

The Second Coming, Doug Hayhoe, October 2022

Over the centuries, Christian leaders often thought Christ was returning in their time, but were disappointed. Nevertheless, his promise will one day be fulfilled.

Having done well in business, with his gifted analytical skills, Cousin Les retired early to concentrate on “the things of God.” He was a great help to young people like myself, in the 1960s and 1970s, encouraging us to live out our faith. He also had a great passion for Scripture, including its use of numbers and timelines. According to his calculations, it appeared to him that Christ might return in 1988. This would mean that the Antichrist (called the Beast in [Revelation 13:1](#)) would become world ruler a few years earlier, in 1984. Half in fun and half seriously, he concluded, “the Beast will roar in eighty-four!”

Cousin Les was not the first to predict this. In the 1500s, Martin Luther thought the Papacy was Antichrist. Several centuries later, people thought Napoleon was the Antichrist. Then Hitler was identified with the Antichrist. In fact, corrupt and brutal rulers over the centuries have shown characteristics of the Antichrist who is predicted to come just before Christ’s second return.

But something special was happening in the late 1970s. The European Economic Community, initially six nations in 1957, added three more in 1973, and a fourth in 1981, bringing the number to ten (Figure 1). This reminded many believers of the *ten-horned* Beast of Revelation ([Ch. 13:1](#); [17:3](#)). To further clinch it, the EEC treaty was first signed in Rome, a city known to be built on seven hills (Figure 2). And the book of Revelation says that the ten-horned beast had *seven heads*, which were identified as seven hills ([Revelation 17:9](#)). So, we can see how, in the 1970s, the EEC looked very much like the ten-horned, seven-headed Beast of Revelation. This coincidence didn’t last long, however, as many more countries soon joined. Cousin Les, for his part, lived to a ripe old age, long enough to see his prediction proven wrong, but still longing for Christ’s return!



Figure 1 [The ten nations in the EEC in 1981](#)

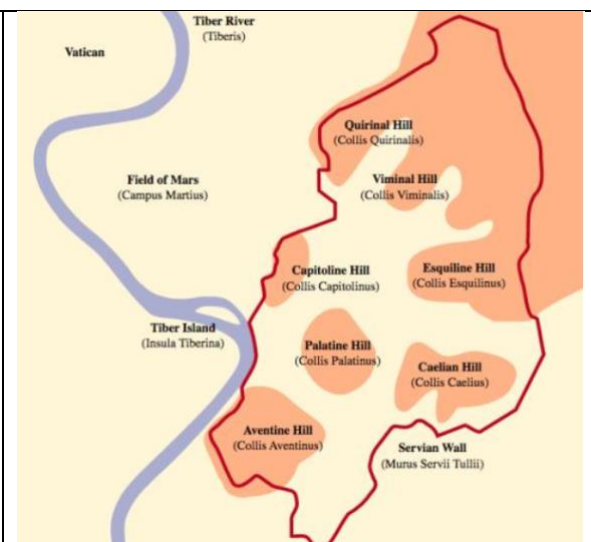


Figure 2 [The seven hills Rome is built on](#)

The New Testament refers to the Second Coming one hundred times, using words such as coming, appearance, presence, revelation, day, or hope. Many of these references emphasize its immediacy: he will come and not delay ([Hebrews 10:37](#)), his coming is near ([James 5:8](#)), he is coming soon ([Revelation 22:7](#)). The first Christians expected Christ's return in their lifetime. They had been warned, however, that "it was not for you to know the times or dates the Father had set by his own authority" ([Acts 1:7](#)). And Jesus himself had said, "No one knows about that day or hour" ([Matthew 24:36](#)). And, in fact, here we are two thousand years later, and Christ still hasn't returned. So, we must hold in tension the truths that although Christ's second coming may still be imminent – it could happen at any time – its exact date is also a secret.

Charles Spurgeon was an outstanding pastor in London, England, from 1854 to 1892, preaching weekly to 5000 people (Figure 3). His preaching, and his sermons that are still read today, were so welcomed by believers of many denominations that he became known as the "Prince of Preachers." His practical exhortations included many aspects of the Christian life, such as [actively engaging with the poor](#) in London. But he also focused on important Christian truths. Several years before he died, he preached a sermon titled, "[Watching for Christ's Coming](#)." It had three simple points: First, the Lord will come again. Second, the Lord calls us to watch for him. And, third, there is a reward for watchers. It's still worth reading today. In the rest of this essay, I'll give five points why we should not only *watch* but *long* for Christ's return.



Figure 3 [Charles Spurgeon 1885](#)

1. We long for Christ's return so that we will be transformed into His image. If you're still young, you may not appreciate this. But those of us in our senior years know only too well that our bodies are decaying. "The whole creation has been groaning," Paul wrote to the Romans, "and we ourselves ... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" ([Romans 8:22-23](#)). When he wrote to the Corinthians, who would have remembered how he supported himself in tent-making ([Acts 18:1-4](#)), Paul put it this way: "while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened ... [so] we wish to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" ([2 Corinthians 5:1-5](#)). When Christ returns, we get a new body like Christ's. "We eagerly await a Savior ... who will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" ([Philippians 3:20-21](#)). This is a great thing for sick or aging believers to look forward to! Actually, for all of us!

2. We long for Christ's return, to bring a final end to injustice. Those of us concerned about *social justice* are often frustrated to see how difficult it is to achieve. It's easy to get discouraged. "The whole creation groans, as in the pains of childbirth," Paul said to the Romans, who were suffering under the unrighteous reign of the Caesars ([Romans 8:22](#)). Is there social injustice? James warns us that "the Judge is standing at the door" ([James 5:9](#)). If you're concerned about this, reflect for a minute on how the apostle Paul was treated. As he went from town to town preaching the good news of Christ and distributing food to the poor ([Galatians 2:10](#)), he was continually opposed, persecuted, stoned almost to death, often going to bed without food and drink ([2 Corinthians 11](#)). No wonder at the end of his life, Paul was longing for "the crown of

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day” ([2 Timothy 4:8](#)).

3. We long for Christ’s return, so that we can be in his presence. Life wasn’t easy for the first Christians living under the constant presence of the pagan Roman administrators, always trying to get them to conform to the cult of Caesar. So, Paul reminded them that when Christ returned, they would enjoy *his presence* ([1 Thessalonians 2:19](#)). In fact, when he returns, “we will all be forever with the Lord” ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). What could be more natural than longing to be in the presence of the person you love? When I first fell in love with my wife, I longed to be in her presence. Every night, when I finished my classes at the university, I would drive to her house to spend a couple of hours there. When we are deeply in love with someone, we want to be with them.

4. We long for Christ’s return to see him receive the honour he deserves. Canadians were delighted when the Raptors won an NBA championship in 2019. Our city celebrated them with the largest parade ever (Figure 4). How much more should we want to honour the “champion of the ages” when he appears in his glory ([1 Corinthians 1:7](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:7](#); [1 Peter 1:7; 4:13](#))? We can’t wait to see every knee bow at the name of Jesus, and every tongue confess that He is Lord ([Philippians 2:10-11](#)). Should we not, then, “look forward to” and want to “speed his coming” ([2 Peter 3:12-13](#))?



Figure 4 [Raptors victory celebration in Toronto on June 17, 2019](#)

5. We long to see God’s final solution for our civilization. Christ’s return will bring history to an end. God will wrap everything up when “he judges the world with justice by the *man* he has appointed. He has already given proof of this, by raising him from the dead” ([Acts 17:31](#)). This

was Paul's argument, in his talk to the Greek philosophers in Athens. Christ's return will also bring unity to the disparate parts of human relationships, civilization, and culture. This was how Paul expressed it to the Ephesians: God's ultimate "purpose," which will be "put into effect *when the times reach their fulfillment*," is to "bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" ([Ephesians 1:10](#)).

The ultimate goal of physicists is a "unified field theory," one single equation that incorporates all force fields in the universe, including gravity, electromagnetism, quantum field theory, and the nuclear forces. But God already has his unified field theory, his sure plan of unifying everything under Christ ([Ephesians 1:10](#)). What a day that will be!



When I first heard the song "I can only imagine," by *Mercy Me*, I was startled but soon delighted at how creatively it expressed what it would be like to be in Christ's presence when he returns:

"Surrounded by your glory
What will my heart feel
Will I dance for you Jesus
Or in awe of You be still
Will I stand in your presence
To my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah
Will I be able to speak at all

I can only imagine I can only
imagine"

If you're not familiar with that song, you've probably shared another experience of mine. When concluding a worship service with the hymn, *How Great Thou Art*, the whole congregation spontaneously stands up as we start the final verse,

"When Christ shall come, With shouts of acclamation,
And take me home, What joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art!"

What a Day that will be! If only our eyes were more open to see what awaits us, and what awaits this poor world, would we not all be longing for his coming?