

Is God Really Coming Back?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2024

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] It's got to be probably one of the most famous movie lines. I'll be back. And it's well quoted in many contexts, but you know, it wasn't only Arnold Schwarzenegger who said that in Terminator 2.

Great movie, by the way, if you're old enough. It was also Jesus Christ who said that. He didn't say it in exactly the same words and not in the Austrian accent, but one of the clearest teachings of the New Testament about the future, whatever else you might believe, whatever else people might debate about what the Bible teaches about the future, one of the clearest teachings and one of the most undeniable teachings about the future in the Bible is that God in the flesh who walked on this planet is going to do it again.

God is going to come again in the person of Jesus, and He is going to be here, and He's going to walk in our world once more. And that is really the burden of Paul's speech in Athens that we read here in the book of Acts.

Now, if you don't know, the book of Acts is all about the story of the early Christians going throughout the known ancient world of the time, sharing the gospel, sharing the news about Jesus, because they believed and they were burdened by the fact that this was not just news that was relevant to one particular nation.

It was relevant to all people. They were so blown away by the importance of this news that they basically spent the rest of their lives making it known, and they went throughout the ancient world into all the major cities.

[1 : 4 9] And here we find Paul, the apostle, in the city of Athens, one of the major cities of the ancient world. And he is telling them about Jesus. And as we read about this, and as we read about where Paul ended up in his speech, we discover not only why the return of Jesus to this earth is so relevant for each one of us, no matter who we are, but we discover how we can know it really is going to happen and what we must do about it.

And that's what we're going to look at this morning. But first, we need to ask, why is that a teaching in the Bible? Well, why is Jesus coming back at all?

On Wednesday, we celebrated the coming of God into our broken world in order to fix it. What an amazing thing that is to celebrate, that God decided that He's not going to leave us in the mess we've made for ourselves, but He's going to come into the mess, get His hands dirty, and fix it.

That's what we were reminded of on Wednesday. But it doesn't take a genius to see that 2,000 years later, the world is still not fixed.

Did He fail His mission? Well, no. If we read the Bible, we understand that it's not that Jesus failed His mission to come fix this world, like many people assume.

[3 : 1 7] It's that He's not finished. You see, it's that something more needs to happen before this world can be fully, completely fixed and restored.

And we find it in verse 31 of our passage this morning. What needs to happen still for this world to be fixed? And it's in the beginning of verse 31, Paul says this.

God has set a day when He is going to judge the world in righteousness. And that is the one thing this world still lacks, is true judgment.

True judgment. Where all that is wrong in this world is called out, and it is finally and decisively put an end to.

True judgment. Where wrong is called wrong, and it is ended. That is what this world still lacks. And you know what? We all love the idea of that. Of wrong being called out and put an end to.

[4 : 20] Deep down inside, we all want it. And yet, we also don't. It's just like we love the flash of the speed camera when it catches that guy who just pulled in front of us and sped away, and then he gets flashed, and we're like, yes!

Instant karma. But we hate, we despise that same camera when it catches us, don't we? You see, we've got this love-hate relationship with the idea of justice, with judgment.

We want bad people to be judged, but how dare someone judge me? Right? It's this love-hate relationship with judgment.

There's times we love it, and there's times we really don't. But whatever you feel about this idea of judgment, and by the way, in today's world, just the word judgment puts people's backs up, you know?

Judgment. People don't like judgment. And yet, subconsciously, we all want judgment. Judgment. And we're very quick to judge other people, and yet we don't like the idea of judgment.

[5 : 26] We don't feel good about it. It doesn't bring good feelings to us. But you know what? Nobody cares how you feel about judgment. It doesn't matter what you feel, because the Bible says it's going to happen.

It's going to happen. It will happen. In fact, that's always been God's plan, right from the beginning. We read earlier, even long before Jesus came, that was God's plan. In Psalm 98, let me just read to you the end again of that psalm we started our service with.

Let the sea and all that fills it, and the world and all those who live in it, resound. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains shout together for joy before the Lord.

Why? Because He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world righteously, and He will judge the peoples fairly. And another psalm, Psalm 96, ends like this.

Let the fields and everything in them celebrate. Let all the trees in the forest shout for joy before the Lord, for He is coming.

[6 : 31] He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His faithfulness. Now, these psalms were written centuries before Jesus came.

So, way before Jesus came, it was always part of God's plan, right from the beginning, to bring justice to the world. And here in these psalms, creation itself is pictured as celebrating.

Creation, the mountains, the seas, the animals, they're celebrating. Why? Because the truth is that God has never intended to leave this world like it is. That's why creation is celebrating, because it's broken right now, and creation suffers because of it.

But creation here is celebrating because it's God's plan to fix things. God never intended to leave the world in this broken state, but to fix it properly, as our verse here from Acts 17 says, He has set a day when He will do that.

He has set a day. Think about that. It's set. He has set a day. That judgment is going to happen in this world. A date. There's a date. We don't know what it is, but there's a date.

[7 : 38] That judgment is going to happen. It's set. And this is not, by the way, like a Capetonian dinner arrangement. You know what I mean?

If you're a Capetonian, you'll know what I mean. You know, we should really get together sometime. We definitely must. Let's do it. That's far from certain, by the way.

When a Capetonian says that to you, you never know. Why is it only Capetonians? Probably because you never know. The weather might be good, and maybe we'll change our plan. But those plans are never set. But God's plans, God's dates are not like that.

God's justice is not like that. It is certain. There is a day. God has set a day. It is already in His calendar. If you had a big world chart, there's a day somewhere there that is circled that He's going to come, and judgment will happen.

It's an appointment that cannot be rescheduled. And more than that, the verse tells us it's an appointment that all people will have to be at.

[8 : 43] Look what it says. Not only has He said today, He said today when He will judge the world. The world. That's all of us.

Not just the people who knew about God, but everyone God has made, irrespective of what they believe, will be at that appointment. You may not believe in judgment, but that won't get you out of it.

You know, a criminal who's caught and brought before the judge in the courtroom could have his eyes closed, and he could convince himself he's not in a court, but that's not going to stop him from facing justice. Ignorance and willing deception will not stop people from facing justice.

This is a day that is set. Even if you don't believe in it, it won't stop. It won't get you out of it. But everyone must face God's true justice. That's what the apostle here claims.

That's what the Bible claims. But the question is, how do we know it's true? I mean, that's really what it comes down to. How do we know any of this is true?

[9 : 51] Well, Paul goes on to tell us. Let me continue to read in verse 31. He says, God has set a day when He's going to judge the world in righteousness. By the man He has appointed.

And He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead. Okay, so here, Paul claims that God has provided proof.

Proof. Evidence. Proof is a way that any rational human can know something for sure. Proof. And God has given us proof, apparently.

What is this proof? Well, the proof is that the man who has been appointed by God to judge all people is the same one who has come already to save them. That's the proof.

And that salvation, when Jesus came and He died on the cross for sins of other people, that salvation didn't end there. It culminated the third day later with His resurrection from the dead.

[10 : 57] Unprecedented. An amazing moment. The resurrection of a human body from the dead, never to die again. And that resurrection, that moment, Paul says, is all the proof anyone needs.

That is the proof. And it's all the proof you need. Why? Why is that sufficient proof? Well, firstly, because it is actually, and many people don't know this, it is a provable historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

It's not just a myth. It's not just a story. You know, people think, and I've come across people like this, who think that the Bible is made up of a whole lot of myths and legends and stories.

In fact, we were, like 10 years ago, we had a trip in Norway, a family trip, and we were on a bus, and we were on a tour bus through Norway, and there was this tour guide, this lady, and she was telling us, we were going through all the Viking ruins, and learning about all the history of the Vikings.

It was fascinating stuff. And this tour guide, as we were going through, was telling us all about the stuff. And then she said, she started talking about the legend of St. George and the dragon.

[12 : 13] You know, that old English legend where that knight slays the dragon. And then, because apparently it had some connection with Viking myth and legend. And then she said, you know, it's in the Bible, yeah?

And I was sitting at the back of the bus, and I was like, what? And every fiber of my being wanted to stand up and say, excuse me, lady, did you know the Bible is actually verifiable historical fact?

It's eyewitness testimony, written within the first century of people who were there and can verify it. And it hasn't been disproven for 2,000 years as verifiable historical.

I didn't stand up and say those things, much probably to the relief of my family. But it's true, right? This is not a collection of myth and legend.

It is fact. This is historical documents. And it's actually, if you look into it, we have far more evidence historically for what's written in the Bible than any other historical event of that time or beyond that time.

[13 : 20] This is, if you believe anything that happened in the ancient world, you have to believe this, because we have far more evidence for what we read in the Bible. It actually happened. Archaeological evidence to back it up. Other extra-biblical historians also back it up.

But we've got much more evidence than people think for what's written here, especially the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I mean, there was one British chief justice who said, if you take all the evidence we have for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and you put it through a legal system, a courtroom, that evaluates the evidence, you have to admit that it happened.

But more than that, more than just the historical evidence we've got for it, it is a fulfillment of prophecies that were written centuries before it happened, and Jesus himself said to his disciples multiple times that he is going to rise from the dead.

And thirdly, another reason it's proof and we know is that it hasn't been able to be disproven for 2,000 years of skeptics trying, and let me tell you, people have tried to disprove the historical credence of the Bible, many of whom actually became Christians in their attempt because they realized that it's so reliable.

Lee Strobel, maybe you've read some of his books, he was an investigative journalist who was an atheist and who wanted to disprove Christianity, and in his process of investigating it, he became a Christian.

[14 : 55] William Ramsey was an archaeologist who spent his life and his career going and doing archaeological research in the Mediterranean basin to disprove the historical validity of the Bible.

He came back a Christian because he realized how reliable it is. You see, if you look into it, we have more than enough evidence. If you don't believe that, and if you haven't seen that evidence, then that's why we run courses like Discover Jesus.

Don't just take my word for it. Don't just believe it because somebody in the pulpit said it. Come and investigate the evidence for yourself. It is all here. It is all here. You've just got to open it up and look at it.

See for yourself. It's there. It's there. The evidence is there. The proof is there. But more importantly, if that's true, if Jesus actually rose from the dead, what does it mean for us?

What does it tell us? If the resurrection really happened? Well, it tells us, firstly, that there is such a thing as life beyond the grave. That it's real.

[16 : 00] It's not just a crutch that we like to think about because it makes us feel better about death. It's real. It really happened in our world. And not only is life after death real, but it confirms that God's plan all along was not for us to die.

God did not make us to live 80 painful years or maybe 90 if we're lucky and then just to die. That's not His plan. And the resurrection proves that's not His plan.

That there is something beyond death and that God's plan to fix this world and to do away with death and suffering, it's real. It's not just wishful thinking.

It's real. And the resurrection proves that. But also, what it proves, according to Paul here in our verse, is that judgment has to happen before the world will be fixed.

And not even death will let you escape that judgment because now we know God can raise humans from the dead and the Bible affirms that's exactly what He will do before the judgment.

[17 : 10] All humans who have ever lived will be raised again and face judgment. And God's proven that He can raise people. So we know that's true. And so we can't escape it.

Not even your... People often think that. People actually come to church, they hear about the judgment, and they go, Yeah, it's not going to happen to me. I'll probably die before that, right? And that's why they put it in the back of their minds.

That's why they don't think about it. But... Well, God's like, Sorry, you can't... That's not a way out. I'm just going to raise you. And you will face judgment. All people will.

Justice has to happen. Nobody can escape it. That's what the resurrection tells us. You can't escape it. And most shocking, when you face it, you can't plead ignorance.

You can't say, Well, I never knew. Listen to what Paul said, just the verse before, in Acts 17, verse 30. He says, Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent.

[18 : 24] Having overlooked the times of ignorance. That's interesting. God overlooked the times of ignorance. In other words, God didn't expect people to believe without sufficient evidence.

Okay? He doesn't expect you just to take blind leaps of faith. God never expects anyone just to take blind leaps of faith. He doesn't expect people to believe in things without sufficient evidence.

But now, He does expect you and everyone everywhere to believe because He has now given sufficient evidence. And so today, after Christ, to still claim that you can't know and many people do that, Oh, you know, well, who really knows for sure?

You say that. That religion says that. Can't really know for sure. To claim that? Now, after everything that's happened, to still claim you can't know is like claiming that you can't see anything in a dark room while the sun is blazing outside, you just refuse to open the curtains.

So you can't actually plead ignorance. The evidence is there. The Bible is clear. Read it. It fits together. It makes sense. Prophecies are fulfilled.

[19 : 39] The whole thing fits together as one unified story. And it's why Christianity took over the Roman Empire in three centuries. It's why the message of Jesus spread all across the world despite Christians being the most persecuted people because of their message because people don't want to hear it and yet it's still spread all across the world because it's so convincing.

You can't claim ignorance these days. And you can get the Bible on your phone. There's nothing stopping you from reading and looking at the evidence yourself.

You can't claim ignorance unless you are adamant to keep the curtains closed. Now, of course, you could try the strategy of, well, I've never heard it.

So how can I be held accountable for something I've never heard or never had explained to me? Well, you've blown that today, haven't you, by being here?

Sorry to say. You've heard it now. So what must you do about it? That's the only question that's left. What must we do about it? Now that we know God has set a day and He has provided proof that it's coming, the only question that's left to us is how do we prepare for that day?

[21 : 04] Well, that's the interesting part of what Paul says here. Because you would have expected him to say, well, you know, now that judgment is coming, you better live as good a life as you can.

You better just be really nice to people, you know, and help little old ladies across the street and recycle and give to charity and do all the good things you can before that day comes.

But he doesn't. He doesn't say, you know, now you've got to live a good life. Instead, he says this, verse 30, God now commands all people everywhere to repent.

Repent. You know what repent means? Literally. It means change your mind. That's literally what it means. Change your mind about Jesus.

That's what you've got to do. Everything else will follow that. First, you've got to change your mind about Jesus. Realize who He is. Realize that He is the man who is appointed by God.

[22 : 10] Realize that He is the one you are going to face and He is the only one who can save you from His own judgment because of what He did the first time He came when He died on the cross to take the sins of other people on Himself so that they can have their records clear in God's justice, in God's courtroom.

That's what Jesus did. That was His mission the first time He came was to die for the sins of His people. To save them from judgment so that they can escape. And you can escape too.

That's what He came for. So that you can escape that judgment that's coming but only if you repent. Only if you repent because your good deeds will never be enough. You might think you're a good person. Maybe you are a good person in the world's view but they will never be enough because you've already sinned.

And no amount of good deeds can make up for the sin. God's not going to sweep sin under the carpet and it's not going to be like the Muslims think it is where your good deeds need to outweigh your bad deeds and then you'll be okay.

No. I mean that doesn't work in a human courtroom. I mean you're not going to have a criminal who's arrested for drug dealing and for assault and then the judge is going to let them go because you know they gave to charity.

[23 : 26] Your good deeds don't outweigh bad deeds in justice in our justice let alone God's justice. And so the only way is not to try do good things it's to change your mind and it's to repent and it's to follow Jesus.

That of course is going to change how you live but that's how it starts repenting changing your mind about Jesus. Now you may think you've done that already.

I come to church I'm a Christian I've repented. Maybe you think you've repented already. But let me tell you something if you are still focused more on other things in your life than following Jesus no matter what you call yourself if there are things in your life that are more important than Jesus you still need to repent.

You still need to change your mind about who He is until He becomes the most important thing in your life because I promise you on that day He will be the most important thing in your life. And Paul's saying here God has commanded us to make sure He's the most important thing in our lives before that day.

Change your mind about Jesus until He is the most important thing in your life more than anything else. And notice this is not an invitation. Please consider Jesus.

[24 : 52] You know please come along if it suits you. No that's not what God says and it's not one option out of many. You know you should really try on Jesus try out Christianity if it works for you you really I think it'll work for you.

You know you often have invitations to the gospel like invitations to church you really should try it out. None of that here. No this is a command from your creator who made you and gave you life and will hold you accountable for the life He gave you and when He does and He says to you what did you do in response to that last sermon of 2024?

2024 what did you do on the 29th of December 2024 when I called you to repent through my word what did you do? How did you respond?

What are you going to say? How are you going to respond today? Well at the end of Paul's speech there were three responses did you notice?

I'll read them again and maybe as I do think which one are you? when they heard about the resurrection of the dead some began to ridicule him but others said we'd like to hear you more about this and so Paul left their presence however some people joined him and believed including Dionysius Janus the Areopagite a woman named Damaris and others with them.

[26 : 23] okay so you see the three responses there some scoffed ah it's just resurrection that's just a myth that's just fairy tales this is just a book of fairy tales and they didn't actually look into it they just wrote it off kept the curtains closed because they don't want to hear about the light okay they don't want to see it the second group were more prudent they said listen this is too big a claim to just throw away and ignore and it's too big to just leave church and forget about and carry on our lives we need to look into this further that was the second group and the third group of course were the ones who did what God commanded them that day and they followed Jesus they made him the most important priority in their life which are you you are one of the three either you are going to walk out here and go okay well that was interesting but I'm going to carry on my life I'm not going to look into it or you are the second group and you are going to say you know what this needs further

I need to put some time into this I need to look into this it's too big a claim to ignore or you are the third group and maybe you are feeling I need to make Jesus the most important thing in my life now well if you are number two or three you need to do something about that you can't just you can't just be passive you need to actively do something and the best thing to do is to come back to church and make church your priority in 2025 so that you come here and you sit under the teaching of the word don't miss it you know people people often say you know life is so busy I can come I'll try to come to church when I can but and then because there's there's other things so that they they have to skip church often but you know what one pastor put it well he said make church the reason you skip everything else maybe maybe that's what you need to do in 2025 make church the reason you skip everything else because this is more important than anything else you could be doing is to come and to hear about Jesus and to know what it means to follow him do that but also if you if you need to look at the evidence for the first time yourself if you're still asking questions and you don't know what to believe come to discover Jesus you can sign up on the connect app you can sign up with one of our stewards it's five five nights in 2025

I mean you're going to have 365 nights it's five out of them do you think that's maybe worth putting time aside for to prepare for the ultimate judgment to come that you will be at probably right it's probably worth putting aside five nights so you can discover this for yourself don't waste the opportunity don't keep the curtains closed make 2025 the year that you let the light in let me pray oh Lord God we are humbled when we come before your word and we hear what you command us and Lord we thank you that you didn't just leave us to suffer and die but you have a plan to restore things to fix this world to fix us to overcome death but Lord as we were reminded of this morning you also have a plan to judge this world and to judge all people and Lord help us to be ready for that by repenting and following

Jesus and making him the most important thing in our lives Lord you have provided evidence and we pray that you would help us not to ignore that but to listen to you our creator and to do what you command us because you command it for our good help us to do this in Jesus name Amen that you