions on that day. I want you to picture this. I mean, I don't know how you can picture the return of Jesus, but you picture this sound and you picture this sight.

And you see then the separation in humanity because there's going to be one group of people who are going to be smiling.

[31:18] It might take a second or two for us to figure out what's taking place. People are like, eh? Oh. Oh. Jesus has come.

One set of people are going to be smiling because they're going to recognize their Savior, that everything that their Savior said is unfolding and it's going to be remarkable.

people are not going to be smiling. The other group of people, there's going to be this dreadful realization of what's taking place.

And it's going to be that, oh, oh, oh. Here is the Lord of glory whose advances I have rejected over many, many years.

Whose loving invitation to someone like me, to someone like you, was to come to him, to know the rest that he can give to you, to come to him knowing that he will never turn you away.

[32 : 33] and you'll see him and you'll know it's too late. The great and dreadful day of the Lord is what the Bible describes it as.

It's very solemn, isn't it? The contrasting emotions, let me ask you, which emotion is going to be yours? Is it going to be that realization he's here?

He's come to take me home? Or that dreadful realization that it's too late and you will bow your knee.

Everyone will bow their knee that day. Everyone will confess, oh, Jesus, you are Lord. But it will be too late if that's the first time that we have confessed and bowed before him.

So Jesus' unique return that is contrasting emotions in that sense. And there is therefore for the people of God concentration.

[33 : 42] That needs to be ours, isn't it? Do you remember the quote I gave you at the very start? Shaftesbury was 84 when he died, Lord Shaftesbury, and he said, I do not think in the last 40 years I have lived a conscious hour that's not been influenced by the truth of the Lord's return.

So that means something changed for him aged 44. Something changed aged 44. We don't know what, well, sorry, some of you, I don't know what, maybe you do, maybe you've read a biography about Lord Shaftesbury, speak to me after, I want to know what changed.

But something changed in his mind, in his thinking, when he was 44 years of age. age, and that transformed his outlook. And maybe up until age 44, he was like us, that he kind of knew that the Lord has returned, well, yeah, that is a thing, Jesus has promised it, but there's so much else going on in life, there's so much busyness, there's so much activity, there's so much responsibility, there's so much weariness, all these things were there, that he knew of it, but it didn't have a daily impact. Something changed, and because it had a daily impact, what an impact he then had upon his generation, as he had that, was it, fervent love for God and hearty love for others.

So I wonder therefore, and I wonder genuinely for myself, and I leave it with yourself to wonder of you, what would it take for my life to be recalibrated so that my focus and concentration on the return of Jesus was actually what it should be, and what impact would that have on others?

[35 : 29] Because Jesus is coming back. It's been my privilege to speak to you over these past days about Jesus' unique good power.

Who else walked on the face of this earth that possessed such power and used it? for good. It's been my privilege to speak to you about Jesus' unique suffering.

There's some sufferings that we can relate to, but there's so much we can't. His suffering as a representative, his suffering voluntarily, his suffering and what the reward would be for it.

And we finish off by reminding ourselves that there is a unique return that is imminent. Are you ready? If you've come to this service tonight and you don't yet know Jesus as your Lord and Savior or you're not sure you want to know more, please speak to me afterwards.

Speak to Thomas. We'd love to speak to any Christian you know in here. This is too important for you to let this evening pass without knowing that you're ready so that your reaction on that day will be one of rejoicing.

[36 : 44] your Savior has come as he promised to take us home.