

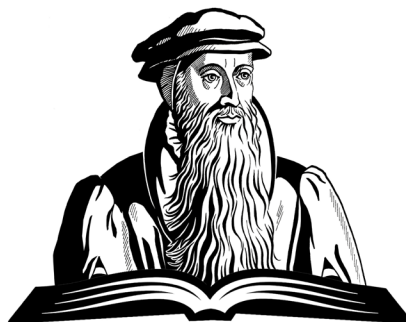
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #25, Lord's Day 19, part 2

The Second Coming of Christ



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Sermon #25, Lord's Day 19, part 2

The Second Coming of Christ

1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13 to 18; and 5, verses 1 to 11
Question and Answer #52

i. Introduction and Review

1. Who Offered Himself for Us

2. Who Will Judge the Living and the Dead

3. Who Will Usher Us into Glory

Introduction and Review

August 24, of the year AD 79 was a day like any other day in the city of Pompeii, the resort city, where all the wealthy Romans would go, where they would have their estates; a city where men indulged in the pleasures of the flesh; a city sadly known for its open and blatant immorality as well; a prosperous city; a city surrounded by extraordinarily-fertile fields. But on that day, at noontime, when people were enjoying their lunch, suddenly there was a massive explosion, for Vesuvius, not far from Pompeii, suddenly erupted with enormous power, with nuclear power. A volcano that had been dormant for centuries suddenly came to life.

Later, it would turn out that there had been many warning signs that something was changing, something was amiss. There were tremors. Hot water was escaping into the Bay of Naples. And there were older people who had lived there their whole life, and they looked at that mountain, and they realized something was different, something was amiss. And they actually became concerned. They began to warn the young people. They said, "Something is going on with Mount Vesuvius." They may have known something about its history, of the eruptions that had established, not only that mountain, but had made the area so exceedingly fertile. But all those warnings were ignored. They were laughed away by people who were only interested in one thing, and that was to indulge

in the pleasures of the flesh.

Suddenly, suddenly, the city was buried by ash. It continued day and night, so much so that the entire city was buried. And it was only until recently that that city was discovered and unearthed again, and what they found was stunning. They saw, literally, bodies of people trying to escape, trying to escape and were not able to escape, people who perished suddenly when judgment overtook them. So it shall be in the day of days, when this world will be in full pursuit of the pleasures of the flesh, when the ungodly will have the upper hand. And suddenly, without warning, Christ will appear in his awesome glory, and his awesome majesty, to judge the living and the dead.

What a blessing it is that we have the Word of God—the Word of God, which tells us about this day; the Word of God, which tells us what will be happening before that day. Read Matthew 24, for Christ teaches us there. Pay attention, pay attention to the signs of the time. There will be earthquakes in divers places; there will be wars and rumors of wars. And even though he says, The end shall not yet be (verse 6), he clearly indicates in that chapter that all of these things are indications that he is coming. And so, when we consider the turmoil that our world finds itself in, we need to pay attention. We need to read, but we don't read newspapers anyway—most of us now watch the news. We need to do so with an open Bible. We need to interpret all that's happening in light of the Word of God. We need to realize this day is coming.

That's why it's so remarkable that the Word of God is filled with so many explicit promises about the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know that every single prophecy about his first coming was fulfilled to the very letter. That's why prophecy has such an important function in the Word of God. Fulfilled prophecy is one of those internal evidences in the Word of God that assures us of the truthfulness of that Word; that tells us in powerful ways that God's Word cannot and will not fail. And so, we know with certainty that all that is prophesied about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, that those prophecies will be fulfilled to the very letter. The question is, congregation, are we prepared for that hour? Are we prepared for that day? And I realize that certain things still need to happen, and yet they can happen far more rapidly than we know. And oh, God forbid that any of us would be caught unawares; that for any of us that that day would overtake us as a thief in the night, as it will for an ungodly world.

If only those young families, those young people in Pompeii, if only they had listened to those elderly people, they would have escaped; they would have paid attention to the tremors in the ground, the earthquakes, what was going on in the Bay of Naples. They would have realized something is going on, and they would have left the city. But the excavations today reveals they tried to escape, and it was too late. It was too late. As, no doubt, there were many when the flood came, and when God closed the door, and the door of the ark was shut, after Noah had preached the gospel to them for 120 years, the door was shut. And how many, that suddenly the heavens broke open, and the earth broke open, and these people experienced something they had never seen before, how many must they have clamored, and tried to enter that ark. But the door was shut.

Well, congregation, we need to take this seriously. So, with God's help, we're going to focus on this, by way of Question and Answer #52 of the Catechism. So please turn to Lord's Day 19, and we will read together Question and Answer #52.

The Question is asked: *What comfort is it to thee—again, very personal—that “Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?”* “Quick” is an old English word for “living”—*the living and the dead.*

And the Answer is—this is the answer, of course, of the believer: *That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for*

my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

So, *Christ's Second Coming*—the Christ, Who Offered Himself for Us, so beautifully articulated here; secondly, Who Will Judge the Living and the Dead—and that has a double meaning, as we will see—literally, those who will be alive at that moment, and those who will arise from their graves, but also spiritually, the living and the dead; and thirdly, Who Will Usher His People into Heavenly Joys and Glory. *Christ's Second Coming—Who Offered Himself for Us; Who Will Judge the Living and the Dead; and, Who Will Usher Us into Glory.*

1. Who Offered Himself for Us

The Answer begins, rather remarkably. It says, *That in all my sorrows and persecutions.* We have to realize that, at the time that the Catechism was written and published, that this was very real to God's children. This was very real. Many of them were persecuted for righteousness' sake. The Roman Catholic Church relentlessly persecuted those who embraced the gospel of the Reformation. Many died at the stake, languished in prisons, were brutally abused. That was the spectrum of their whole lives. Calvin¹ realized, and as he trained ministers in Geneva, he realized that many of the men that he trained in Geneva, would die for the name and sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that was real, that was very real to the authors of the Catechism.

We have to say that, for us, it almost sounds strange. Because none of us, have ever been subjected to that, to my knowledge. I certainly have not. We have grown up in a very, very favorable environment for us. We've never been challenged. Our lives, our freedom and our families have never been threatened, because we profess the name of Christ. All of that may change rather soon. And yet, as I already intimated before also in my prayer, today more Christians are persecuted than ever before in history. So many of God's people have to endure sorrow, persecution, as a result of their love for and profession of Christ.

And so, that's why this answer meant so much. *What comfort is it to thee?* Remember, that's how the Catechism begins, *What is thy only comfort in life and death*, to know that I do not belong to myself, but *unto my faithful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* And that's the theme of the entire Catechism. The intent desire of the authors is that God's children would experience the reality of these doctrines, that they would experience the comfort of these doctrines. That's why the Catechism is so personal, and time and again, it asks us very personal questions.

And so, congregation, the question comes to me, the question comes to you, when I was just talking about the impending return of Christ, the impending judgment that is coming, did that fill your heart with joy? Is that something that comforts you? Are you comforted by the impending return of Christ? Does that fill your heart with joy? Sadly, many of God's children do not experience that joy. And I think part of it is, and that includes myself, is because of our prosperity, we are such weak Christians; we are such compromised Christians, far more than we realize. Life has become so comfortable. We are surrounded by such unspeakable prosperity. If you go elsewhere in the world, where God's people couldn't even dream of what we consider to be basics, you will sense in them that this yearning for the return of Christ is real. It means so much to them to know that all they are going through is but temporary, is but a brief discomfort that will ultimately culminate in being with Christ forever.

¹ John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564), was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and well-known Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

And so, in that context, the Catechism is saying, What is the comfort for God's children? What is the comfort, when we go through sorrow and persecution? What is the comfort when we have to endure afflictions and trials? What is the comfort, when we, perhaps, are afflicted with a total illness? What is the comfort that is afforded by that doctrine, by that blessed doctrine that Christ shall come again to judge the living and the dead? It says so beautifully that *with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me*. Oh dear believer, this is so precious. This is what the angels said to the disciples as they were still gazing up into heaven, as their beloved Master vanished from sight. Oh, they said, That same Jesus, that same Jesus that you followed; that same Jesus that was delivered for your offenses and raised again for your justification; that same Jesus, whom you love so intently; that same Jesus will return as he came.

And dear believer, that's the comfort, even though this Christ will come in unspeakable majesty and glory, it is the same Jesus that has become so precious to your soul; that same Jesus that has been revealed to you in the gospel; that same Jesus that you have been privileged, by grace, to embrace by faith; that same Jesus, who has become so altogether lovely to those that fear him; that same Jesus, who has manifested himself to you over and over again; that same Jesus, the sweetness of whose love you have experienced in this life; that same Jesus, he will come, he will come, and he will return. And so, dear believer, though he will come in glory; though he will come as the Judge of all the earth, for you, he will come as your Redeemer. For you, it means that the final step of his exaltation, that final step on that last day, for you, it means that you shall forever be in the presence of that same Jesus, that same Jesus that has become so precious to your soul.

Does that stir your heart? Or can you not relate to what I'm talking about? Do you not know this Jesus? Do you not know him personally? Do you not know him experientially? Because, you see, this is what all God's children have in common. The way in which God may have led us may vary from person to person. But all God's children have this in common, that this Christ becomes so very precious, this Christ becomes so lovely, this Christ becomes our all and in all. This is the Christ of whom Paul writes at the end of his letter, when he addresses the Ephesian believers as those that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (Ephesians 6:24).

My dear congregation, if you love, if you love this Christ in sincerity, if you can bear your heart to an all-knowing God, and say, "Lord, thou knowest, that in spite of who I am and remain, thou knowest that I love thy Son. Thou knowest that he is the altogether lovely One to my soul. Thou knowest that I yearn for him. Thou knowest that he alone can satisfy the yearning of my soul." That same Jesus, that same Jesus, that very same person, who before, offered himself for your sake, to the tribunal of God; that same Jesus who took your place on the accursed cross of Calvary; that same Jesus, who, for your sake, faced the judgment of Almighty God; that same Jesus, who was judged in your place; that same Jesus, who paid the penalty for your sins and transgressions, and who paid that penalty to the full; oh, that same Jesus, who emptied the cup of God's wrath to which God had been provoked by your sins, in your place, he emptied the cup of that wrath. He knew that you could not be redeemed unless he did so. That's why, in the garden of Gethsemane, when he saw it coming, when he knew that he had to drink the cup of his Father's wrath, oh, he groaned, and he said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," but not my will but thy will be done (Matthew 26:39). And he willingly went to Calvary's cross, and there, he emptied that cup to its very last drop for you, for your sake. He quenched it. There, he was made a curse in your place. All the consequences of God's curse landed on his head. It was like a lightening rod, a lightening rod that attracted the wrath of God because he hung there as your representative. God saw in him

all of your sin, in all of its wretchedness, in all of its vileness, in all of its wickedness. And His wrath exploded on him. He faced the judgment of God in your place, and he quenched it, and he silenced that curse.

Oh, that same Jesus, who has performed a complete work for you; that same Jesus is coming to bring you home. That same Jesus will appear in glory. And that same Jesus, you will recognize, because, for God's children, he will not be a stranger, I can assure you. You will recognize. And for you, what a moment of unspeakable joy that will be, to see him as you've never seen him before; to see him in his glory and his majesty, in his unspeakable beauty. Oh, what a day that will be. Then, the righteous will joy as never before. They will joy to see him. And that's why, the Catechism says, lift up your heads, lift up your heads. Luke 21:28, Christ says this: "And when these things begin to come to pass"—and you read it in its context; he's talking about the signs of the time. "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up," he says, "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

What a blessed prospect, because, dear believer, dear child of God, your redemption is not complete. You may now enjoy the beginnings of it, you may now enjoy the beginnings of that joy, those unspeakable moments. But your complete redemption still awaits you, your complete redemption, when, with body and soul, we will be ushered forever into the presence of Christ, when we shall dwell upon that new earth, as God's redeemed people.

Are you lifting up your head, when you consider the troubling news of our day? When you see the signs of our times, as articulated in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, when you see that happening before your eyes, are you lifting up your head on high? Does this comfort you? Is your relationship with Christ so intimate, so intimate, are you abiding in him? Are you so walking in him that that stirs your heart with a holy and intense desire?

It's remarkable, is it not, that that's the final word of Scripture. In the very next to last word in Scripture, after Christ has said three times, "Surely I come quickly" (Revelation 22:20). What is the response of the church? "Even so come"—"Even so come Lord Jesus." Oh, congregation, is that desire alive and well in your life? Is it alive and well in my life? Or are we so comfortable in this life, are we so comfortable in this world, that we rarely think about the second coming of Christ? That's why, it may very well be that also in North America, difficult and trying times must come, to wean us from this present world, and to stir up the intense desire of the ages for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Who Will Judge the Living and the Dead

But we need to go on, because it says that he will *come as judge from heaven*. Congregation, it will be specifically Christ who will be the Judge from heaven. That judgment has been committed to Christ, to the Son of God, who will come as the Son of man, as the glorified Son of man; who will come on the clouds of heaven as Emmanuel, in all his glory, majesty, and his power. And Christ himself often spoke of that day. Let me just read to you several passages, just from the Gospel of Matthew. If you jot them down, go home, and use your concordance, and you can see the parallel passages in Mark, Luke, and John. But just from Matthew, listen carefully.

Matthew 13, verse 41: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity"—those who live in sin.

Matthew 16, verse 27: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works"—I'll come back to that in just a moment.

Matthew 24, verse 31: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Matthew 25, verse 31: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.”

Now, we read earlier, Christ had said, in John 5, verse 22, that “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” That’s why, when Paul was preaching in Athens on the Areopagus, he ends his sermon when he says, because this God who you ignorantly worship “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31)—his Son.

Paul writes in Romans 2, verse 16: “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”

And so, why is it the Son who will judge? Because, congregation, as I will teach you repeatedly, all God’s dealings with man are always in and through his Son—always. That’s why, not only did the Son come into the world to be the Savior of sinners, to reconcile us to God, but he will be the One who will judge all men, as the exalted Christ, the final step of his exaltation. Oh, what shall that be!

In Matthew 26:64, again, Christ is speaking: “Hereafter,” he says, “shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” He will come as Judge from heaven.

And so, the day of judgment, four things I want to briefly highlight.

It will be *A Day of Universal Acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is Lord*.

Secondly, it will be *A Day When Christ Will Open the Books of Remembrance*. We read it from Revelation 20.

Thirdly, it will be *A Day When Christ Will Settle All Accounts with All His Enemies*.

And fourthly, *The Day of Judgment is Only Delayed for One Reason—that’s for the Sake of the Elect*, the sake of those who he has purchased with his blood.

1. So, it is *A Day of Universal Acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is Lord*—Philippians 2, verse 10, a well-known passage: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” On that day, there will be no human being who does not believe in Christ. But for many, it will be the first time. They will have never bowed the knee, but then, they must bow the knee, then they cannot but bow the knee. In that day, all of humanity, all those who have been resurrected, all of humanity will confess that he is Lord.

And congregation, if that will be the first time for you, it will be too late. We must confess him as Lord now, today. Today we must confess him. Today we must bow to him. We must bow the knee to him today. We must kiss the Son, lest his Father be angry and we perish in the way. Oh, if that’s the first time that you will confess his name, it will be forever too late. And yet, on that day, God’s Son will be honored by all men, to the glory of his Father. Because that’s—you see—that’s so important for us to realize, that God the Father is known through his Son. In his Son, he reveals himself, and when his Son is universally worshipped by all of humanity, it will be to his glory, that at last, every son and daughter of Adam will bow the knee to the Son and confess that he is Lord. Oh, my dear congregation, God forbid that, for you, it too will be the first time. God forbid. Oh, that by grace, you would bow your knee to him today.

2. It will be *A Day When Christ Will Open the Books of Remembrance*. In Matthew 25, verse 32, we read: “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from

another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” Oh, what a day that will be. With absolute perfection, Christ and his angels will separate the sheep from the goats—the sheep on his right hand, the goats on his left hand; believers on his right hand, unbelievers on his left hand. And congregation, there will be no mistake. Christ will judge with absolute perfection.

That’s why you will hear often from me, it’s so important that we know, on biblical grounds, that we belong to his people. Because it doesn’t matter ultimately what I think of you. It doesn’t matter what your elders think of you. It doesn’t matter what your family thinks of you. In that day, it will only matter what he thinks of you. And there will be no mistake. That’s why the Apostle says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Examine yourself whether your faith meets the criteria of his Word. Examine yourself whether you are truly in Christ. And we can do that. God’s Word does not leave us in the dark. If we prayerfully examine ourselves, we can come to a proper biblical conclusion whether we belong to this Christ; whether we shall ultimately be among the sheep, rather than among the goats.

And so, we read from Revelation 20, did we not? “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books,”—and then, this important phrase—“according to their works” (verse 12). That theme is repeated so many times. Matthew 16:27, it says: “and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” Second Corinthians 5, verse 10: “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.” And so, we can multiply that with many other passages. Matthew 25, that second half, where Christ gives us a preview of the final day, when the righteous will say, “When did we see thee naked? When did we serve thee?” Oh, he said, “You did it, when you did it to the least of mine, you did it to me.” And the other ones will say likewise, and he said, “You did it not to the least of mine.”

So are we then saved by works? Is that what Christ is saying? Are we saved by works? No, but what Scripture so emphasizes over and over again, in the end, your life, my life tells the real story. Our lives, our lives demonstrate whether we are truly united to the vine, Jesus Christ. Because those who are united to Christ cannot but become like Christ. Union to Christ will always produce likeness to Christ. That’s why Jesus talks about fruitless branches. They are connected to him outwardly. They are connected. They seem to belong to all the other branches, but they are fruitless—fruitless! They will be cut off and they’ll be cast into the fire. We will be judged on that day.

3. It will be *A Day When Christ Will Settle All Accounts with His Enemies*. Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 1, verses 7 through 9, a very solemn passage indeed. And there, we read, consistent with what we’ve heard already: “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels”—Jesus said that repeatedly—“in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:”—if you go lost, you will go lost because you did not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—“who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

Oh, what shall that be! Sometimes we wonder, how can God allow these things to happen—the ongoing brutal slaughter of unborn children; all of the wickedness that just goes on in this world? God has no time. He’s an eternal being. Christ will settle accounts on that day. For he *shall cast*, it says, *all His and my enemies*. The order is significant there: *His and my enemies*. There’s a day coming when he will settle all accounts. And then he will say to them on his left hand, Matthew 25:41: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Sometimes boys and girls ask me, “Pastor, is it going to be a real fire?” Obviously not, this is symbolic. But let me tell you, congregation, boys and girls, let me tell you, that to experience God’s wrath is far worse than a physical fire, a fire of God’s wrath will burn forever against the ungodly. That’s what the rich man experienced when he opened his eyes in hell. That’s what Christ experienced on the cross on behalf of his people.

Let’s open our Bibles now to Revelation 6, another passage that speaks of that final judgment. Revelation 6, verses 15 through 17: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” You know what this is saying—that the vast majority of all the power brokers of the world, the vast majority of all the kings and princes, and prime ministers, presidents, bankers, industrial giants, all the great men of the world, the vast majority of them will be in hell. That’s what this passage says. They had their moment in glory. Here, they enjoyed power, and wealth, and prestige, but they will belong to that multitude.

Oh, then, what a role reversal that will be, when those whom they despised, those whom they persecuted, those whom they trampled upon; and they will see they are translated into glory. And then, they will say to the mountains—oh, congregation, I cannot tell you what this means—for them to see the glory of the Lamb will be so frightening, so frightening. The heavens and the earth will seek to pass away, and no place is found for them, we’re told, so fearful it will be, to face the wrath of the Lamb of God. Oh, God forbid that it would be so for us.

4. *And that day is delayed only because all the elect have not been saved.* And so, as Christ said, in Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” And that’s still happening. The gospel is being preached. There are still unreached population groups. And that work continues. And Christ continues to thrust out his servants. He continues to stir up his church to preach the gospel, to go to the very ends of the world, so that this will be fulfilled, and all families of the earth will be blessed through him. That’s why Peter said, in 2 Peter 3, verse 9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise.” If you read that chapter, 2 Peter 3, the ungodly are mocking with the return of Christ. “Where is the promise of his coming,” they say mockingly. And Peter said, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” And that could be explained various ways, but certainly in the context, he’s not willing that any of those for whom Christ died would perish. They must come to a saving knowledge of him, they must come to salvation, and when that number is complete, he will return.

3. Who Will Usher Us Into Glory

And then, this final sentence, so precious: *But*—oh, that amazing word, “but”—*but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.* Oh, dear child of God, dear believer, he will translate you—you, you of all people, you. Why you? Why will you not be cast into the lake of fire? Why? Why you? Why will you be translated into his presence? There’s only one explanation for it—because you were chosen in him.

Remarkably, the Catechism only speaks of election twice: here, and in Lord’s Day 21. It’s like election is the bedrock—the bedrock which we don’t see, upon which rests the whole edifice of

salvation. But at the appropriate time, the Catechism speaks of it. Because, if by the grace of God, we are believers, and how do we know whether we are one of God's chosen ones? Oh, Calvin says this so beautifully. He said, "Christ is the mirror in which we can read our election." If Christ has become precious to your soul; if he has become your all in all; if, by grace, your soul yearns for him; if you have come to him, and continue to come to him, that's the evidence of election. That means that you are one of God's chosen ones. What a comfort that is. Do you know what that means, dear believer? Your salvation cannot miscarry; it's impossible. If we have been chosen in Christ; if we have been given to Christ; if we have been redeemed by Christ; if we have been drawn to Christ; if we have been united to Christ; if we are being conformed to Christ, we shall forever be with Christ, together with all his chosen ones.

That's why all boasting, all boasting will forever be in him. As never before, in that day, in that day, God's redeemed people will sing, and they will look to their Savior, and they will say, "It's through thee, through thee alone, because of thy sovereign good pleasure." That's why all boasting will be excluded. And that's what makes the difference between you and his enemies. And dear believer, you were born as an enemy of God. You were born with a heart that was hostile to God. And by his sovereign power, God changed your heart. God renewed you, made you willing in the day of his power. He drew you, by his Spirit, to his Son, so that you would embrace him to your salvation. Oh, if ever we see that salvation is of the Lord, what a comfort that is for God's children. Christ says, No one—"No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29).

Oh, he will translate me—even me; even a Manasseh; even a thief on the cross; even a Saul of Tarsus; even a John Newton; and even someone like you. And he will translate us—this is so beautiful—to himself. Congregation, that's heaven. That's heaven, to be where he is. Christ, he promised that, he promised that so beautifully, did he not, in John 14, verse 3, he said: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and"—and listen—"I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." That's heaven.

Oh, Christ is saying, my dear people, "My Father's house hath many mansions," and one of those mansions is for you. There's a reservation. There is a reservation in heaven that has your name on it. And that reservation cannot be cancelled. That reservation has been secured by my blood. And my presence is the warranty that you will come to that mansion. "I go to prepare a place, [even] for you." And when I come again, I will bring you to myself. That's why, in John 17, he prays, oh, he prays, "Father, I pray that those whom thou hast given me, that they may be where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24). That's his desire.

That's why Samuel Rutherford² famously said that "Christ is heaven's heaven." So let me ask you something. Do you want to go to heaven, or do you want to be with Christ? There are many heaven seekers today. But heaven without Christ would be meaningless. God's children long to go to heaven, not just to be in heaven, but they long to be there—why?—because he will be there. He will be there. That's heaven's heaven. He will gather us *to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory*.

Oh, Isaiah 35, verse 10: "The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Oh, to be where he is! That's what that new reality will be, amazing, is that Christ, as our Emmanuel, as our glorified Emmanuel, he will forever walk among us, he will forever dwell among us. And we, his redeemed people, we will behold the Father's glory in him. We will delight

2 Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor and theologian, and author of many widely read letters, sermons, devotional and scholastic works. He is known for *Lex, Rex: the Law and the Prince*, a defense of constitutionalism and limited government against the supposed divine right of kings.

ourselves, we will see the glory of God revealed in him. Oh, the wisdom of God, who has purposed that, in glory, we will interact with God in a manner that befits our humanity.

That's why Christ, in his glorified humanity, will be in our midst. He will walk among us. We will be able to interact with him. And yet, God, at the same time, so we will delight ourselves in Christ, so will the Father delight himself in his people. Why? Because in glory, you will perfectly reflect the glory of his Son—chosen in his Son, to become like his Son. And when God beholds his redeemed people, he will see in us a reflection of the glory of his only begotten Son. And so, Christ will be the centerpiece of heaven. It will all revolve around him. The Father will delight himself in Him, and in his people, who reflect his glory. And God's redeemed people will delight themselves in their Emmanuel, in whom they behold forever the glory of God. Oh, Peter says, "According to his promise, [we] look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Oh, congregation, is that your future? Boys and girls, is that your future? Are you looking forward to his coming? What comfort is it to you that Christ shall come again to judge the living and the dead? Does that truth comfort you? Does that stir your soul? Does that make you join the multitude of the ages in that final word of Scripture, "Oh, come, Lord Jesus"? Or does that day fill you with fear? Oh, God forbid that any of you would perish.

Let's turn to John 12, verse 48, a remarkable passage that speaks about this final day of judgment, for those who do not know Christ. Look at what Christ says in John 12, verse 48. He said: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." That's why the judgment of those who have been under the gospel will be worse than the judgment of the ungodly who have never known the gospel; to have been under the gospel; to have the Word of God proclaimed to you; to have Christ offered to you; to have heard the invitation to the gospel, and yet to perish.

Christ is saying, "He that rejecteth me"—that's a powerful statement. There's no passage in Scripture that teaches the offer of grace so powerfully as this statement. Because how can you be judged for rejecting Christ unless he's offered to you—he's offered to you freely without money and without price. That's what it means to be under the preaching of the gospel. And so, Christ is saying, "He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words"—that's what it means to be an unbeliever. It's to reject Christ and to reject his words. You will be judged also by the gospel you've heard. It will be a hell in hell, when that gospel will forever burn in your conscience. And then you will realize that you have believed it too late. That's what hell is—filled with people who have believed the truth too late. And therefore, while he proffers peace and pardon, and while he offers himself, let us hear his voice today, lest, if we our hearts should harden, we should perish in the way.

But you, who love this Christ, who cannot deny that he has become the altogether lovely one, the chiefest among ten thousand, oh, lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing nigh. The day is coming when he will translate you to himself, and to heavenly joys in glory. Amen.

Let's pray.

Lord, we give thee humble thanks that we could be in thy house today. Bless thy word, bring it beyond the outward ear; write it upon our hearts, also the word of tonight. Oh, that we would not, in utter foolishness, lay this aside, that we would not be those forgetful hearers who straightway forget what they have heard. Oh, let not the birds of the air take away the seed of thy Word. And oh, we pray that, by grace, none of us will once be judged by the gospel we have heard, that instead, that we would be encouraged to come to thee as vile, wretched sinners, as we heard this morning, knowing that thou art so ready to welcome the vilest sinner that comes to

thee in Christ, thy dear Son. Oh, remember us with our children. Go with us in this coming week. Keep and protect us. Bless the labor of our hands. Bless the time with the young people tonight. Bless the instruction that will be given to them as well. And, oh, glorify thy grace mightily in the hearts of our young people and in our children as well. We ask it in thy name. Amen.