



“My Lord Delayeth His Coming”^{1,2}

IN THE WORDS OF JESUS himself, the evil servant said in his heart, “My lord delayeth his coming” (Matthew 24:48; Luke 12:45). For many generations not only the evil servant but many devout followers of Jesus have wondered why his promised return has not yet occurred. Some imagine that God has abandoned this world. Others contend that he has already returned into their own hearts. Still others believe that God is waiting for all heretics to be eliminated. Why, then, his supposed absence?

God’s Presence as Jesus Christ

The reality is that God as Jesus Christ is already present. He himself declared, “. . . [L]o, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [age]” (Matthew 28:20). God is quietly, silently present with us, and he profoundly cares for us and for all Creation. The tragedy is that, despite God’s appearance as Jesus Christ over

2,000 years ago and his efforts to terminate the order of command, possession and power, his followers have largely determined to maintain that old order. God must be deeply disappointed. Nevertheless, “when the fulness of the time [is] come” (cf. Galatians 4:4), he will act to manifestly appear, reveal his loving presence, grant the gracious gifts of his covenantal attributes, and transform the universe and all humanity into responsive, self-emptying love for him and all others.

The question therefore remains, Why is God not manifestly present now to fulfill his new covenant and to transform all Creation? Why the supposed “delay” in his Parousaic (Second Coming) appearance? In considering this question, we freely confess with the apostle Paul that “now we see through a glass, darkly” and

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only “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet, as we ponder the passage of time, we reiterate that it is essential for a universe facing an eternity of infinite possibilities to first encounter the “negatives.”³ Because God has permitted these aberrations in order to teach the universe the consequences of negative actions,⁴ evil “shall not rise up the second time” (Nahum 1:9; cf. Zephaniah 3:15; Matthew 6:13). Moreover, because God as Jesus Christ inaugurated the new order when he encountered and overcame all “negatives” at his First Coming, the universal disclosure of that victory at the transformative Second Coming is certain. So it is that we confidently anticipate an eternally human future of “positives” — “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). The unfolding history of “negatives,” Jesus Christ’s inaugural victory over all “negatives,” ongoing gospel developments, and the emergence of reciprocal human relationality for both God and man — all assure us of an approaching Parousia.

Wise men, shepherds, and Simeon and Anna in the Temple, were representative witnesses who recognized Christ’s First Coming (Matthew 2:1, 2; Luke 2:8-21, 25-38). In anticipation of his promised Second Coming, let us now be representative witnesses who abandon the old order of command, possession and power and adopt God’s resurrectional gifts (Acts 1:8), as it is written:

... [A]t the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. — Deuteronomy 19:15.

... [I]n the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.
— Matthew 18:16.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.
— 2 Corinthians 13:1.

So let us acknowledge, accept and celebrate what God accomplished in his life, ministry, death and resurrection as Jesus Christ.

What God Accomplished as Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ accepted the burden of command, possession and power which he himself had initially and necessarily adopted in the creation of the universe and humanity.⁵

2. Jesus Christ brought this old order — the old covenant of command, possession and power — to death at Calvary. This was his atoning purpose from the beginning (Ephesians 1:4, 13-17; 2 Timothy 1:9).

3. By his resurrection Jesus Christ inaugurated the new order — the new covenant of self-emptying love. In this new order he irrevocably adopted humanity and graciously offers his loving attributes on condition that his gifts be shared with all others. Yet even Jesus’ closest followers have largely

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failed to understand and respond to his gracious purposes. Thus, for over two millennia world power structures have claimed to sustain God's original use of command, possession and power rather than abandon them and adopt God's resurrectional gifts.

Conclusion

At this time of world crisis, let us be representative witnesses to understand, receive and celebrate God's loving purposes. Soon the One who is always present will manifest his loving presence and fulfill his "eternal purpose" (Ephesians 3:11).

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. — Hebrews 10:35-37.

Endnotes

1. Matthew 24:48; Luke 12:45.
2. See "Note to *Outlook* Readers" (September 2011).
3. See "The Gospel for the Postmodern World III: The 'Other Side' of God," *Outlook* (January 2008); "The Gospel for the Postmodern World IV: The Gift of God," *Outlook* (February 2008); "The Gospel for the Postmodern World V: The Gift Abused," *Outlook* (March 2008).
4. See John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. 84.
5. See "The Divine Predicament," *Outlook* (January/February 2005).

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