

Christ Has Returned

There has always been a great deal of interest among Christians regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. He first came to earth nearly two thousand years ago for the purpose of sacrificing his perfect human life as a Ransom price for the forfeited life of Adam and his race. Then he was raised from the dead a glorious spirit being and returned to God in heaven, having purchased the human race. He promised to return in great power as King of earth, to reign for a thousand years, redeeming all mankind from sin and death; restoring them to human perfection and eternal life. This objective is termed in Ephesians 1:14, "The redemption of the purchased possession."

Every prophet of God spoke of this wonderful event. Thus we read, in Acts 3:19 to 21: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must retain until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." So today we are proclaiming a most joyful message: Christ has returned to earth! He is here, invisibly present, and is now setting up his Kingdom which will bring restitution to the world.

The Bible teaches that when Christ first returns, only a few will know about it—only those who are watching, and who recognize the signs of his presence. Jesus himself said, in Revelation 16:15, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth." When Jesus told his disciples that he would be crucified, raised from the dead, ascend to heaven; and then, at the end of the age, return invisibly to earth to establish his Kingdom, they wanted to be sure they would recognize such an important event when it occurred.

So they asked him, as recorded in Matthew 24:3, "What shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the age?" In reply Jesus gave them many signs which would be evidences of his invisible second presence. These signs are everywhere around us today, and prove that Christ has returned.

Time will not permit us to cite them all; but let us consider some of them. Although there have always been wars between nations, Jesus (Matthew 24) refers to a scope and intensity of conflict such as the world has never before experienced. It refers to extremely destructive world wars, involving every nation of the world. This is brought out in the 21st and 22nd verses: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time; no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved." Since Christ's return, and as an evidence of it, there already have been two world wars; and a third one, using atomic weapons, is threatened. Such a war could, by poisoning the atmosphere, destroy every living thing upon the earth. This particular set of circumstances has never before existed, and is a sure sign of the times. This is confirmed in Daniel 12:1: "And at that time shall Michael (Christ) stand up (return); the great Prince (ruler) which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time."

The very fact that all nations are now vainly striving to bring peace upon the earth, is another sign of Christ's invisible thief-like presence. The Bible says that

at the time of Christ's presence, the cry for "peace and safety" would be the loudest. Thus we read, in I Thessalonians 5:2 to 6, the Apostle's words to the faithful, watching Christians who recognize the signs: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day (presence) 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, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober." So let us take the Apostle's advice, and not be as others who ignore the signs of Christ's presence.

Another important sign Jesus gave his disciples, which we see fulfilled today, is in Matthew 24:32: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh." This sign becomes beautifully clear when it is realized that the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. Israel was at one time the only nation recognized by God. He said, in Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Then they displeased God, and were cast off from favor. They were banished from their own land, and scattered among the nations. Thus we read, in Jeremiah 16:13: "Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor." Thus the symbolic fig tree withered.

But God promised to restore Israel to his favor, as is written in the next two verses: "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth that brought up the children of

Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them. And I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers." This is confirmed by Ezekiel 36:24: "For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land."

This is something that is happening before our eyes; and it is thrilling to see. Israel is once again a nation, and is being built up in its own land. The fig tree, which was withered and dry for many centuries, is now budding, and it is a sure sign of the end of the age and the return and presence of Christ. We are in the beginning of the time referred to in Acts 15:16: "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up." The restoration of Israel is an especially significant sign because the Bible teaches that the operation of the Kingdom of God on earth, whereby all nations will be blessed, will commence with that nation.

Another important sign which all can recognize today was given by Jesus in Luke 21:25 and 26: "Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring." "The sea and the waves roaring" picture the discontented and restless masses of humanity rising up in protest and clamoring for their rights. This is causing distress in every nation, to an extent never before experienced in history. Then we read: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Men's hearts are now failing because of several fearful possibilities the world is faced with for the first time in history—each of which threatens to destroy the human race. There

is the threat of an awful atomic holocaust. There is the ever-increasing pollution of the air, water and earth, whereby people sicken and die. There is the population explosion, bringing world-wide famine. Then there is developing a wide-spread anarchy, threatening the overthrow of law and order.

Fearful as they are, these are signs that Christ is present, and that God's Kingdom is about to assume complete power over the earth, to destroy evil, and bring life, health and happiness to all mankind.