

# **WHEN CHRIST VISITS THE EARTH, WHAT WILL HE FIND?**

**By Paul Penno Jr.  
January 11, 2014**

It's not easy moving through the world when you're terrified of electricity. "Donna," 45, a writer, knows that better than most. Get her in the vicinity of an appliance or a light switch or a thunderstorm, and she is overcome by a terror so blinding she can think of nothing but fleeing. That, of course, is not always possible, so over time, Donna has come up with other answers. When she opens the refrigerator door, rubber-soled shoes are a must. If a light bulb blows, she will tolerate the dark until someone else changes it for her. Clothes shopping is done only when necessary, lest static on garments send her running from the store. And swimming at night is absolutely out of the question, lest underwater lights electrocute her. When there's a possibility that lightning may strike, she simply shuts off everything in her house and sits alone in a darkened room until the danger passes. Donna is afflicted with electro-phobia.

Now if you think she's nuts and plagued with an irrational fear, then consider this. Every human being on the face of this earth is afflicted with a suppressed terror of meeting God. We are informed that at the coming of the Crucified One "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" (Revelation 6:15, 16).

Now what explains such odd human behavior when confronted with a Lamb? One day I visited a farm in which there were goats and rabbits, chickens and turkeys. The largest animals on the farm were the sheep. When the owner invited me to come into the pen with the sheep, they were the most docile and benign of all the critters on the farm.

The only explanation for our human fear of God is our repressed, intense, animosity toward God. Our first parents exhibited this fear after the Fall when God paid them a visit. They cringed in fear. Sin had so riddled them with guilt that they could not bear to be in the presence of a holy, loving God. They preferred death themselves or the elimination of God rather than coexistence with Him. They were extremely uncomfortable around God.

On a float-trip down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, our guide pointed out a secluded cabin in the remote wilderness where a recluse lived. We were warned not to approach the property because he would come out with guns ablazing. A hermit who is anti-social and can't stand being around people. That's the natural born state of humans with God.

In order for humans to survive with such psychological trauma, we have adapted to our environment by suppressing the consciousness of God's existence deep down inside. We have been deeply damaged with regard to our picture of God.

We see the combination of the horrors of evil all around us as manifestations of God's handiwork. We blame Him for everything bad that happens.

Is it any wonder that just thinking about a return visit of God to this earth gives us an advent attack? We are ill-prepared for the second coming of Jesus. And there are gospel preachers who unwittingly play to those human fears of His return visit.

I don't believe we can herald to the world a message of "good news" that will say, "Be ye reconciled to God!" while we represent Christ at His second coming as mowing down His helpless enemies with a heavenly machine gun. This is what the picture of Him as emitting a "lethal radiation" implies. I heard one prominent public evangelist tell his audience God will personally "devour the wicked."

As ministers, we have most certainly failed to convey to the world a true revelation of God's character. "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love." *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415. To present Christ in His second coming as having lost His mercy and His love is misrepresentation due to sad misunderstanding. The evangelist I refer to was ever so sincere. And he is no exception. If we will look at our normal, run-of-the-mill contemporary literature on the advent, this is the idea that gets across repeatedly.

I believe that what is involved is our presentation of the very gospel itself. Is it "good news"? Does it minister reconciliation? Not if it arouses fear and dread and plays upon an egocentric motivation.

Did the Lord harden Pharaoh's heart or did he harden it himself? The Bible actually says both. How you understand the problem depends entirely on the concept you have of the character of God. And this, I believe, is the key to our understanding Bible passages regarding the advent. If one has the legalistic, harsh, ungospel concept of God's character, he will quote and emphasize Scripture that seems on the surface to support an angry God view. He will believe that God personally devours the wicked, that God destroys His enemies Himself personally, even vindictively with a righteous glee. He will even quote the words of the enemies of God to support this view.

For example, he will quote "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:17 and say, "See there! Christ is mad when He comes the second time!" He won't notice that these are the words of Christ's enemies, whose basic sin has all their lives been that they have cherished this distorted view of His character. He will quote, "and He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God" Revelation 19:13, and imply that this "blood" is that of the lost, when in reality it is His own blood shed upon the cross. This is clear from the poignant disclosure of His sacrificial agony in verse 12, "His eyes were as a flame of fire" because His character is love. Love is the mightiest power in the universe: but when rejected, it brings the most fearful judgment possible. His name which no one knows but Him comes from the experience He went through on the cross, which no one, not

even the angels in heaven, can fully appreciate. The idea is that the Lamb's eyes are swollen with tears knowing the incomparable loss which the wicked are experiencing and He must give them up to their choice of rejecting Him their Saviour.

How will the lost feel when at last they actually see the face of Him whom they have persistently resisted and rejected? For those who have urged and supported the mark of the beast, just to look in His eyes will itself be torment "with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 14:9-11). The original language expresses the idea of their beholding in a flash the awful reality of their having rejected the One who suffered hell in order to save them. They can't stand it. The horror of their final realization of guilt tortures every cell of their souls.

The Lord never intended that the sight of His loving face should do that to anyone. While it is true that "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), it is only to sin that the revelation of His love is so destructive. Thus, if a human being persistently clings to any sin as a vine clings to a tree, the physical sight of Him who is love incarnate must also be instant destruction.

"No," says the legalist, "this is the blood of His enemies—now He's going to get even with them." They think they find proof for this in verse 15, the "sharp sword" that "goeth out of His mouth." But figurative language must be explained by literal: in John 12:47, 48, Jesus makes clear that the "sharp sword" "out of His mouth" is His truth which the wicked already know well enough. There is nothing figurative about John 12:47, 28—"the word that I

have spoken (not will speak), the same shall judge him in the last day." According to *Great Controversy*, when Christ comes He doesn't have a word to say in condemnation of the wicked. He has already spoken, throughout their lives, in tones of tender entreaty, and well they know and remember this. He plainly says the "word" "shall judge him." A single word of truth from His lips slays them—but that has nothing to do with "lethal radiation."

This is vital. To preach the love of God truly is not namby-pamby sentimentalism. It is hard reality. And it motivates truly all who choose to "believe." And terribly hardens all who disbelieve.

Who slams the door in the face of the wicked when probation closes? Does God do it of His own initiative? I don't see God pushing the door shut at all; it looks to me like He has been propping it open for many decades. I see the wicked closing that door themselves. "If a man withdraws himself from light and evidence, and yields to Satan's seducing arts, he himself draws the curtain of unbelief about him, so that light cannot be distinguished from darkness." Here is a clear statement: "God destroys no man. Every man who is destroyed will destroy himself." *Our High Calling*, p. 26. How desperately our youth need to get a clear picture of the character of God!

Sometimes it's represented that the initiative in salvation or damnation as being backwards from what it is. The idea is that if you are saved, it will be due to your own initiative—you have done the right thing to make your salvation possible; and if you are

lost, it will be due to God's initiative. He pulls the rope. He is the hangman.

There is confusion—sometimes it is one way, sometimes it is another. But the basic idea that gets across to the student, that God has already done His part and is standing back with His arms folded, waiting for us to do our part. His attitude is, "Take it or leave it," and by implication the sinner gets the idea that He could hardly care less if one does leave it. If God gets mad at the last, how does the sinner know He isn't mad right now beneath the surface? There is no atonement, no reconciliation, in such a concept. Who would want to be in heart-union with such a God?

Could this be one big reason why we are having so little evangelistic success, especially among thinking people? The winsome truths of the New Testament gospel enunciated are nearly lost!

An example of the confusion in the minds of good Christian people regarding God's character, is found in Romans 2:5, 8, and 4:15 and 5:9. All Paul said in each instance was "wrath," not specifying whose. "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Evangelists must extrapolate and insert the word "God's" wrath in each instance. This is due to a misconception of God's character.

Paul understood the gospel. He also understood clearly the process of unconscious self-destruction that the wicked experience. He saw that their "orge" or wrath, is against themselves, turned within, self-hatred. This is produced by "the law". All such self-

centered motivation produces despair and resentment by an eclipse of the sunlight of God's true love. Rejoice, says Paul; we are delivered from this "wrath" through the gospel of Christ, "being now justified by His blood." It is clear! Christ doesn't have to stand between a bloodthirsty, angry God and a terrified sinner, and shield him from a divine monster!

We seek to simply free the gospel from these confusing ideas that hinder its effectiveness, so that the beautiful "message of mercy (may) be given to the world . . . a revelation of His character of love." This will be the "last rays of merciful light." COL 4:15.

I believe in the reality of the "wrath of God." But where does it come in? As I see it in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, God is not wrathful because men have rebelled against Him nor even because they crucified His Son. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" is His attitude toward that sin of mankind. His wrath will blaze forth when at the last the wicked attempt to exterminate God's people! This is a willful, conscious re-crucifixion of Christ. The purpose of the second coming of Christ is that of a rescue operation, not a punishment expedition. The destruction of the wicked when they see His face is incidental.

The apostle says that "one [Christ] died for all." That is the same as saying that if He had not died for all, all would be dead. See 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15. Yet it seems that very few of His beneficiaries are willing to say "thank you." The percentage of those who make any acknowledgement of His

sacrifice is shrinking; we live in what is openly said to be a post-Christian age. Was His magnificent victory in vain? Will Satan take over the planet by default? The same Scriptures that predicted the coming of the Deliverer predicted the ultimate success of His mission: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” Isaiah 53:11. The apostle John heard “voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 11:15. According to the Bible, the human race today is standing on the verge of the final scenes of this unfolding divine drama.

God will not force a solution to the sin problem on us. He is the complete antithesis of a dictator who stuffs the ballot boxes in contrived elections. Unless the people freely recognize and confess the rightness of His sovereignty, God will not force His rule upon them.

So God’s patience must allow Satan time to unmask himself before humanity as he did before the universe 2,000 years ago. The human race must see what Heaven has already seen—the utter depravity of the great rebel’s character, and how utterly unnecessary is submission to his cruel reign.

The prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation chronicle the steady unfolding of that disclosure through all the centuries since Christ. Already, millions of thoughtful people all over the world have recognized the issues involved in this war behind all wars and heartily long for the time when Immanuel shall “reign for ever and ever.” The personal issue

must yet confront every human being: whom shall we acknowledge as Sovereign of our souls—Christ or Satan?

The good news that exposes the fallacy of Satan’s false accusations against God is steadily penetrating the consciousness of humanity everywhere. Christ predicted that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:14. John saw “the everlasting gospel” being heralded “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Revelation 14:6. True, not all will accept but all will be brought to a decision for or against.

The final battle in this great war is called Armageddon. See Revelation 16:13-18. Those who believe the good news will loyally line up on Christ’s side. They that are with him are “called, and chosen, and faithful.” Revelation 17:14. Those who join in rebellion to the bitter end will also be constrained to confess the justice of His victory. “Every creature . . . heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” Revelation 5:13.

Neither fear of punishment nor hope of reward will extort such a confession from the hearts of the wicked; conscience alone can force it from their souls. The final clarification of the issues in the great controversy will require “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.” Philippians 2:10, 11.

Two harvests will ripen side by side—“the harvest of the earth,” the good grain, those who are loyal to Christ; and “the clusters of the vine of the earth,” the grapes fully ripe for destruction. “And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.” Revelation 14:14-19. Those who believe the good news will beautifully reflect the image of the character of Christ—those who persist in rebellion will at last bear the unmistakable stamp of Satan’s character. Then the end can come.

The glorious victory won at the cross will at last be realized at the second coming of Christ.

The good news is that the time is near, so near that millions of Jesus’ thoughtful followers around the world believe it will be in our generation. Scripture does not predict a fearful nuclear war that will wipe out civilization, but it does predict a final Armageddon conflict that will resolve for all eternity the issues of the controversy between Christ and Satan. This is the war behind all wars, the issue behind all issues that looms in overwhelming significance behind the scenes.

This is no time for fear and mourning. While unbelieving “men’s hearts [are] failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth,” it’s time for God’s people to “look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” Luke 21:26-28.

But as “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse” in the last days, and as people in general “love darkness rather than light” (2 Tim. 3:13; John 3:19), the Holy Spirit of God is gradually driven away from the world. The result: Jesus said that Jerusalem’s horrendous desolation in 70 A.D. portrays what the world will become when the Holy Spirit is finally driven away (Matt. 24:1-34).

Modern man’s only reasonable hope is that this “enmity against God” must be healed by true conversion. Without full conversion, the individuals and the nations of this modern earth will surely act out to the full those dark passions of the multitude at the trial of Christ who cried, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him.” The enforcement of a “mark-of-the-beast” death decree will be an attempted re-crucifixion of Christ this time in the person of His saints. Think of it!—the resplendent KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS coming in the clouds of heaven, surprising His enemies in the very act! He will come to rescue those who are loyal to Him. Then the moment of truth will have come for all earth’s inhabitants.

The Book of Revelation pictures that final scene: These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev. 17:14).

For centuries, millions have endured—and continue to endure—wars, plagues (and now AIDS), crime, grinding poverty, and unending fear. No one can say that God has brought this awful load of suffering on the world man has done this! Can we, as temporary inhabitants of earth, blame the government of God when we crucify His Son,

expel Him, and say, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14).

Should not God be “democratic” and allow this planet to go on living in rebellion against His government and His universe? There is a ready answer. He has already done so—He still waits since the fall of man in Eden, hoping for repentance and reconciliation. He cannot and has never abandoned any “remnant” of His people who appreciate His character of love and respond accordingly. They are the ones who rightfully “inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

But now in this present day, God looks down upon the earth and sees as plainly as we do that man has nearly ruined this habitat. It is evident that selfishness and sin make human life almost intolerable in many nations on earth. All too soon, the terrible “seven last plagues” detailed in Revelation 16 will bring the ultimate culmination of human pain. But in the awful agony of those last plagues, God will compassionately grant to the finally hardened and impenitent their “desire.” Since “God is love” (1 John 4:8), He cannot permit an ever-suffering hell to mar the happiness of the new heavens and new earth that He will restore. To allow those who are rebelliously disloyal to Him to continue living in hopeless, hate-filled misery would be maintaining an endless torture. Who could live happily in His New Jerusalem with the agonies of lost souls continually splashed across their TV screens, like our nightly news? For everyone in the entire universe, “the second death” will be seen to be finally, a most welcome relief (Rev. 20:12).

The Lord tries again and again to save us. He is pleading in the most sublime, compassionate language, saying to every human soul, “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?’” (Ezek. 33:11). Love could not be more eloquent, or more persistent.

But Jesus promises that “the pure in heart . . . shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). They “shall dwell with the devouring fire, . . . with everlasting burnings” (Isa. 33:14). As Christ walked in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace with the three Hebrew youth who believed Him, so He will save those physically who have already permitted Him as Saviour to save them spiritually from sin.

In the final judgment every human being will see that God could not have been more fair, more patient, more compassionate than He has been. Rightly understood, the world has never heard any better Good News than the glorious second coming of Christ.

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:11-14, NIV).

What a bargain for “all men”! This godly grace has already come to you. The hardest thing we have to do is to say “No” to sinful temptation, but this grace actually teaches us to say it.

Believe the powerful Good News, and immediately the second coming becomes your “blessed hope.” Worldwide, “the grace of God” is working night and day “to purify for Himself a people that are His very own.” The nightly TV anchors may not tell us about this, but it is the most important News in the world, and it is Good.