

JUNE 2004—*Looking Forward*

Have you ever seriously reflected on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? In some churches today it is rarely, if ever, mentioned. What are we to make of this doctrine and its relevance to us today?

The church has always believed and taught that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, and C.S. Lewis stands in this great tradition, as well. He said, “If this is not an integral part of the faith once given to the saints, I do not know what is.”<sup>1</sup>

Christ’s return looms large in the New Testament and has been the subject of much speculation and writing over the centuries. Lewis summarizes Christ’s teaching about his return in this way: “(1) That he will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore we must always be ready for him.”<sup>2</sup>

Pondering these three truths promotes a profoundly healthy effect upon our souls. “The doctrine of the Second Coming has failed, so far as we are concerned, if it does not make us realize that at every moment of every year in our lives Donne’s question ‘What if this present were the world’s last night?’ is equally relevant.”<sup>3</sup> When we see the existential importance of this question, we are led on to realize that “Precisely because we cannot predict the moment, we must be ready at all moments.”<sup>4</sup>

An insight from William Law on a slightly different line helps explain why this is so valuable to us. Law writes, “If you attempt to talk with a dying man about sports or business, he is no longer interested. He now sees other things as more important. People who are dying recognize what we often forget, that we are standing on the brink of another world.”<sup>5</sup>

Pondering the Second Coming of Christ confronts us not only with our own mortality but also with the fact that we must one day give an account of our lives to Almighty God. This sobering realization can help free us from our preoccupation with ourselves, our love of this world, and our neglect of the eternal. Or to put it differently, it can help prepare us for the world to come. For these reasons, Lewis believed that the Second Coming of Christ ought “to be the more valued and made more frequently the subject of meditation.”<sup>6</sup>

But what if Jesus doesn’t return in our day? Isn’t our effort then in vain? Not at all. For two thousand years wise believers have been living in readiness for his return. And although he did not appear in their day, they eventually met him in death—without shame, dismay, or regret. May we live our lives in the same way.

*So you also must be ready,  
because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

Matthew 24:44 NIV

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1988), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> (Source unknown)

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, p. 109.