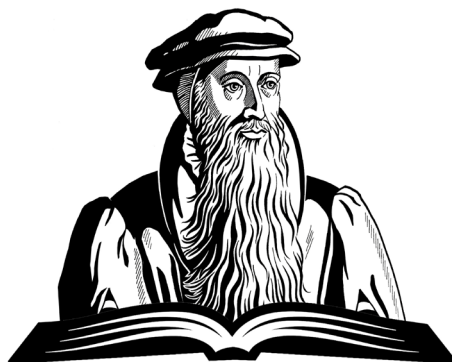

**VIDEO LECTURE MODULE:
THE APOSTLES' CREED**

LECTURE 8
**ARTICLE 7: CHRIST AS JUDGE
OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD**

Lecturer Presenter: Rev. Cornelis Harinck



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

THE APOSTLES' CREED

13 LECTURES

Lecturer Presenter: Rev. Cornelis Harinck

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THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 8

Article 7: Christ as the Judge of the Living and the Dead

Beloved listener, in the Apostles' Creed, the Christian confesses: "from where he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Jesus is coming back. He did leave the earth, and is now seated on the throne, at the right hand of God. However, one day he will return. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels spoke to the disciples, "You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). One day, Jesus will return in power and glory, as he has promised his church, "Behold, I come quickly"—Revelation 22, verse 7.

His second coming will not be in humility to shed his blood, but in exaltation to reign forever in the kingdom of peace. Believers expect the return of Christ to establish the eternal kingdom of peace, of which the Old Testament prophets had said, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"—Isaiah 11, verse 9. There will come a new heaven and a new earth—Revelation 21, verse 1—the Apostle John says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth passed away."

The first Christians longed intensely for Jesus' return, and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. They expected Jesus every day. Some didn't even work anymore. Every day they anticipated Jesus' return. The apostle Paul had to correct them regarding their mistaken view. He wrote, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition"—2 Thessalonians 2, verse 3. Paul warns the Christians not to foster an unrealistic expectation of Jesus' return, as if that day could be tomorrow. He points out that, according to Jesus' words, certain things must happen first.

There will first be a great apostasy. Vast multitudes will abandon the Christian faith. The man of sin, the Antichrist, must also come first. A power—a person will arise that will subjugate the whole world. He will turn against Christ and his church, and will seek to destroy her. It will be the last effort of the devil to defeat Christ and ruin his kingdom. Presently, persecutions occur in specific localities, but in the last days, the church will be persecuted worldwide. Jesus speaks of this as the great tribulation. He said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be"—Matthew 24, verse 21. Only after all these events have occurred will the end be, and Christ shall return. Despite all these signs by which we can anticipate the approaching return of Jesus, we ultimately do not know the day when the Lord will return. Consequently, Jesus exhorts us, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42). That day lies hid that every day we be on the watch.

There are certain Christians who do believe in a twofold return of Jesus. He will first return to establish a thousand years kingdom upon earth, and after that he will return a second time to judge the living and the dead. They base this opinion on Revelation 20. In Revelation 20, we read, "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:1–2). This passage of Scripture speaks about the so-called "millennial kingdom." The distinguishing feature of that period in history will be that Satan will be bound and restricted, so that he will no longer be able to deceive the nations. Based on what we

read in Revelation 20, regarding Christ's millennial reign, some teach that Jesus will return two times. The first time, he will return to establish a kingdom of peace that will last 1000 years. Jesus will then be victorious over the antichristian powers. He will bind Satan, bring Israel to repentance, and from Jerusalem, he will reign with the saints for a thousand years, as King over a Messianic kingdom of peace on earth. The proponents of this view are called millennialists.

Proponents of such a millennial empire differ significantly among each other, as to what this empire will look like. Some even posit that there will be a restoration of temple worship, whereas others view this millennium as being merely a time of great spiritual revival. Most millennialists believe in a twofold return of Jesus. They believe that Jesus will come to earth once more before his second coming to establish a millennial kingdom. Satan will then be bound and have no more power over the nations of the earth. Following these thousand years, Satan will be unshackled, and a time of great tribulation will ensue, which will be followed by Jesus' return. Most proponents of a literal millennium insist on such a reading of Revelation 20.

However, the Apostles' Creed does not refer to such a millennium. The Christian church generally has always confessed that there will be only one single return of Jesus, namely, as the Judge of the living and the dead. Jesus spoke of only one day in which he would return. Therefore, the Apostles' Creed makes no mention of a twofold coming of Christ to establish a millennial kingdom on earth. We must, therefore, reject such a notion. This erroneous view is founded upon a very literal exposition of Revelation 20.

Revelation 20 speaks of matters that transpire in heaven and not on earth. It speaks of the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus—Revelation 20, verse 4. The focus is on souls rather than on bodies. The thrones occupied by martyrs are not earthly, but rather, heavenly thrones. They are set up in heaven. The thousand years point to a certain period—it does not literally mean a thousand years. Satan will, during this period, be kept from seducing the nations with his lies, and will be restricted in his power. However, of a twofold return of Jesus is not spoken in Revelation 20. The entire prophecy focuses on the reign of the ascended Jesus. He now rules from heaven as King over his church. The devil is now bound and his influence restricted.

Before the first coming of Christ, Satan had power over all nations except Israel. His rule as king was unchallenged, and he seduced the nations through the dark forces of idolatry. However, Jesus, now having triumphed over Satan by his death and resurrection, reigns as King in heaven, and Satan's grip on the nations is restricted. Revelation 20 teaches that Christ's resurrection and victory over the old serpent, the Devil, would bring a significant change. The gospel would be preached to all nations, and Satan's hold on the nations would be broken. Christ would plant his church in the Gentile world, and deliver sinners from the power of Satan. The church would no longer be limited to the descendants of Abraham. Instead, it would be established among all nations. Revelation 20 describes this metaphorically and symbolically. Therefore, Augustine already posited, in the early church, that the millennium started with Jesus' ascension, and the preaching of the gospel to all nations, and that it will end with Jesus' return to judge the living and the dead. The millennial kingdom symbolizes the New Testament era, and thus, the period in which we are currently living. The gospel is now being preached to all nations. The devil's dominion over the nations is being broken. Jesus is planting his church where previously the devil had his dominion.

Some old theologians have said of the thousand years, of which is spoken in Revelations 20, as a period of great prosperity for the church. They believed that the period immediately preceding the second coming of Christ would be a time of prosperity for the church. They base their view on various unfulfilled prophecies, mainly from the book of Daniel, and on what the apostle Paul wrote about the future conversion of the people of Israel. They believe that the time will come when the church will expand significantly. They refer to the many prophecies that have not been fulfilled, such as, for example, Isaiah 11, verse 9: "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." The proclamation of the gospel will result in the Gentiles acquiring a knowledge of the true God. They believe that there will come a time when the church will be victorious over the powers of Satan. After all, Revelation 20, verse 3 says that the mighty angel was ordered by God to take hold of the dragon, and to bind him for a thousand years. The influence of the devil will be restricted in that period. They also anticipated that the Jews would repent of their rejection of Christ and accept him as the Messiah, for Paul taught: "And so all Israel shall be

saved”—Romans 11, verse 26. They believed that Israel was destined to have a prominent position in the world community. On the basis of the prophesy of Zechariah 8, verse 23, they believed that an era would come when the Jews would teach the nations God’s ways: “In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” The converted Jews would prove to be an enormous blessing to the world.

Thus, there are many differing views about Revelation 20, and the millennial kingdom mentioned there. Notwithstanding the different opinions, all sound biblical theologians reject the idea that Jesus himself then will return to earth. Jesus will return only once, and he will do so to judge the living and the dead. The Apostles’ Creed, therefore, confesses: “from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

The Scriptures speak only of a twofold advent of Christ. He came the first time in deep humiliation to become the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. He will come the second time to judge the living and the dead. The apostle teaches us that Jesus came “once” “to bear the sins of many”—Hebrews 9, verse 28. He uses the term “once.” Furthermore, the apostle continues, and teaches that Jesus will come to earth a second time. He says, “And unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” The apostle emphatically uses the words “once” and “the second time.” At his first advent, he came as the Lamb to make atonement for sin. At his second advent, he will appear as the Judge, to judge the living and the dead. The Bible only speaks of a twofold coming of Jesus: once as Savior, and once as Judge.

Jesus spoke many times of his return and the day of judgment, particularly, toward the end of his life on earth. In Matthew 24 and 25, we have a detailed account of how Jesus spoke about his return. The first thing one will notice is that Jesus identifies himself as the Son of man, saying, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him”—Matthew 25, verse 31. Jesus often used this title in reference to himself. This title is derived from Daniel 7, verse 13. There we read, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven.” By using the name, Son of man, Jesus is referring to the figure spoken of in Daniel 7. Jesus claimed that he is that exalted person whom God vests with the power to judge all creatures. Jesus declared that he will return as the Son of man, that is, the Son of God, who has become the Son of man, by assuming our human nature, to judge the living and the dead.

Scripture teaches us that he will appear visibly in his human nature. He will appear as the Son of man. Revelation 1, verse 7 says, “and every eye shall see him.” Moreover, Jesus taught that he would appear in his glory. He will not appear as the Son of man in his humiliation, but he will appear as the glorified Son of man. He will be the Son of man as John saw him: “And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters”—Revelation 1 (13–15).

On the day of his second coming, Jesus will appear as the glorified Son of man, surrounded by his holy angels. The second coming of Jesus belongs to the exaltation of Jesus. A great white throne will be established in the universe. All people who ever lived and will still live on that day, will be gathered by angels and be summoned before the judgment seat of Jesus. They will be judged according to all that they have done in their lives. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”—2 Corinthians 5, verse 10.

Jesus will return as King and as Judge of the living and the dead. What homage will be paid to the Jesus who had once been so despised! He will be afforded the honor of rectifying everything in the world, to bring to perfection God’s eternal purpose regarding the world; to determine the eternal destiny of all people; to triumph openly over all of God’s enemies; and to lead into heaven the church he purchased with his blood. Jesus, therefore, always spoke of the day of his return as the day of his glory: “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”—Luke 21, verse 27. On that day, the glory of the maligned and crucified Christ will be seen.

On the last day, the day of the final judgment, a separation will manifest itself among the people. Jesus taught, “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one

from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats”—Matthew 25, verse 32. All people who have ever lived will first be gathered in full number, and be summoned before Christ. Then Jesus will separate them from each other. He will put the sheep—that is, the true believers, at his right hand, and the goats—the unbelievers, at his left hand. Thus, in the end, there will only be two types of people.

Since Paradise, there are already on earth only two types of people. Those who serve God, and those who do not serve God. There is neither a third category today, nor will there be on the Day of Judgment. We belong either to the seed of the woman, or to the seed of the serpent. We either bow before Jesus, or we reject him. There is no middle ground. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathers not with me scatters abroad”—Matthew 12, verse 30. Jesus will position the believers at his right hand and say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—Matthew 25, verse 34. During their lives, they responded to Christ’s invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—Matthew 11, verse 28. They came to him weary and heavy laden, weak and wounded, sick and sore. And they found in him the promised rest—rest in the finished work of Christ. They followed Jesus and served him, by living according to God’s commandments, and bearing the yoke of discipleship—very deficiently on their side, but yet, sincerely. On the Day of Judgment, they will hear a far more glorious invitation, namely: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—Matthew 25, verse 34. And they will be ushered into God’s eternal and blessed kingdom.

Jesus will place the wicked on his left hand. During their lifetime, they served sin and disregarded Christ’s call to repentance, and despised his gracious gospel invitation. They preferred their fields and oxen to Jesus, and refused to depart from the broad way of sin. They did not want Jesus to be their King. Jesus will say to them on the Day of Judgment, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”—Matthew 25, verse 41. During their lives, they preferred the fellowship of the devil to the fellowship of Jesus and the godly. They will then spend a never-ending eternity in hell, in the company of swearers and devils.

What a day, the day of Jesus’ return shall be! What a division Jesus will bring about among the mass of humanity! Jesus will separate the wicked from the righteous, the nominal Christian from the true Christian, the hypocrite from the upright. The last words of the prophecy of Malachi shall then be fulfilled: “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not”—Malachi 3, verse 18. The second coming of Christ will be a day filled with awe-inspiring events. It will be the great day of the Lord—a day anticipated by all other days. It is called the day “in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat”—2 Peter 3, verse 10. On that day, will be fulfilled that which Jesus taught, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”—Matthew 24, verse 30.

God’s children, however, need not fear Jesus’ return. The Jesus who will appear in his glory will be the same Jesus to whom they have taken refuge, as penitent and believing sinners, and in whose blood they have found peace with God. He is their Savior, King and Redeemer. Their sins are covered with the robe of his righteousness, and they belong to his sheep. They will therefore be acquitted of guilt and punishment, on that day, by the great Judge of heaven and earth. It will be declared publicly that they are the people whom God has embraced as his children and heirs. They will witness how their enemies and persecutors will be thrown by God into the lake burning with fire and brimstone. This great day shall end as follows: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”—Matthew 25, verse 46. However, today is still the day of salvation—the day in which God offers peace and pardon to sinners. Therefore, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7).