

*NECMA June 13th 2004*

*Introduction to the Second Coming*

Recently, we here in Australia have been privileged to share with the rest of the world not just one, but three international events centred on cathedrals, and celebration, and all magnificently produced.

As I put the finishing touches to my notes on yesterday morning - Saturday morning - Pat and I have been watching the most recent of them, the state funeral of the American President Ronald Reagan. I was struck, not only by the beautiful remarks made - particularly those of Margaret Thatcher, but also the choral music, one of which was a lovely setting of William Blake's poem "Jerusalem" set to Welsh composer Dr. Joseph Parry's music

*And did those feet in ancient time,  
walk upon England's pastures green ...*

The middle of the three events was the wedding of the Spanish Crown Prince, who the week before had attended the first one as an invited guest, the marriage of Kronprins Frederik of Danmark and his beautiful Australian bride, Princess Mary.

In the Copenhagen ceremony I once again heard a magnificent anthem written by Georg Friderik Handel, "Zadok the Priest" - which I had previously heard on 2nd June 1963, the day Princess Elizabeth was crowned Queen of England.

Zadok was a high ranking priest at the time of David and Solomon, and while I'm not familiar with Handel's work, I remember being surprised at the recitative "God Save the King" that is part of the composition, both at our queen's coronation, and again at Prince Frederick's wedding, on both occasions there being no king per se.

But yes, there was, and is; think about it. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords! And the Word tells us that He shall return to rule over us.

I wonder if you have noticed that some people focus on Jesus' millennial reign and the second coming, rather than on what happens before.

For example three of the Latter-Day Saints' songs,

*"Come, thou Glorious Day of Promise",*

***“The Day Dawn is Breaking”,  
and my favourite perhaps  
“Softly Beams the Sacred Dawning of the Great Millennial  
Morn”,***

all point there, to the time of Jesus' future establishment as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, upon this earth for one thousand years.

Note that is quite separate from the “new heavens and new earth” when this creation has been wound up.

In this song we can see biblically based beliefs, rather than their heretical teachings that are often more noticeable... these were songs of which I accumulated quite a repertoire of recordings some years ago. They are in 19th century English...

***Softly beams the sacred dawning of the great millennial mom,  
And to saints gives welcome warning that the day is hast'ning  
on.***

***Splendid, rising o'er the mountains, glowing with celestial  
cheer, Streaming from eternal fountains, rays of living light  
appear.***

***Swiftly flee the clouds of darkness; speedily with mists retire;  
Nature's universal blackness is consumed by heav'nly fire.***

***Yea., the fair sabbatic era,, when the world will be at rest,  
rapidly is drawing nearer; then all Israel will be blest.***

Compare it, rather than contrast it, with Charles Wesley's thoughts a hundred years earlier... He wrote a hymn I remember singing as an Anglican lad...

***“Lo He Comes with Clouds Descending” ...***

and we can look at it in that context a bit later.

***Lo! He comes with clouds descending, once for favoured  
sinners slain; Thousand, thousand, saints attending, swell the  
triumph of His train! Hallelujah! God appears on earth to reign.***

***Every eye shall now behold Him robed in awesome majesty;  
Those who set at nought and sold Him, pierced and nailed Him  
to the tree, Deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.***

*Those dear tokens of His passion still His dazzling body bears;  
Cause of endless exultation to His ransomed worshippers: With  
what rapture gaze we on those glorious scars!*

*Yea, amen! Let all adore Thee, high on Thine eternal throne;  
Saviour, take the power and glory, claim the kingdom for Thine  
own; O come quickly; hallelujah! Come, Lord, come.*

Both of those hymns show that people in previous generations probably had more of an understanding than many of us in this generation. I think we would be wise to be more aware of the details of both the millennium AND what leads up to it.

While several apparently valid arguments can be presented for each of the dis-similar cases of what has to happen before Jesus' return, this isn't really a good moment to look at any in detail, mainly because of time restraints and lack of opportunity to follow on. However, it is a fascinating topic and I have my own thoughts which I must admit do not conform to popular messages of "it will all pan out okay in the end" which even has a name... "Pan-Millennialism".

Whatever set of thoughts you may personally have about what the Authorised Version calls the "Time of the End", there essentially will have to be one, if we are to accept the validity of the Holy Bible, in its 66 books of the Old and New Testaments.

I offer a thought here for your consideration. While you may choose not to accept the Bible as an authoritative set of writings, I do, and there are millions of us round the world. Those who like to paint people into boxes, call us "Fundamentalists" because the bible is fundamental to our faith and beliefs. Indeed in some circles, that name has bad vibes, but I can assure you I don't have two heads - nor horns that poke up out of my hair:)

Actually my hair is far too short to hide them, I had a number 4 two weeks ago!

You see those of us who DO believe in the authenticity of the bible make a point frequently overlooked by our liberal colleagues that we believe the bible to be without error in its original writing, NOT in the hundreds of translations made since, by fallible men like me. There is a huge difference. And also we are open-minded, because we go on and say that there are parts which we do not understand, but we aren't arrogant in our denial of their legitimacy because our own cleverness can't cope with it!

**I have not always believed this myself. Indeed there was a time when as a young engineer who know absolutely all the answers there were to the design of control systems, that I thought I also knew all the answers to the question marks over the Bible, and I strongly pooh-poohed any suggestion that particular sections could possibly be taken literally!**

**Later on, I realised that the more liberal approach is actually a form of presumption on our part that we have all the answers. And the older I get, the more I realise that the less I understand!**

**Wouldn't it be right to say that every one of us has a yearning for Jesus' return? Let us listen to a few minutes of what the Welsh would call "hwyl" - an untranslatable word more or less meaning "yearning fervour".**

**The piece is called "*Jerusalem, Come Down*". It is towards the end of Murray Wylie's "*The Jerusalem Passion*", and the tenor soloist expresses the aching yearning in all our own hearts, for Jesus' return. As the sound people start to play it, I'll explain a bit over the instrumental introduction.**

**roll CD track 13**

**Return He will, but His timescale is different from yours and mine. But we do eagerly await His return, amen?**

***Come Down, Jerusalem, Come Down. Father, come and dwell among us. Come and tabernacle with us. Spread your mighty wings upon us,***

***Drive away every fear, dry away every tear. Come Down, Jerusalem, Come Down. Come, Thou fount of living water, Come Thou bride of heaven, down, and feed us with Your bread of Heaven, City of history., finish Thy mystery...***

**<voice over til here>**

**<voice over end, starts 45 seconds from end >**

**Jerusalem, Come Down. Please, Lord. The New Jerusalem. City of History, Finish Thy mystery. We implore You, Lord, Come Down. We wait for You. Patiently. In Your timing, wishing it was today.**

**When I preached on May 2nd, I had changed that day's message from what I had prepared over the preceding three weeks because of a word from "on high".**

**Strangely, I had also prepared a different sermon for today, one about tradition.**

**Last time, I mentioned that the "Time of the End" is something we should look forward to, rather than dread, if we know the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet if we do not, we should most definitely be fearful of it. And it is a reality, it shall happen, and your and my procrastinating isn't going to make it any easier.**

**We looked at man-made ideas about what the "end of the age" was going to be like, and realised there were alternative beliefs within mainstream Christianity, some of which I suggested could be linked to "container theology" - belief that the Bible "contains" - rather than "is" - the Word of God, meaning that part of the Bible must be lies, to be able to logically reject it.**

**Container theology is rather like "Salad Bar" theology, where you pick a bit from here, and a bit from there, and end up with a different plate from everyone else, through what you leave out.**

**We discussed God making the decision how much we "need to know", so that we are forced to walk by faith, rather than having everything spelled out in detail.**

**We saw that we can piece together the "end times" from MANY places in both the Old and New Testaments, which suggests that if it is mentioned a lot, we should pay attention to it, rather than glossing over it.**

**We looked at novels, fictional stories from the fertile imagination of believing authors of quality literature, and identified with the human beings just like you and me who we discover in the "Left Behind" series, and we heavily emphasised that while they were just novels, albeit with educated guesses on a scenario which follows closely one of the several biblically inspired timescales for the end of the age.**

**If we do the sums we could guess at perhaps 600 million readers of the series, not all of whom would be believers in the true sense of the word.**

**I relate to those fictional characters, because they were aware of their own fallibility, in the same way we are. Real people, facing daily life... who discover the need to put God first, communicating with Him to offer thanks... to pray for others... and then setting aside the irrelevant things of daily life as they prepare for His work.**

**One of the main characters, a senior 747 pilot, is not a believer. He knows exactly why he has been left behind at the rapture; his wife was a devout Christian who had tried to talk to her stubborn husband for years, about the Bible, and about his need for faith in Christ. He didn't listen. Now, he is mourning his wife's and son's disappearance, and is concerned about his and his daughter's fate.**

**I know a number of follows like that. I was one, myself, at one time.**

**My final thoughts went back to “are we, ourselves, ready?” We recall Joshua challenged the people, many times, and let us remember his so famous punch-line “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”.**

**There are “gods” in your and my past, of our own imagination. And there are gods of this land in which WE dwell. And there is the Living God. Who is each of us going to serve?**

**During this past week, I was text - messaged by my friend who has been lending me the “Left Behind” books. She wrote that I had been promoted from number 10 on the reading list, and would I like to collect the twelfth, called “The Glorious Appearing”, originally scheduled to be the last in the series.**

**Reading, I pondered again, and was reminded of Charles Wesley's hymn “Lo He Comes with Clouds Descending” at which we looked earlier.**

**You know, aged 16 in 1960 , I was fully aware that Jesus would literally return to save us and the world from an end-time destruction, yet I was not a Christian. It was just part of the beliefs of the society in which I lived.**

**We are much nearer the time now when God WILL have to set in motion those mechanisms He has already put in place. The end goal**

is there, Christ shall return. Have no doubt about that. In person. As described in the Word.

Let me share with you a portion of this volume, which describes the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as visualised in the mind's eye of the author, which he describes as eye-witness accounts, in part based on scripture, and in part being scripture.

I ask you to listen carefully, because the second coming is an event which will happen in a graphic manner, and there is no room for complacency or a ho-hum approach. I promise it won't be boring.

<Quote>

*The siege was deafening. Jet engines, jeeps, cars, trucks, hummers, transports, armaments, munitions, rifle fire, machine gun fire, cannons, grenades, rockets - you name it.*

*But the world went black again. It reminded Rayford of the darkness that descended upon New Babylon. The only sound was the clicking of weapons which would not fire. Nothing produced light. No headlights. No matches or lighters.*

*And then, as if God had thrown the switch in heaven., light.*

*But that wasn't enough of a word for it. This was not light from above that cast shadows. This was a brightness that invaded every crevice and cranny. He had to shield his eyes, but it did no good, as the light came from everywhere.*

*But as Carpathia's petrified soldiers slowly turned back to the matter at hand, the brilliant multicoloured cloud cover parted and rolled back like a scroll from horizon to horizon. Rayford found himself on his knees on the ground, hands and head lifted.*

*Heaven opened, and there, on a white horse, sat Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*

*He could not explain how he could see his Saviour so clearly. It was as if He appeared within inches of Him, and he knew that had to be the experience of everyone everywhere.*

*Jesus' eyes shone with a conviction like a flame of fire, and He held His majestic head high. He wore a robe down to the feet so brilliantly white it was incandescent and bore writing in an*

***unfamiliar language. At the thigh a name was written King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow. His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace.***

***He held in his right hand seven stars, and his countenance or face was like the sun shining in its strength. He was followed by the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, on white horses.***

***“I am the Alpha and the Omega”, Jesus said, “the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty”.***

***When Rayford heard the voice of Jesus, he understood what John meant when he compared it to both a trumpet and to the sound of many waters. It pierced him,, reaching to his heart. It was as if he was not hearing with his ears but rather with his very soul.***

<end quote>

**Let me ask you a question. Did you find that fictional description of an eye-witness account of the “Second Coming” at all hard to understand? I didn't. And it was almost all either scripture or a paraphrase of scripture.**

**You know, if you read the Bible determined not to understand it, you won't... this is why I find it so unbelievable when some churchmen make claims that much of scripture cannot be taken literally.**

**Last Wednesday evening I felt most strongly to put together this now sermon, throwing out what I had previously prepared for today. Maybe on another occasion we can look at tradition, and what triggered my preparation on that topic.**

***Lo! He comes with clouds descending, once for favoured sinners slain; Thousand, thousand,, saints attending, swell the triumph of His train! Hallelujah! God appears on earth to reign.***

***Every eye shall now behold Him robed in awesome majesty; Those who set at nought and sold Him, pierced and nailed Him to the tree., Deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.***

***Those dear tokens of His passion still His dazzling body bears; Cause of endless exultation to His ransomed worshippers: With what rapture gaze we on those glorious scars!***



***Yea, amen! Let all adore Thee, high on Thine eternal throne;  
Saviour, take the power and glory., claim the kingdom for Thine  
own; O come quickly; hallelujah! Come, Lord, come.***

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