

CHRISTIANITY *(defined)*

A Study of 1 John

“Are You Ready to Meet Jesus?”

1 John 2:28-29

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INTRODUCTION: Everybody makes mistakes. The worst time to make a mistake may be when you are applying for a new job. These are actual statements that people made on job applications: (1) I served as an assistant **SORE** manager. (2) Education: Attended college on a **FOOL** scholarship. (3) I am very **DETALE OREINTED**. (4) I am a **RABID** typist. (5) I was involved in **RUINING** an entire Midwest division. (6) Reason for leaving previous job: I was pushed aside so the manager’s girlfriend could steal my job. (7) **ON A FEDERAL JOB APPLICATION:** “Do you favor the overthrow of the United States Government by force, subversion, or violence? Answer: **“Violence.”**

Those could be costly mistakes. But the biggest mistake a person can make is not being ready for the return of Jesus. So let me ask you a personal question: **ARE YOU READY TO MEET JESUS?**

In the passage we studied last week, John wrote, “Children this is the last hour.” I said, “If John was living in the last hour, we are certainly living in the last minutes of the last hour.” Then John addresses something that will happen at the last hour. Let’s pick up the text at **1 John 2:28-29:** “**So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.**”

Back in college I commuted every Wednesday afternoon to a church I was serving to lead youth Bible Study. I would often drive back on Thursday morning depending on when my first class met. The trip was 75 miles one way, and all of it on Interstate 65. That was back in the early 70’s when a lot of people were still hitch-hiking. I would usually pick up hitchhikers because I had a captive audience to witness to them

about Jesus. I used different approaches, and this on particular morning I was thinking about the second coming of Jesus because I had taught about it the night before. I picked up a hippy who was hitch hiking alone. He had long hair and a beard – but hippies were considered cool – they were peaceniks. He got in the passenger seat and we pulled back onto the Interstate. After I sped up to slightly over the speed limit, I looked at him and out of the blue asked him, “Hey man, are you are you ready to meet Jesus?” He must have thought I meant right then because his eyes got big and he reached for the doorhandle and said, “No, dude, I don’t want to die!” I laughed and told him to settle down. I continued to talk to him about the second coming, but he was pretty nervous. After about ten minutes he said, “Thanks for the ride dude, you can let me out that this exit.” He probably thought I was crazy for believing that Jesus was coming back. And a lot of people think we’re crazy for believing that and preaching that. But I still believe it and I’m still preaching it. Let’s learn three truthss about the return of Jesus.

1. JESUS WILL APPEAR WITHOUT WARNING. The study of end times is called Eschatology. When we speak of the second coming of Christ, we’re not talking about something that happens on one day. The Bible speaks often about The Day of the Lord – but it’s not one 24-hour period. The Second Coming is actually a series of events that will happen. If you want more information on this, I suggest you get my book, *Revelation: God’s Final Word*.

But as I understand the Bible, here are the three major events that will occur in the future. The very next thing to happen will be the rapture of the church – that’s the appearing that John is talking about. It will happen in the sky. Then once of the church has been taken to Heaven there will be a seven-year period of world chaos often called the Great Tribulation. Jesus said in Matthew 24 that it will be a time of trouble and tribulation unlike anything the world has ever experienced. Then the third event will be the literal return of Jesus to set His foot on planet earth. He will be leading a heavenly army to defeat the Antichrist and his forces. In this message, we will be focusing on the first event – the rapture of the church. But to put it in context, let’s talk about the different times when Jesus has appeared.

(1) His past & present appearances. In the past, Jesus appeared for our redemption. He was born in Bethlehem, but we don't know much about His life until He was about 30 years old. Then at age 30, He started a three-year ministry. He went around teaching and preaching, performing miracles and doing good. And then when He died on the cross, He offered Himself as a sacrifice once for all, for sin. That's the *past* appearance of Christ. Did any of you see Him then? Of course not. None of us saw Christ in that appearance. Peter saw Him. John saw Him. Many people saw Him, but we did not.

After He was crucified and laid in the tomb, He rose from the dead. He stayed around with the disciples for forty days until He ascended back to Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. That is the location of His PRESENT appearance.

At this moment, Jesus is appearing as our representative for our redemption. The Bible says in Hebrews 7 that Jesus is better than any earthly priest because He is a live forever. And because He is an everlasting priest, we read in Hebrews 7:25: **“Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.”** He is interceding on our behalf. A few weeks ago we studied 1 John 2:1 which says that when a Christian sins, we have an advocate – a defense attorney- with the Father, and His name is Jesus.

(2) His future appearance. So Jesus appeared in the flesh when He was born in Bethlehem. He rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of God the Father where He is appearing now. And the writer of Hebrews tells us that there will be another appearance on earth. Hebrews 9:28 says, **“So also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”**

That hitchhiker probably thought I was a little crazy because I talked about Jesus coming back. And there are a lot of people who ridicule our belief about the second coming. According to the Bible, that's actually a sign that His return is near. Peter wrote: **“Scoffers will come in the last days scoffing and following their own evil desires, saying, “Where is**

his 'coming' that he promised? Ever since our ancestors fell asleep, all things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4)

All the original disciples believed Jesus would return in their lifetime. Peter, Paul, and Mary believed it. And to us it seems like a long time since John wrote these words. But the Bible says that with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. Heaven isn't limited to the clock and the calendar like we are. To us it seems that Jesus has been gone for two thousand years. But to God it only seems like a couple of days. It's as if Jesus returned to His Heavenly home last Friday! Be ready. He will appear without warning.

been a couple of days. It's as if Jesus went home last Friday!

2. YOU MAY BE ASHAMED WHEN HE APPEARS. So when Jesus appears suddenly, He will rapture the church. Jesus compared it to a Jewish bridegroom surprising his bride and taking her to His Father's house. Some people complain that the English word “rapture” doesn't appear in the Bible, and they are correct. But the English words “trinity” or “missions” don't appear in the Bible either, but we believe in the trinity and missions. Paul wrote that believers who are alive at the coming of the Lord will be “caught up.” The Bible was first translated from Greek to Latin. In the Latin Vulgate the word used for “caught up” is *raptio*, from which we get our English word rapture. Let's read about it in 1 Thessalonians 4:16: **“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still 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.”**

The Apostle John warned the young believers to stay faithful and remain in Christ or they face the possibility of being ashamed when Jesus appears. That's a warning that we should take seriously. The word “ashamed” is a very graphic word that means to shrink away in fear. It's a word that Homer used in his *Iliad* to describe someone who was horribly disfigured.

So let's all examine our lives and think about at least two areas of conduct that might cause us shame when Jesus returns.

(1) First, Unholy behavior would cause us shame. Let's say that there is some behavior that you're involved in that is sin. That sin is not going to send you to hell if you're a Christian. If you are a Christian, every sin you've ever committed and every sin you'll ever commit has been put under the blood of Jesus, and you're forgiven.

You don't have to confess your sins to go to heaven, but you must confess your sins, Christians, to stay clean before the Lord. And so let's say there's some sin, some habit, some filthy attitude that you're just holding on to. And you say, "Lord, I want to give it up." And then you take it back again and you say, "God, I'm going to stop this." And then you start it again the next week. You're fighting and you're fighting and you're fighting, but you don't have any victory over it.

Then imagine Jesus comes back at the moment you are involved in that behavior. You would be ashamed.

Through the years, one of my most enjoyable experiences has been to go to Student Ministry summer camp. For five or six years after I came to Tyler, when Bob Billups was our Student Minister, he asked me to be the main speaker. That was back when I was younger and cooler. I did a series of messages on "What would Jesus say to Madonna, or Michael Jordan, or Bill Clinton, Homer Simpson, Marilyn Manson, or the Columbine shooters – and many other.

But then I got too old to be cool. But I have always enjoyed going and joining the students at camp to hang out for a while. Before COVID, I would join the students in Florida for Engulfed. The last few years, I've done a "stump the pastor" Q&A. One question that has come up several times has to do with teenage romances. The question has been phrased different ways, but it's basically asking this: "I know that premarital sex is sinful, but how far can a couple go and still not sin?" That's a great question. They wonder where Christian students should draw the line. My answer has always been 1 John 2:28. Don't engage in any behavior that if Jesus came back at that moment, you'd be ashamed. But that advice isn't just for students, that's good counsel for every one of us.

I'm not talking about being perfect. When Jesus comes back, He doesn't expect His children to be perfect, but He does expect them to be clean. You can be confessed and stay up-to-date. How can you confess your sins? Get on your knees before God and say, "God, bring to my mind any unconfessed sin in my life right now."

(2) We might be ashamed if we have unfinished business. Let's say the Lord has led you to be involved in some ministry, or to share your faith with a friend or loved one. Our tendency is to procrastinate and think that we'll always have time to do that tomorrow. When Jesus returns will there still be unfinished business for you?

Christians will not face the Great White Throne Judgement. Only lost people will be there. But we will be evaluated at the Judgement Seat of Christ. That's not a judgment to determine who is lost or saved. It's for Christians to be evaluated on what we did with what we were given. Everybody has been given spiritual gifts. If you're a Christian, you have an ability to do something for Christ.

I constantly come back to what Jesus said in Matthew 25 about the Parable of the three Managers. They aren't named. We'll call them Tom, Dick, and Harry. The Owner gave Tom five thousand dollars; he gave Dick two thousand dollars, and he gave Harry a thousand dollars. Then he said, "Go to work with what I've given you."

Then he was gone a long time. He came back without warning and said, "Let's settle up." Tom said, "Master, you gave me five thousand, I invested it in some small companies, and now it's worth ten thousand." Dick said, "Master, I've also doubled your investment." To both of them, the Master said, "Well done, good and faithful servants. What about you, Harry?"

Harry said, "Master, I know you're a hard man, a skinflint, you don't put up with mistakes. So, I hid your money away, and here it is. The full thousand bucks." The Master was furious. He said, "What? At least you could have put the money in a bank and earned a little interest." You are a lazy, wicked, servant, and you're fired, give that money to Tom."

God has gifted you. What are you doing with what He has given you? We would certainly be ashamed if Jesus returned and we had wasted our lives on things that don't matter for eternity.

One of my mentors, Pastor Ray Stedman, who has been in Heaven now for 29 years wrote this about this passage: **“What are the alternatives awaiting Christians on that day? Well, clearly there are two, and only two. It is possible for us to have confidence before him, or to shrink in shame from him, one or the other. There is a false teaching that has arisen within Christian circles that suggests that the day of our appearing before the Lord will be a day only of the giving of rewards. There are to be no regrets, no shame, no negative notes at all; it is all sweetness and light. It is hard to understand how such teaching arises in the face of a Scripture like this where John warns that it is all too possible to shrink in shame before him at his coming.”**

3. WE CAN MEET JESUS WITH CONFIDENCE! But you don't have to be ashamed. The other option is to meet the Lord with confidence. This isn't a message to lay a guilt trip on you. It's a message to encourage you to be faithful to the end. John gives us three words that summarize how to face the Lord with confidence. He wrote, **“So now, little children, REMAIN IN HIM so that when he appears, we may have confidence.”** (1 John 2:28)

Some people envision that when Jesus comes back, He is going to parachute down from Heaven. They think they're going to have time to get on their knees and repent. Or if they are a Christian out of fellowship with the Father, they'll have time to get right with God. But the Bible teaches that when Jesus returns it will happen in a split-second. Literally. In 1 Corinthians 15:51 the Bible says, **“Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.”**

It's going to happen faster than a blink of your eye. Here are at least two ways you can meet the Lord with confidence.

(1) Look for His return. Paul wrote to Titus that we should be Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said the same thing. He said, you don't know that day nor

the hour, so just watch and keep watching. There's a gospel song that says, "**Keep your eyes upon the eastern skies. Lift up your head, redemption draws nigh.**"

That doesn't mean that all you do is stare at the sky. It means you anticipate every day that this could be the day He returns. I can't tell you how many times I've been driving and looked at a beautiful sunset and thought, this would be a great time for Jesus to come in the clouds. But I don't keep staring at the sky, I put my eyes back on the road.

During the Second Great Awakening a Baptist Preacher in New York, William Miller, was convinced from reading Daniel 9 that Jesus would return at noon on October 22, 1844. Thousands of his followers sold their possessions and gathered on hills and mountains to meet Jesus – but that prediction was wrong. That's not what it means to look for His return.

No, you stay busy in the meantime. Have you ever been in your kitchen on a holiday waiting for somebody that's on the way to visit you for Thanksgiving or Christmas? You can't wait for them to get there! Maybe it's your children, your grandchildren, or maybe it's your parents who are coming to visit you. You stay busy in the kitchen, don't you? But every now and then, you're glancing out the window and thinking, "Are they here yet? Are they here yet?" You're expecting them to arrive. You're making preparations for them to come. That's what it means to look for His return. You live every day expecting His return. And that leads us to the second way to be confident regarding Christ's return.

(2) Live for His return. We don't know when Jesus is coming back, so we just have to stay ready. Paul wrote that the Day of the Lord would come like a thief in the night. So we must live as if each day is the day when Jesus will appear.

C.S. Lewis was one of the most respected scholars of the 20th Century. He was an atheist for many years, having rejected his Anglican upbringing. But he had a friend who also taught at Oxford, J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote the Lord of the Rings. Tolkien helped Lewis reconnect with the faith of his youth. Consequently, Lewis became one of the most influential theologians in Christian history. Here's Lewis' warning about the Second coming of Christ: (*The Case for Christianity*,

1947): “God is going to invade this earth in force. For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing. It will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”

The Bible contains thousands of promises from God. But do you know what the very last promise that Jesus makes in the Bible? It’s found on the last page of your Bible. In Revelation 22:20 Jesus said:

“Yes, I am coming soon.” And the last prayer of the Bible is in the next verse where John wrote, **“Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!”** Is that your prayer? Are you read to meet Jesus with confidence today?