

*Come,*  
*Lord*  
*Jesus*

MEDITATIONS ON  
THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

JOHN PIPER

*Come, Lord Jesus*

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# Come, Lord Jesus

*Meditations on the Second Coming of Christ*

John Piper

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*To*  
*George Eldon Ladd*

*the first to show me that*  
*the whole New Testament*  
*is eschatological*



# Contents

## PART 1: REASONS TO LOVE CHRIST'S APPEARING

- Prelude to Part 1: The Miracle We Seek: Love 11
- 1 All Who Have Loved His Appearing 13
- 2 How Can a Book Awaken Love for Christ's Appearing? 23
- 3 The Glory of Christ as the Primary Reality of His Coming:  
The Heart of the Matter, Part 1 35
- 4 Experiencing the Glory of Christ with Joyful Amazement:  
The Heart of the Matter, Part 2 47
- 5 The Grace Being Brought to You at the Revelation of Christ 59
- 6 Will We Be Blameless at the Coming of Christ? 71
- 7 We Will Be Perfected Mind, Heart, and Body 87
- 8 Jesus Will Deliver Us from the Wrath of Jesus 105
- 9 In Flaming Fire, with Vengeance and Relief 117
- 10 Repaying Each for What He Has Done 135
- 11 Rejoicing in the Hope of Receiving Different Rewards 149
- 12 The Joy of Personal Fellowship with the Sovereign  
Servant 161



## PART 2: THE TIME OF HIS APPEARING

Prelude to Part 2: The Time and the Love of Christ's  
Appearing 179

- 13 Did Jesus Teach That He Would Return within One  
Generation? 181
- 14 What Does the New Testament Mean That Jesus Will Come  
Soon? 193
- 15 Is There an Any-Moment Rapture before the Second  
Coming? 203
- 16 Jesus and Paul: A Common Vision of Christ's Coming 215
- 17 What Must Happen before the Lord's Appearing? 233

## PART 3: HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

Prelude to Part 3: Living between the Two Appearings  
of Christ 249

- 18 End-Time Alertness and Love for Christ's Appearing 253
- 19 Patient, Joyful, Not Deceived, Not Alarmed 261
- 20 Coming Justice, Present Gentleness 267
- 21 Go to Work, Go to Church 273
- 22 End-Time Praying, for Yourself and the Mission 281

O Come, Lord Jesus, Come: A Hymn to Christ 285

General Index 289

Scripture Index 294

Desiring God Note on Resources 304

PART 1

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REASONS TO LOVE  
CHRIST'S APPEARING



*Prelude to Part 1*

## THE MIRACLE WE SEEK: LOVE

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK IS TO HELP YOU love the second coming of Jesus Christ. The contents and title were inspired partly by the biblical prayers “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20), and “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22). But mainly the book was inspired by the heart affection beneath these prayers, which Paul expressed in 2 Timothy 4:8:

There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have *loved his appearing*.

A crown of righteousness is promised to those who *love* the second coming of Christ. We pray for his appearing, because we love his appearing. The prayer “Come, Lord Jesus” is rooted in something deeper: “I love your appearing!”

This book is about the reality that awakens such love and how that awakening happens. This love involves desiring, longing, and hoping. It is not an action of the body. It is a spiritual affection of the heart. By *spiritual*, I mean brought into being and formed by the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising that the Holy Spirit would bring into being the heart's love for the coming of Christ, for the Spirit's most essential work in the human heart is to glorify Jesus. Jesus says of the Spirit, "He will glorify me" (John 16:14).

Therefore, our Spirit-awakened love for the second coming is not a Christ-neglecting fascination with an event. It is a Christ-enthralled longing for his presence and glory. It is an extension of our love for Christ—the kind of love Jesus was seeking in Matthew 10:37: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Any love for the second coming that is not an extension of this supreme affection for Jesus himself is not the Christ-exalting work of the Holy Spirit. It is not the love to which Paul promised a crown. It is not what I am aiming at.

Therefore, this book aims at a miracle that the book alone cannot achieve—namely, Spirit-created affections. But that aim is no different from all Christian teaching and preaching and counseling and serving, which seek to build faith in Jesus, and rescue people from divine judgment, and stir up Christ-exalting righteousness. All such faith and rescue and righteousness are works of the Spirit of God (Rom. 5:9; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Thess. 1:11). Human means—like books—are not decisive. God is.

But human means *are* divinely appointed. When God intends to open the eyes of the spiritually blind to see the glory of Christ and his coming, he sends a human messenger and says, "I am sending *you* to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:17–18). That's how God awakens love for the second coming. He opens the eyes of the blind to see the greatness, the glory, and the worth of Christ's coming. He does it through the biblical truth about Christ's coming and through human teachers who point to that truth. That's what I aim to do in this book.

## All Who Have Loved His Appearing

LET'S MAKE SURE THAT the biblical text where this book takes its stand can bear the weight:

I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to *all who have loved his appearing*. (2 Tim. 4:6–8)

Does the *appearing* referred to in verse 8 actually refer to the second coming of Christ, or does it refer to his first coming, his incarnation? Considered by itself, the word *appearing* (ἐπιφάνεια) can refer to his first coming. Of the five other uses of this word by the apostle Paul, four refer to the second coming (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13). But one refers to the first coming:

[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been

manifested through the *appearing* [ἐπιφανείας] of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim. 1:9–10)

So there is nothing in the word *appearing* itself that demands a reference to the second coming. But four observations incline me to think that in 2 Timothy 4:8 Paul means “all who have loved his [*second*] appearing.”

First, the nearest use of the word, seven verses earlier, refers to the second coming: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his *appearing* and his kingdom: preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1–2).

Second, in verse 10 Paul contrasts those who “have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8) with Demas, who “deserted me, *having loved the present age*” (my translation). Calling attention to Demas’s love for “the *present age*” contrasts him with those who love the second coming of Christ, because the second coming brings the “*end of the age*” (Matt. 13:40; 24:3; 28:20). The second coming brings to an end the very thing Demas has come to love most. Those who love the second coming, however, prefer the arrival of Christ over all that this present fallen age can give.

Third, Paul’s reference to his being rewarded on “that day” (2 Tim. 4:8) creates the expectation that what follows will relate to “that day”—namely, the day of Christ’s second coming. (For Paul’s use of “that day” as a reference to Christ’s second coming, see 1 Thess. 5:4; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:3; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18.) In this flow of thought, it would be strange for Paul to revert to the first appearing of Christ.

The fourth observation that inclines me to take 2 Timothy 4:8 as a reference to the *second* appearing of Christ, rather than the first, is that Paul sees the first appearing as precisely designed to fit us for the second. Notice how he argues in Titus 2:11–13:

The grace of God has *appeared* [ἐπεφάνη, the verb form of the Greek noun behind the word *appearing*], bringing salvation for all people,

training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [eagerly<sup>1</sup>] waiting [προσδεχόμενοι] for our blessed hope, the *appearing* [ἐπιφάνειαν] of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Boiling it down, Paul says that the grace of God *appeared* the first time to bring into being a people who would eagerly wait for Christ's second *appearing* with uprightness and godliness. In other words, the first appearing prepares us for the second. We have much to love about the first appearing of Christ. But as great as it was, climaxing in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, it was all designed to bring into being a people and a new reality that would find climactic expression at the second coming.

So I think Paul would say that the test of our proper affection for the first coming of Christ is the measure of our affection for the second. Or to say it another way, the test of our love for the Christ who *has* appeared is our longing for the Christ who *will* appear. Therefore, I believe I am building on a good foundation when I say that the aim of this book is to help people love the second coming of Christ. To such people, Christ, the righteous judge, will award the crown of righteousness.

### Why a Crown for Loving His Appearing?

Why does Paul connect the crown of righteousness with love for Christ's appearing? Why does he say, "The righteous judge, will award [the crown of righteousness] . . . to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8)? Why not say that the Lord will give a crown "to all who have finished their race," or "to all who have fought the good fight," or "to all who have kept the faith"? That is what Paul seems to be leading up to when he says in 2 Timothy 4:7–8:

1 This Greek verb, προσδέχομαι, in most of its uses carries the connotation of waiting with eagerness, or gladly welcoming, Mark 15:43; Luke 2:25, 38; 23:51; Rom. 16:2; Phil. 2:29; Heb. 10:34; Jude 21.



I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who . . .

It certainly sounds as if Paul is going to say, "Not only do I get a wreath for fighting the good fight, but so does everyone else who . . . *fights the good fight*." "Not only am I awarded a wreath for finishing the race, but so is everyone else who . . . *finishes the race*." "Not only will the judge give *me* a crown for keeping the faith, but he will give that crown also to all who . . . *keep the faith*." That's what we expect. But that is not what Paul says.

He says in effect, "Just as I will receive a crown for the *fight fought*, and the *race finished*, and the *faith kept*, so also will everyone else who . . . *has loved the Lord's appearing*." Why? Why does Paul replace "fighting the fight" and "finishing the race" and "keeping the faith" with "loving the Lord's appearing"?

My suggestion is that welling up in Paul's mind, as he thinks about his fight and race and faith, is his own decades-long desire for the Lord's appearing that exerted such a keeping power in his life. In other words, as he thought back over the battles he had fought, and the endurance demanded by the marathon of his life, and the temptations to forsake his faith for the pleasures of the world, what rose in his consciousness was the sustaining power of the preciousness of what he saw coming at the Lord's appearing. He loved it. And that love kept him.

### Why Demas Did Not Finish

Two contextual clues show us that Paul was thinking this way. One is the link we have already seen between 2 Timothy 4:8 and what follows about Demas in verse 10:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day,

and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas deserted me, *having loved the present age*, and went to Thessalonica. (2 Tim. 4:8–10, my translation)

Demas did not fight on. He did not finish his race. He did not keep the faith. He is the opposite of what Paul is urging Timothy, and us, to be. He says to Timothy, “Endure suffering [*fight!*] . . . fulfill your ministry [*finish!*]” (2 Tim. 4:5). Don’t stop fighting and running. Paul gives *himself* as a model for Timothy to follow and *Demas* as a model not to follow. But the language he chooses to describe Demas’s faith is *love* language, not the language of fighting or running or keeping. Demas quit fighting and quit running and quit keeping, because he “*loved the present age.*” He did *not* love the Lord’s appearing.

So in the example of Demas, Paul makes explicit what is in his mind in verses 6–8, namely, the connection between what we *love* and whether we *endure*. He makes plain that promising the crown of righteousness to those who have *loved* the Lord’s appearing (2 Tim. 4:8) is in perfect harmony with the promise that he would receive that same crown for his good fight and finished race and kept faith. They are in harmony because loving the Lord’s appearing was essential for his lifelong endurance. It was the root of that fruit.

### **Why the Itchers Did Not Finish the Race**

Another contextual clue shows that Paul sees loving the Lord’s appearing as essential to fighting the good fight and finishing the race and keeping the faith. It is found in the preceding verses:

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Tim. 4:3–4)

Here Paul prepares us for what he will say about Demas. The issue is that professing Christians will “turn away” from the truth. (Demas had seemed to be Paul’s faithful partner, Col. 4:14.) They will “wander off.” But why? The reason Paul mentions is not intellectual struggles or relational conflicts or sincere doubts. What he mentions is “itching ears” for teaching that will “suit their own passions.”

The word *passions* is simply the common word for *desires* (ἐπιθυμίας). It is the language of *love*. It is similar to 2 Timothy 4:8 (“have *loved* the Lord’s appearing”) and verse 10 (“having *loved* the present age”). The reason they “turn away” and “wander off” is that they *love* (crave, long for, desire) the wrong things. They quit fighting the fight. They stop running the race. They cease keeping the faith. Because, like Demas, they love this age. They do not *love* the Lord’s appearing.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul says *his* crown will be awarded because of a well-fought fight and a well-run race and persevering faith, while *their* crown will be awarded because they have loved the Lord’s appearing. These are not separate standards for awarding crowns. They are the same standard. In one, Paul focuses on the inner spiritual affection of love for the Lord and his coming. And in the other, Paul focuses on the resulting fight for perseverance.

### How Important Is It to Love the Second Coming?

This relationship between *loving* and *fighting* is so important for us to see because it shows how crucial it is that we love the Lord’s second coming. This love is not marginal. It is not optional. It is a means by which Christians are kept from falling away. It is a condition of the Christian heart that protects us from the destructive Demas-like love for this age. It is a thrilling glimpse of the prize at the end of life’s marathon that keeps us running (Phil. 3:14). Loving the Lord’s coming is an extension into the future of loving the Lord now. And loving the Lord now is essential to being a Christian.

The closest New Testament parallel to 2 Timothy 4:8 is James 1:12:

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:12	2 Timothy 4:7–8
steadfast under trial	fought the good fight, finished the race
the crown of life	the crown of righteousness
those who love him	those who loved his appearing

Two key differences in wording confirm how much is at stake in loving the Lord’s appearing. James speaks of *loving the Lord himself* where Paul speaks of *loving the Lord’s appearing*. And James promises a *crown of life* where Paul promises a *crown of righteousness*. These are not contrary pictures. Both teach that what is at stake in loving the Lord and his appearing is final salvation. The “crown of life” signifies the final inheritance of eternal life (cf. Titus 3:7); and the “crown of righteousness” signifies that this eternal life is the inheritance of those whose saving faith was confirmed by the fruit of righteousness.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The term “crown of righteousness” could possibly represent the final act by which God declares us to be justified. But I have taken it to mean an award for a life whose justifying faith was confirmed with the fruit of righteousness. I do this for two reasons. One is that Paul’s use of the term “righteous judge” in 2 Tim. 4:8 is not based on a courtroom scene (suggesting justification) but on an athletic scene where the judge is rightly deciding if the athletes fought and ran by the rules. “An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tim. 2:5). The other reason is that awarding Christians a crown for a life marked by the fruit of righteousness is what Paul, and the rest of the New Testament authors, taught. Such teaching simply acknowledges that “faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26), and we are saved “through sanctification” (2 Thess. 2:13), and there is a “holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14), and “whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God” (1 John 3:10). This is not perfectionism. We will not be perfect until we see the Lord Jesus face-to-face (Phil. 3:12; 1 John 3:2). And it is not justification by works. It is the uniform teaching of the New Testament that to enter heaven one must have a wedding garment (Matt. 22:11–14) and that garment is “the righteous deeds of the saints” (Rev. 19:8). These “righteous deeds” do not earn heaven or replace faith as the sole

Therefore, loving the Lord Jesus, and its extension in loving his coming, is an essential mark of a true Christian. Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!” (16:22, my translation). In other words, no one is a Christian—no one is saved—who does not love the Lord Jesus. And it is striking that just as Paul links *loving* the Lord with the Lord’s coming in 2 Timothy 4:8, so here he links *not loving* the Lord with the Lord’s coming: “Let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!” In other words, just as the crown of righteousness is awarded to the lovers of Christ at the day of his coming, so will the curse be pronounced on the nonlovers of Christ at the day of his coming.

### Place of Grace

Someone might stumble over the fact that the very next verse in 1 Corinthians 16 says, “The *grace* of the Lord Jesus be with you” (16:23). One might ask, “How can Paul make love for Christ essential for escaping God’s curse, and then declare that *grace* is the way Christ relates to his people?”

The answer has two parts. First, grace is the divine power that gave us spiritual life in the first place so that our hearts were able to love Christ (Eph. 2:5). “The *grace* of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and *love* that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14). Second, the ongoing blessings of grace flow to us in the channels of love for Christ that grace itself has created. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 6:24, “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.” Loving Christ (and thus his coming) is the channel through which more grace flows to us. This is also why both James and Peter say, “God opposes the proud but *gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

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instrument of God’s being 100 percent for us. They are the “obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 1:5, my translation; Heb. 11:8), the “[works] of faith” (2 Thess. 1:11). They are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). Or, as Paul said in Phil. 1:10–11, Christians will be found on “the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness.”

The point is that even though grace is what created the humility in the first place, it is to the humble that God gives “more grace” (James 4:6). When the apostles speak of God’s grace flowing to those who love Christ (Eph. 6:24), and grace flowing to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5), they are not describing different hearts—one humble and one loving. There is one Christian heart. It has been brought low in humility, and it loves Christ and his coming.

Therefore, when Paul says that the person who does *not love* the Lord will be cursed at his coming, and the person who *loves* the Lord will receive a crown of righteousness at his coming, he is not undermining or contradicting the decisive role of sovereign grace. God’s grace is the mighty plan and power that, before the creation of the universe, had guaranteed the salvation of God’s people. “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and *grace*, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim. 1:9). The grace that gave us life and revealed to us the infinitely precious glory of Christ—in his person and in his coming—was given to us before the universe was created.

### **Love for the Second Coming Is Essential**

The point we are stressing is that love for Jesus and, by extension, love for his coming, are essential to being a Christian. Jesus himself taught this truth more than once. He said to the Jewish leaders, who claimed to know God but rejected Jesus, “If God were your Father, you would love me” (John 8:42). In other words, if you don’t love me, you don’t have God as your Father. And as we have seen before, Jesus said, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37). What that verse makes clear is that loving Jesus cannot be reduced to doing external things that he commands. That is not what love for father and mother and son and daughter means. This love is what we have called an *affection* of the heart, not a set of deeds

done by the body. And in the case of love for Jesus and his coming, it is a *spiritual* affection—a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Without this love, God is not our Father, and Jesus is not our Savior.

### **Means to a Miracle**

Perhaps it is obvious, therefore, why I am pursuing a deeper, more authentic, more unshakable love for Christ's coming, and would like to bring you with me. The aim is that we experience a Christ-enthralled longing for his presence and glorification. Only a divine act in our hearts can bring that about. So the question we turn to now is, How can a natural act, like writing or reading a book, be a means to that miraculous end?