

**“If Jesus were to return today, would you and your family members and friends be ready for His return?”** That was the question posed by myself, Craig Ratliff, Dave Jochum and Manley Miller in the messages that we preached at our Celebration campuses this past weekend. We are in the midst of a message series titled, *BEDTIME STORIES*, and we’re learning from the Parables of Jesus stories and truths that we need to think through carefully, and that we also need to dialogue about with our family and friends.

In the message this past weekend we learned from the story that Jesus told in Luke 12:35-48 that Jesus Christ is definitely returning to Planet Earth some time in the future, and that we need to be: 1) Looking for His Return, and 2) Prepared for His Return. We taught that when Jesus returns He will clean up and straighten up our world, defeat the Devil fully and finally, and further establish His kingdom here on earth and in heaven.

This is a prominent and powerful teaching in the Scriptures. The Bible teaches that the “second coming of Jesus” is the “blessed hope of Christians” (Titus 2:11-14). Jesus’ return is also the “blessed hope” for our world that is economically, morally, emotionally, relationally and spiritually literally “coming apart at the seams.” The return of Jesus Christ will mark the consummation of the age and the inauguration of the eternal order, bringing about quite literally, “heaven on earth.” To borrow a quote from Paul Rees, “the only hope for a tottering civilization is a towering Savior.”

While the “second coming of Christ” is our hope, there is often more confusion and division surrounding it than any other Bible teaching. Christians are generally agreed on the basics. When Jesus returns: 1) the Christian dead will be raised from the grave, 2) living Christians will be transformed and taken to heaven, 3) the Devil and his allies will be fully and finally defeated and destroyed, 4) the final judgments on mankind will be carried out, 5) all genuine Christians will be affirmed and rewarded in accordance with the faithfulness and fruitfulness of their lives on earth, and 6) the eternal order will be established. However, when Christian scholars seek to diagram systematic approaches of how all of this is to happen, there always seems to be great differences and disagreements.

Much of the disagreement centers on different interpretations of Revelation 20. In that chapter the Apostle John uses the phrase, “a thousand years,” six times. Satan will be bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2), martyred believers will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4), and at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed from prison, defeated in the Battle of Armageddon, and then cast into the “lake of fire and brimstone.” Then will come the Great White Throne Judgment of the world. The Latin word for “thousand” is “millennium” and therefore three major and different perspectives have arisen as to how everything is going to “play out” at the end of time. Those three different perspectives – Postmillennialism, Pre-millennialism, and A-millennialism – will be addressed following this article.

What do I believe? What is my millennial view? Much of my study and teaching has been from the Pre-millennial perspective. However, I like to joke that I am a “Pan-millennialist” (I believe it will “all pan out in the end”) or that I am a “Pro-millennialist” (I’m all for a thousand years of peace for any time). But the Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis probably said it best for me.

Lewis said, “All that really matters is that you were at your post when the inspection came.” May you and I “always be at our post,” looking for, living for, witnessing for and serving our Savior, so that we and all those we know and love are prepared to meet our Savior who is coming again!

Pastor Dennis

P.S. Please be praying for our Teens who are attending the *Centrifuge Summer Camp* in Jackson, Tennessee this week. Be praying for their safety as they travel and for spiritual strengthening during this Summer Camp.

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**Postmillennialists** believe that the church, by preaching the gospel, will usher in a utopian age of righteousness, justice and peace on the earth that will last for a thousand years. Then Christ will return, all the dead will be resurrected, and a general judgment will take place followed by the eternal order. The strength of Postmillennialism is that it affirms the world as good and that God is working out His plan to restore creation to its original perfect state. It is extremely optimistic and believes it is worthwhile to invest our energies in trying to improve the world. The greatest weakness of the Postmillennial perspective is its failure to take seriously the biblical pessimism regarding man’s efforts apart from God.

**Pre-millennialists** believe that Jesus will come before the millennium period. This age will grow increasingly worse until the end comes. The end will be marked by two comings and three judgments. First, Jesus will come for His “saints” (both living and dead), who will then be taken with Him to heaven, where they will be “judged” and rewarded. This will be followed by seven years of tribulation on earth, and during this time a worldwide dictator known as the “Anti-Christ” will arise and eventually rule the world. But the “Anti-Christ” will be defeated at the final battle when Jesus returns a second time. Second, Christ will come with His “saints” and set up His earthly kingdom. Then, Satan will be bound, the nations will be judged, the martyred dead from the tribulation period will be raised, and Jesus will begin His thousand year reign on earth with Jerusalem as His capital. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed and the great Battle of Armageddon will occur. Christ will win the final victory and Satan will be cast into the “lake of fire.” Then will follow the resurrection of the wicked and the Great White Throne judgment. The strength of Pre-millennialism is the earnestness with which its proponents have pursued the details of biblical prophecy. The weakness of the Pre-millennial perspective is that much of it is drawn exclusively from one chapter in the Bible and that its followers have an unwillingness to leave any mystery in the way God works with man.

**A-millennialists** do not believe in a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Christ following His return to earth. They view much of the Book of Revelation as written in signs and symbols that are not to be taken literally. A-millennialism views the “second coming of Jesus” as a single event rather than a series of events. They believe that when Christ returns the dead will be raised, believers will be transformed, taken to Heaven and glorified, and will return to Planet Earth with the Lord Jesus. At this point the final judgment will send those who have rejected Christ to hell, believers will enter into everlasting glory on the “new earth,” and heaven and the “new earth” will be made one. The greatest strength of A-millennialism is that it was the

consensus of the Christian Church for nearly 1500 years. Its weakness is that it leaves many questions unanswered.

Thomas Jefferson once said, “Good people with good intentions and the same facts don’t always agree.” That statement is so true when applied to projecting what the Bible teaches about the “second coming of Jesus” and the “end times.”