

# Followers of the Way

## The return of the King

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Acts 1:1-11; 2 Peter 3:2-13

The Bible tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, took human form in order to break Satan's hold over humanity and restore us to that relationship with God for which we had first been created, and which had been so fatally ruptured in Eden. But though Satan's hold *was* broken by Jesus' death on the Cross and His resurrection, we know that was only Part 1 of a wider plan, and that victory will only become complete once Christ returns in glory, and deals finally and forever with Satan, consigning him, along with all his hordes, to the lake of fire.

Since the choices made in this life have eternal consequence, we know that this time we're in now is vital. For the last 2000 years we've enjoyed a time of dispensation to allow time for every man, woman and child on earth to hear the good news and have a chance to repent, before it's too late. To be saved. This was the reason for the Great Commission, e.g. Matthew 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." And Jesus added, "... I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

So the disciples knew beforehand this was the plan, and it was confirmed for them by the angels when Jesus ascended into heaven. Acts 1: 10, we read, "They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go ...'"

What an amazing statement! When Jesus rose from the dead, from that moment the disciples knew that everything really had changed. At first, of course, when He was crucified, they had thought that all their dreams were ended, but then they met with the risen Lord, and all that changed. They believed everything he'd ever told them, in ways that just hadn't been possible before, because the resurrection was outward sign of what God had done for mankind. But even more, it was a sign of what God was going to do. It's difficult to comprehend just how mind-blowing this must have been. Jesus was the Messiah, yes, they'd been able to get their heads round that when they followed Him round Galilee – but the reality or what that meant was so much bigger than anything they'd ever been able to imagine. Jesus wasn't just any old messiah – a saviour for the nation in time of need – He was the incarnate Son of God and, through Him, God was moving to redeem the whole of creation.

Even with the evidence of the resurrection in front of them, this was at first pretty incomprehensible. Acts 1:6, the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going at this time to restore the kingdom to Israel?" At this point they still didn't fully understand, and

they were still thinking of nationalist outcomes, with the restoration of an earthly kingdom. But Jesus' response is fascinating. He replies, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority." And then, instead of answering directly, He tells them that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This is actually the answer to their question, because it's this gift of the Spirit that's the beginning of restoration.

So, the disciples knew that it wasn't over and that they had a job to do before the Lord's return. But it's fair to say that at this point they weren't anticipating a very long wait. In fact, they seem to have been expecting Jesus' return any day, so that Paul, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 7, could write to the church recommending celibacy, but with the concession that, if men or women couldn't control their passions till the Lord's return, it was better to marry.

Even so, as time went on, it seems that the early Christians were beginning to get a bit impatient and had started to ask when the Day of the Lord really was going to happen. And the problem seems to have got so bad that Peter in his second letter was moved to address the problem head on. Don't be taken in by the scoffers, he warns, who only want to follow their own evil desires, and who say, 'Where is this coming, he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'

Sound familiar? Isn't this, at heart, the exact same approach of secularists today? You know, the ones who say, 'You can't believe all that rubbish in the Bible. It's a fairy story. Things go on the way they've always done. The only thing that's changed is that now we understand science and evolution, and if we don't like the way things are ... well, we can change it!'

This is deception – a demonic illusion of control, designed to blind people to God. The scoffers forget, Peter says, that God called forth creation out of nothing, and then in ancient times He destroyed the earth by a flood – by water. And he tells them that in the same way, in time to come, the heavens and the earth will be destroyed again, but this time by fire. This, Peter says, is the dawning of the Day of the Lord,

But he doesn't stop there. Peter goes on to warn the believers that God isn't 'slow', as we understand it, because to God a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day ... and the apparent delay is simply because He's being patient and wants as many as possible to hear the good news and be saved, ahead of what will be certain destruction.

Well, 2,000 years on and we're still waiting, and the scoffers warned about by Peter, all intent on following their own evil desires, are very much in evidence. In fact it feels, over the last century, that the scoffers, and evil, have grown incredibly strong. But never fall into the trap of imagining this means God doesn't exist, or that He's powerless, or won't return. Resist the Pulman delusion that presents God as an enfeebled old man, intent of keeping men and women in subjection.

No, what we are seeing in the world today is a sign of God's plan approaching completion. We do well to remember that God is faithful, and that His word is to be

trusted. The King will return to claim His Kingdom – maybe very soon now – and He will deal once and forever with evil.

In the last 2,000 years, the good news has gone out across the world. All have been given opportunity to repent – but, sadly, the greater majority of mankind seems today hell bent on rejecting that call. This too was foretold in Scripture, and what We are witnessing now, I believe, is the approach of God. But this isn't judgment. Not yet. Rather, as result of our sin, God has withdrawn His hand of protection, allowing us to reap the consequences of our choice .... so that men and women might have a chance to repent. And evil – which knows better than us that the writing is on the wall – is fighting desperately to maintain control, which is why the battle seems to be intensifying. And if evil can't maintain its stranglehold, then its sole aim is to destroy.

Whether the return of the Lord is tomorrow, next year ... whenever ... the one thing of which we can be certain is that He will return, and that day will come, Peter says (v.10) like a thief. “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” But for those who keep faith, the Lord promises deliverance, and that there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

We are here now – in these difficult, dark, challenging, and frightening times – for a purpose. Ahead of the Lord's return, our call is to be a light in the darkness, holding to truth ... seeking, in love, after the lost. So in the time that remains, be it short or long, let us stand firm, and serve the Lord with faithfulness and courage, knowing that He is with us, and will never let us go.