

INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular patriotic songs is "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Many people don't realize it comes from the War Between the States. It was actually written to be a recruitment song for the Union Forces. Of course, the favorite song of the Confederate forces was "Dixie."

Among the northern states, there was a popular song called "John Brown's Body." John Brown was a militant abolitionist who was tried and hanged for his raid on the Federal armory at Harper's Ferry in West Virginia. He became a martyr for the cause of abolition. There was a popular song that said, "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave; but his soul is marching on."

In 1861, Julia Ward Howe, another abolitionist, took that tune and applied it a poem she wrote. We know it as the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." During this chaotic time in our nation's history, many Americans thought it was the end of the world, and Jesus surely must be coming soon. Julia Ward Howe certainly saw God's hand at work in the War. The first stanza says, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on." The second stanza describes the scene of a Union camp. It says, "I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps, They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps; I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps: His day is marching on." There are six verses to her poem, but this final verse is hardly ever printed in hymnals. It speaks of the Second Coming. It says, "He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave, He is Wisdom to the mighty, He is Succour to the brave, So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of Time His slave, Our God is marching on."

The Civil War was undoubtedly the darkest period in our nation's history, but it wasn't the second coming of Christ. However, I want to borrow the first line from that hymn, because our passage today speaks about the glory of the coming of the Lord. And if you are a born-again believer in Jesus Christ you WILL see the glory of the coming of the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10: "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."

God is a God of perfect love, but He is also a God of perfect justice. When Jesus came the first time, He came as the Lamb of God. When He comes again, He'll come as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He came the first time as the Redeemer, to die for sinners. He will come again as the Ruler, to judge sinners.

Back in the 1980s, evangelist Billy Graham was a guest on "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson. He said, "You know, Billy, I bet if Jesus ever came back to earth, I bet we'd do him in again!" I don't think he was prepared for Billy Graham's reply. He said: "In the Bible, Jesus predicted that He would return to earth again. But the first time He came in love, the next time, He'll come in power—no one will DO Him in!"

He was exactly correct. Let's learn four things about the return of Christ.

I. JESUS GIVES RELIEF IN TROUBLED TIMES

Paul wrote, "He will ... give relief to you who are troubled." (1:7) The believers in Thessalonica were facing opposition and hostility for their faith. The same members of the synagogue, who had run Paul out of town, also hated these believers. Many of these men belonged to vocational guilds that had their own idols. When a man gave his heart to Jesus, he often lost his job because he would refuse to sacrifice to the god of that particular guild. So life was tough. Paul told them Jesus would give them relief in their troubles.

There are three kinds of people here today: those who are in trouble; those who are just getting out of trouble; and those who are fixing to get into trouble. You're in one of those categories today. But don't worry, because the Bible says Jesus will give you relief when you face trouble.

There used to be a Roloids commercial that asked, "How do you spell relief?" The answer was ROLAIDS. But according to the Bible, the way to spell relief is J-E-S-U-S. The word Paul used for relief meant, "Release from tension." It was the same word used when a warrior placed an arrow in the bowstring and then drew it back until it was tight. Then he would release it.

In our crazy world, too many people are wound up as tight as a bowstring. But Jesus can give you release from tension and stress. These are dark days we're living in, but we don't have to be afraid because the darkest hour is just before the dawn. Our hope is not in politics. Our hope is not in sociology or in science. Our hope is in Jesus Christ. He knew that life would be full of trouble.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Jesus offered to give us rest for our souls. Sometimes you walk through a cemetery and you see the words "Rest In Peace." Some people think the only time they will finally experience rest is when they sleep in the grave.

Have you heard about the latest coffin that you can buy? A company in Sweden is offering a high tech coffin that plays music for the dead. You can pick your playlist before you die, and the coffin has high fidelity speakers to serenade you in death. The tombstone has a screen that allows your friends and family members to enter a different playlist for you as well. The music is designed for the deceased to have a more restful and relaxing experience in the grave. If you're interested in this musical coffin, it can be yours for only \$30,000.

But the good news is you can rest in peace without a tombstone. Jesus can give you rest and relief in the midst of your troubles right now. But we all know more troubles will come, and

when they do, God will give us more grace and peace. But Paul mentions a time in the future when we will experience the end of all our troubles—when Jesus returns in power and glory.

II. THE RETURN OF CHRIST IS A SERIES OF EVENTS

When will we experience final relief? The Bible says, "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels." (1:7) The word "revealed" is the word *apokalupto*. It's the same word used as the title for the last book of the Bible, revelation. It means "unveiling." Sometimes a sculptor is commissioned to build a statue in a public park. On the day the statue is revealed it is covered with a large cloth. At the moment of revelation, the cloth is removed and the sculpture is "revealed." That's what this word means. For many people on planet earth, the true nature of Jesus remains veiled. But on the day He returns in glory, His power and majesty will be revealed to everything.

Whenever we speak of the second coming of Jesus, it's important to remember that the return of Christ involves a series of events.

A. The rapture: Taking His Bride to His Father's house

The first event that will occur to start the Day of the Lord is when Jesus returns in the clouds and all of us who are alive are caught up to be with Him. In the U.S. when a couple is going to get married, they get engaged and then they get married. But during the time of Jesus, a groom and bride would be promised to each other, they were betrothed. This was a stage stronger than just being engaged. They were already legally married and committed to each other, they just didn't live together.

The groom then spent up to a year preparing a place for them to live. Several generations of family members lived together in the same dwelling, so the groom usually prepared a place in his father's house. Ladies, you might not like the idea of living with your in-laws, but that's the way they did it in Biblical times. When the groom finished preparations, he would go and claim his bride and carry her to his father's house for a wedding celebration lasting several days.

The church is the Bride of Christ. We have been betrothed to Him, but He has returned to heaven to prepare a place for His Bride. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3 NKJV) So when Jesus raptures the church, He is coming to claim His bride. And the Bible says we'll enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

B. The tribulation: The rise of the Antichrist

After the rapture of the church, there will be a global crisis. Out of this chaos a world leader will arise who will be the head of a one-world government and one-world economy. At the beginning, this world leader appears to be a man of peace who unites a divided world. But after a few years, the Bible predicts this leader's true satanic nature will be revealed. You can read about the Antichrist in the Book of Revelation. But in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians,

Paul also describes this evil leader. When we get to this passage, we'll dig deeper. Here's how Paul describes the Antichrist. "He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

During the past few weeks, we've seen global politics playing out like a chess match. Should the U.S. attack Syria for using chemical weapons? President Obama went on primetime television to press his case with the American public. The very next day, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, had an op-ed in the *Washington Post* urging caution, and claiming a rebel faction actually employed the chemical weapons attack.

In Revelation 13, we read that the Antichrist will be identified by the number 666. Putin's full name is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. If you assign a numerical value to letters, and add up the numbers in Putin's name, would you believe it equals 666? It doesn't. I just asked you if you would believe it. Now, I'm not saying Putin is the Antichrist by any means, but the Antichrist very well could be someone like him, a leader with global recognition.

At the end of the seven years of Tribulation, the antichrist will lead an attack on Israel and the city of Jerusalem, and that's when the event that Paul wrote about in this passage will happen.

C. The return: Coming of Christ with His heavenly armies

According to Zechariah 14, Jesus will return at this climactic battle and place His foot on the Mount of Olives. That's will be the first time since His ascension 2000 years ago, that He will step on planet Earth. This event is described in detail in Revelation 19.

Jesus described this aspect of His return in Matthew 25. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25:31-32)

During the rapture, Jesus comes secretly, like a thief in the night, for the church. But at this time, He will return openly and with great glory. He will return WITH the church, because, along with the angels, we will be part of His army. But don't worry about the fight. It will be the world's shortest battle. Jesus will slay His enemies with one Word that comes out of His mouth.

III. THOSE WHO REJECT GOD'S GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE WILL BE PUNISHED FOREVER

The Bible says, "He will punish those who do not know God...with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord." (1:8-9) The Bible teaches that there are only two possible eternal destinations, heaven or hell. Hell was never meant for human habitation. In Matthew 25:41 Jesus said to the goats on the left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." I can say with certainty that God doesn't want any person to go to hell. The Bible says, "He is not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) However, there are some who refuse to accept His free offer

of salvation. Those who reject His love will spend eternity shut out from the presence of the Lord.

Notice the Bible doesn't say these people are punished because they did bad things. We all have done bad things. These people are punished for one reason: **THEY DO NOT KNOW GOD.** Salvation isn't about doing more good things than bad things. It is about knowing God. It's about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven... Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21, 23)

I don't enjoy talking about hell. I'd much rather talk about heaven. But the Bible teaches the existence of hell, and I would be a cruel shepherd if I didn't warn you about the danger of hell. It breaks my heart to think about the prospect of people spending eternity separated from the love of God.

Today, most people don't even believe hell exists. And some who believe hell exists think it's going to be like a rave dance party. They think there's going to be one hot dance club where the lights are bright and the music is pumping. Well, it will be hot, but it won't be a party.

Many rock groups have sung songs about hell. One of the most famous was "Highway to Hell" recorded in 1979 by the Australian hard rock group, AC/DC. The lyrics go, "Don't need reason, don't need rhyme; Ain't nothing I'd rather do. Going down, party time; My friends are gonna be there too. I'm on the highway to hell. No stop signs, speed limit; Nobody's gonna' slow me down. Like a wheel, gonna' spin it; Nobody's gonna' mess me round. Hey Satan, paid my dues; Playing in a rocking band. Hey mamma, look at me; I'm on my way to the promised land. I'm on the highway to hell."

There's a sad follow up to that song. Less than a year after it was recorded, the lead singer, Bon Scott was partying in London and drank too much. He was found dead the next morning in a friend's car. On his death certificate it says he died from "acute alcohol poisoning" and "death by misadventure." I sure hope Bon Scott knew the Lord, because if he didn't, he has probably changed his mind about the nature of the place the Bible calls hell.

Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. And when each of us is born, we inherit a little bit of the devil in each of us. It's called sin. In John 8, Jesus spoke to the sinful, self-righteous Pharisees and said, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire." (John 8:44) We are all children of the devil until we are born again and become a child of God. We have a choice. The wages of sin is death—eternal separation from God. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C. S. Lewis was a respected intellectual. But he believed strongly in the reality of hell. He wrote, "It's not a question of God 'sending' us to Hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself be Hell unless it is nipped in the bud. The matter is serious: let us put ourselves in His hands at once – this very day, this hour." (*God in the Dock*)

IV. WE WILL WITNESS THIS GLORIOUS CLIMAX OF HISTORY

The Bible says, "...on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." (1:10) It doesn't say Jesus will be glorified *by* His people. He will be glorified *in* His people. And when Jesus returns in glory, we will return with Him, and we will marvel at His majesty and greatness. This is the final climactic event of human history. How long has this event been prophesied? It has been declared since before the time of Noah. Who was the first prophet in the Bible? According to Jude, the first prophet was Enoch. What did he prophesy about? The glorious return of Jesus. Jude wrote: "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone.'" (Jude 14)

And the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, also wrote about this same glorious climax of history. "'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the Lord Almighty... 'But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.'" (Malachi 4:1-2)

We know the sun doesn't move around the earth. The sun is 93 million miles away, and as our planet rotates every 24 hours, the sun appears to move through the sky. Did you hear about the man who stayed awake all night wondering where the sun went? Finally it dawned on him.

Have you ever watched a sunrise? There are two things about a sunrise that remind me of the return of Christ. First, you can't hurry a sunrise. And second, you can't *stop* a sunrise! And when it comes to the return of Christ, there's nothing we can do to hurry it. Jesus will come in God's perfect time. But, Praise God, there's nothing anyone can do to stop it! He *will* return; and those of us who know Him and love Him will see the glory of the coming of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

I have a spoiler alert for you in a minute, so you might want to cover your ears. Do you know what a spoiler alert is? It's when someone gives away the end of a movie or show. The first Star Wars movie came out in 1977 and became the most watched movie of all time. There was a lot of anticipation for the second installment, "The Empire Strikes Back," which came out in 1980. At the time I was visiting Louisville, Kentucky, finishing my doctorate at Southern Seminary. I was staying with some family friends. They had a daughter who was about ten years old. She was a big Star Wars fan, and she wanted to see "The Empire Strikes Back." So one afternoon I took her to see it. On the way there, I said, "Have you heard anything about his movie?" She said, "Yeah. I heard that Darth Vader is Luke's father."

I almost slammed on the brakes and said, "What? That spoiled the whole movie for me." And sure enough at the end of the movie, Darth Vader says, "Luke, I am your father." And she spoiled it for me. I never took her to another movie!

I've got a bigger and better spoiler alert. Ready? When it comes to the finale of all of human history, in the end, Jesus wins! So no matter how bad our world gets, just remember, in the end,

Jesus wins. Sometimes you look at the score and you think righteousness is trailing, but in the end, Jesus wins!

So, when the road gets long, remember Jesus wins in the end. When your finances get tight, remember Jesus wins in the end. When you get afraid from what's happening in the world, remember Jesus wins in the end! When you get frustrated with what's happening in your life, remember Jesus wins in the end. When your relationships get tough, remember Jesus wins in the end. When your body is hurting and diseased, remember Jesus wins in the end.

And the Creator of the Universe loves you and has chosen you in Christ to be a part of His family. Will you accept His love? Will you let Him choose you?

Let's go back to why Paul wrote these words. He wrote them so believers could have rest and relief in troubled times. How does this knowledge of the return of Christ give us relief in our trouble? It reminds us that no matter how bad life gets now, in the end, Jesus will be victorious. We're on the winning side.

And when you have that confidence, then you can join and sing the last stanza from the great song, "It is Well With My Soul." It says, "And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, The clouds be rolled back as a scroll; The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, Even so, it is well with my soul!"

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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