

Foundations 8: I Believe in Jesus Christ, ...From There, He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead

March 6, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

1 Cor. 3:11-15

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

We are continuing our series on the twelve statements of the Apostles' Creed, which has formed in summary for almost 2000 years the foundation of why we Christians believe what we believe. Each statement is based on Scripture. This week we will focus on the statement, **I Believe in Jesus Christ, ...He Ascended into Heaven and Sits at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty, From There, He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead.**

There were four reasons Jesus ascended into heaven. Last week we discussed three of them:

- 1) Jesus ascended into heaven as our Prophet.
- 2) Jesus ascended into heaven as our Priest.
- 3) Jesus ascended into heaven as our King.

This week we discuss the fourth reason Jesus ascended into heaven:

- 4) Jesus ascended into heaven as our Judge.

We may squirm at that because, generally speaking, when we think of judgement, we tend to think of it in negative terms. We may think of a judge as someone who is condemnatory, passing down upon people a final sentence or penalty as punishment for their crimes. That's not how they are viewed in Scripture, unless you had a bad judge. Judges were the ones who defended the widows, the orphans, and the ones who were treated unjustly. The Old Testament book of Judges were about those heroes who helped to save the people of Israel from wicked oppressors. Judges were around to help set things right again and to assure that those who were doing wrong were either convinced to repent of their ways or they were cast out. Say, for example, that when Russia invaded Ukraine, you felt incensed about that and wanted things to be set right again, then you have some sense of why a righteous judge would be useful in a

situation like that. Jesus is our Judge who will set to rights our whole world, our whole universe. We should not fear that. We should rejoice in that and celebrate!

The Apostles' Creed speaks about Jesus descending to the dead, which is where he proclaims Good News to those who had not heard the gospel in their lifetimes (1 Peter 3:18-20). After descending to the dead, then Jesus ascends into heaven. In the statement we are reviewing today, Jesus comes back to earth to judge the living and the dead.

The first part of the phrase "He shall come" refers to the fact that at some point Jesus Christ will manifest himself and all earthly, human history as we know it will come to an end. This end will be inaugurated through the glorious return of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that "at that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). He goes on to say that there will be a great trumpet call, and he will send his angels to gather his church from the ends of the earth (Matt. 24:31). The apostle Paul teaches the same truth in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 when he says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." His return will be personal and physical. Paul calls the return of Christ the "blessed hope" of the church (Titus 2:13).¹

Let me say just a few words about what is commonly referred to as "The Rapture," a concept made popular by teachings of some preachers who especially emphasize the end-times and through popular books like the *Left Behind* series. Scriptures that are typically used as references for the rapture, like Matthew 24 (particularly, vv. 36-44), and 1 Thessalonians 4 (vv. 13-18), when taken in context refer not to the righteous being taken away from the earth but the righteous being the ones who are left here on earth, like Noah who survives the flood waters. The emphasis in those Scriptures was about when the Lord is coming to us, not when we are going to the Lord.

It is true that at the moment of Christ's glorious return we will be caught up—or raptured—to meet him in the clouds. This celestial meeting pictures what we all do when someone important comes to visit, arriving at a nearby airport. We go out to "meet" them and then return with the guest to our home. We go up "to meet" the Lord as he descends. Not that we will be whisked away to some other place, but so we can return with Christ to a renewed earth. In other words, Christ's return is one, great, climactic, and public event. ...[W]hen it occurs, every eye will see him. His

¹ Timothy Tennent, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 40.

arrival will not go unnoticed. In fact. The Greek word used to describe Christ's coming is the word *Parousia* which means "glorious appearance."²

² Tennent. P. 41.