

Coming with the Clouds

Good Friday Communion Service

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Bible Verse: Revelation 1:7
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For our Communion meditation, I want to take you to the next text that we're facing in Revelation chapter 1, but before we go there, I want to lay a little bit of foundation for it in a couple of other parts of Scripture. One of the greatest promises that our Lord made to his people during his earthly ministry was the promise of his ultimate return in glory. In John chapter 14, he said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Christ said, as a matter of indicative fact, "I will come again. I will take you to myself. You will be where I am." And in the familiar Communion text that we read at every Communion service, Paul teaches us, he says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Christ makes this great promise of his return, Paul emphasizes it as he establishes the biblical foundation for the Lord's Table. It is fitting for us then to consider the coming of Christ as we come to the Table because Scripture links the two of them together.

And the text that we're going to look at is found in Revelation chapter 1, and I invite you to turn there if you're not already there; just looking at one verse here this evening, but it will more than occupy our time, in fact, we won't even exhaust it here tonight. But in Revelation chapter 1, we read this.

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

We find in this verse the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, as we will look at, we will get a taste of what the return of Christ will be like, and we'll set it in a context that reminds us quite well of the death of Christ on the cross, which we remember here this evening and I want to look first at the fulfillment of prophecy. And when you read this verse 7, we find that it is combining two Old Testament prophecies, and you wouldn't necessarily know that if you weren't familiar with it along the way. Look at verse 7 with me again. This is point number 1, the fulfillment of prophecy. We see, first of all, the word, "Behold. Behold, he is coming with the clouds," and that word is designed to raise

your attention, to get you to pay heed; it arouses a sense of pay attention to what is coming, it emphasizes what follows immediately in the language. Pay heed to what comes next. Not only do we have the promise of Christ from John 14 and in other places of Scripture, this verse starts out with the first of 26 different times that the word "Behold" appears in the book of Revelation and so we're immediately commanded to grasp and to rivet our attention on what he is about to say, and so behold what we are about to see. What John does here, what the Apostle John does here, is he draws upon Old Testament prophecy in this book. If you will go back to the book of Daniel chapter 7, Daniel chapter 7, just after the book of Ezekiel. In this famous prophecy in verses 13 and 14, we read this about the coming Son of Man. Daniel chapter 7 verse 13, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." Daniel wrote that some 500 years before the time of Christ, the first coming of Christ, and in that prophecy, he is looking forward to what is a still future time to us today when Christ will return to establish a kingdom and Revelation builds on that prophecy. Revelation in the subsequent 20-some chapters tells us what that return of Christ is going to be like. It is looking forward to events that were future at the time of Daniel, were future at the time of the first coming of Christ, which are future to us today. We find in the book of Revelation an expectation and an explanation and a preview of what that ultimate coming of Christ will be like.

And then in the book of Zechariah, if you turn to the right in your Old Testament after Daniel and before the book of Matthew, you will come eventually to the book of Zechariah and in Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10, we read this about a still future time to us aspect of the coming of Christ, and even the passage that Nathaniel read from Isaiah 53 is giving us a sense of what will be said at the second coming of Christ when the Jews repent and finally embrace their Messiah. But in Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10 we read this, "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn." Zechariah here looking forward to a future time, still future to us, when Christ will return, the Spirit will be poured out upon Jews and they will repent finally and embrace their Messiah when they see him coming. And they will know that it's Christ because they will see him, the one who was pierced on their behalf. His wounds will still be visible at his return. And so at a still future time to us, national Israel will turn to Christ and Revelation builds on that prophecy from Zechariah as well.

Go back now to chapter 1 verse 7 and you'll see these things combined from Daniel and from Zechariah. We read in Revelation 1 verse 7, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds," there's an aspect from Daniel, "and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him," pierced him from Zechariah, "and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen." And yet Daniel and Zechariah are not all. Jesus Christ himself joined these things together in his earthly ministry, in his teaching. In Matthew chapter 24, verse 30,

you don't need to turn there but in Matthew chapter 24, we'll read verse 29 and 30, we read this, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Let me just read that last half of verse 30 again, "they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Scripture says that every eye will see him. In Philippians, perhaps a little bit more familiar to us, we read that "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." There will be a complete physical manifestation of Christ and there will be a complete physical response by everyone who has ever lived on the face of the earth when Jesus Christ is displayed with power and with great glory.

And so before Revelation was ever written, Daniel spoke of this time, Zechariah spoke of this time, and now Christ, we see in his earthly ministry, spoke of this time when he would be coming back. He will return. And this doctrine of the bodily return of Christ is absolutely essential to biblical Christianity and if I may say, the Scriptures talk about in 2 Peter chapter 3 how scoffers will mock this doctrine, say, "Where is the promise of his coming? Everything continues on as it always has." But we as biblical Christians, as Bible-believing Christians, as those redeemed by the blood of Christ, we gladly and boldly and unashamedly proclaim that all of human history is moving toward the fulfillment of these prophecies. It is the event to which all human history will find its culmination and no one will miss it when it comes, and more specifically, more accurately, when he comes; Jesus Christ coming bodily, coming personally, returning to earth is what Scripture teaches us to expect.

So we see the fulfillment of prophecy in what we read here in Revelation chapter 1 verse 7, and then our second point for this evening, I just want to consider this coming of Christ. This coming of Christ and let's just talk for a moment about the word "coming" and think about that for just a moment because we're so used to that word that we kind of just assume we know what it means, but I want you to think about it for just a moment, what the word "come" signifies in this context. Let's think about it this way. Picture a mom on a porch someplace who's calling to her son to come to dinner, let's say. He's out in the yard, you know, away from her, and she says, "Come here, supper is ready." There's something a little linguistically profound about that because what she is saying in so many words and in such a common word, what she's saying with that common word "come," she's saying, "Move yourself from that place that is distant from me and reposition yourself so that you are closer to me, relocate from that distant spot to a position that is closer to me. I want you to come from there to here. I want you to move yourself from where you are at to someplace here by me." To come, the verb "come" then, means that you move from a place where this is really, really, really basic, the verb "come" means that someone moves from a place that is considered or thought about as someplace there in order to come to a place, to arrive to a place, to move to a place that is here. You move from there to here when you come someplace.

Now, that is the sense in which we should think about the return of Christ. Think about it this way, at the ascension of Christ in Acts chapter 1 when he rose bodily into heaven and he went away from earth up into heaven and was received in a cloud, he went there, right? He went there, heaven, someplace away from where we are and now, when we talk about the second coming of Christ, what we're saying is that he will move from there to here. He will move from heaven away there where he is now, and he will come here where we are on earth. That's the idea of to come. Jesus Christ will go from there in heaven to here on earth by the power that he has to subject all things to himself.

Now listen, beloved, these are things that we know only by the revelation of God. These are not things that you can know and observe and figure out by looking at nature. These are not things that are embedded in the mind of man like a conscience is or something like this. We don't know this from reading anything about secular sources or history or anything like that. We know about this future coming of Christ simply because God has revealed it. He has made it known throughout the multitude of centuries where his servants, the prophets, have been teaching through the teaching of Christ and through this book of Revelation. We cannot figure this out on our own. We know this by the revelation of God and we accept it and receive it and affirm it and proclaim it and defend it in faith in things which are unseen.

Now, you know, I think that much of the professing church is probably embarrassed by this teaching; you don't hear a whole lot about it necessarily, certainly from liberal pulpits or from seeker-sensitive pulpits, you know, because everybody's focused on the here and now. That's a grave mistake to ignore, neglect, and be ashamed of the coming of Christ. It is woven throughout all of Scripture. You cannot believe the Bible and avoid or ignore this doctrine. Not only that, beloved, we need to remember or let me just remind you of the most basic of things. There are 66 books in the Bible, 66 and no more, and Revelation is book number 66. It is part of the inspired Scripture, which we believe God gave by Revelation through his servants, the apostles and the prophets. We believe that the Scriptures are inerrant. We believe that Revelation is part of that. And so we receive the totality of Scripture, and that includes the book of Revelation. We're not ashamed of that whatsoever. Now, with that very broad perspective, that very broad context, understand this, that the second coming of Christ is a primary theme, if not the primary theme in the entire book of Revelation. Scripture ends on this climactic fireworks display of the return of Jesus Christ and I want to show you this. I left out so much just to show you the beginning and the end of Revelation on this theme.

Look up a few verses at Revelation chapter 1 verse 4. Revelation chapter 1 verse 4, and we're just looking at the theme of the second coming in the book of Revelation itself, so that in verse 4 we read, "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come." He is to come. He will go from there to here. He will move from there to here, from heaven to earth. He will move and he will come. Revelation opens with this and we see it again in verse 8, which we'll look at in a week from Sunday, Lord willing. We read in verse 8, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" And if you wanted to take time between now and Sunday morning to just read through Revelation and look for all the different ways

and times that it expresses the coming of Christ, you would find it woven throughout the entire book. Revelation chapter 19, speaking of the triumphant coming of Christ as a warrior to conquer the nations of mankind at that time, but we'll leave that for another time. Just go to Revelation 22 for now. Revelation chapter 22 and from verse 6 to verse 20, in the last section of the last chapter of the last book of the entire Bible, there is this accelerating expectation of the return of Christ that becomes the climax of all of Scripture. If you were with us through our teaching of the Psalms, we saw how in Psalm 150, there was this climactic hallelujah, praise the Lord, that closed all of the Psalter, and the 150 Psalms were building to a great climax of praising God. Well, in like manner, all of the Bible and the book of Revelation is moving to this great climax of the return of Christ.

So look at verse 6 with me. I think this is very exciting to see, just to understand how Scripture ties all of this together and what the end point of it all is. The end point is not about you and me. The end point is not about our daily lives or even our individual salvation. It is about a climactic return of Christ that will be the culmination of history and having revealed the coming eternal state in chapters 21 and up to this point in 22, now in verse 6 we read this, "And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.'" Now watch this in these next three verses that I'm going to read to you. Verse 7, Jesus is speaking, "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." In verse 12 you see him saying it again, "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done." And then in verse 20, practically the last verse of the entire 66 books of the Bible, the next to the last verse of 1,189 chapters in Scripture, we read this, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Again and again and again, at the beginning and at the end of the book of Revelation, this emphasis is placed on the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, beloved, there's a couple of different ways to think about this in terms of the way that we respond to it. First of all, this book that almost everyone in this room would say that they believe and trust and receive by faith, this book in Scripture opens and closes with the return of Christ and so our faith is wrapped around that event in an unavoidable manner. Now, beyond that, beloved, and just thinking about the way that we live our lives, the way that we should live our lives, and probably none of us do this in the manner that we should because we're so preoccupied with family and jobs and, you know, all of the things that pertain to daily life, but Scripture would teach us to spend our time on earth in anticipation of that great coming event when Christ goes from there in heaven down to here on earth. Our time on earth should be spent in anticipation of that event, living in light of that, having that as our great hope of what we look forward to and letting that inform the perspective and the priorities and the affections that we bring to life here on earth. If Christ is going to come, if Christ is going to put an end to world history, then everything that we do and live and think should factor that into our worldview, into our whole perspective of life. To ignore the return of Christ, to neglect it, is to leave out the most salient, the most important aspect of everything in human history.

This is the goal. This is the grand climax of it all. Scripture would have us live in light of that.

Now, with those things said, having seen the fulfillment of prophecy, seeing the centrality of the coming of Christ in the book of Revelation, let's go on and consider point number three here this evening, the glory of Christ. The glory of Christ, and for that, let's just go back to Revelation chapter 1, verse 7 for a moment. Revelation chapter 1, verse 7 we read, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds." He is coming with the clouds and if you're taking notes, tonight's message is titled, "Coming with the Clouds," out of that opening sentence there. Let's think about it this way. I just want to focus in the remainder of our time on the significance that Scripture says he's coming with the clouds. It's far more brilliant and far more descriptive than you might think. Consider the ascension of Christ. In fact, let's just turn to the book of Acts chapter 1. I can't remember if I had you turn there earlier or not, but we'll do it again. Acts chapter 1 verse 9. After his crucifixion, after his resurrection, the time came for Jesus to leave earth, to depart from here to there. From heaven's perspective, it would be a coming of Christ, right? From heaven's perspective, thinking about it from heaven, he's going from there on earth up to here in heaven, but our perspective is he was leaving in his ascension, he was leaving earth to go up there. Now in verse 9, we read this, "when [Jesus] had said these things, as [his disciples] were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'" Now listen, beloved, when Christ ascended bodily from earth into heaven, that was a supernatural event, that was a miraculous event that for a man to ascend on his own power from earth into the skies and be received into the heavens. And so when Scripture says that he will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven, it's not simply a manner of how Christ will be delivered in return to earth, it's telling us that it will be a supernatural coming. This will be a climactic event to everything and so we want to appreciate the significance of the fact that Scripture says that he is coming with the clouds. He's coming with the clouds.

Now, what I'm about to say, I intend to be clarifying and elucidating for Scripture, but also there's a bit of a sense of humor in what I'm about to say in order to turn us away, to loose us from our carnal way of thinking and our earthbound thinking so that we're in a position to embrace the fullness of what it means that he's coming with the clouds. Beloved, understand this, when Scripture says that Jesus is coming with the clouds, it's not giving us a weather forecast for what that day is going to be like. It's not telling us that it's going to be overcast on that day or it will only be partly sunny and there will be clouds, there will be white puffy clouds in the sky when Jesus returns. That's entirely the wrong way to think about it, to just think about it in what we associate clouds and weather like on a day-to-day basis. You know, we're used to that. When Jesus comes with the clouds, it's going to be something so otherworldly, so supernatural, so completely different than anything that we have ever experienced that we will recognize something unique, supernatural happening when that day comes just as the disciples in his ascension said, "We've never seen anything like this ever before." No wonder, you know, even

though the angels rebuked them and said, "Why are you standing there staring," you know, I have to admit, I would have been standing there staring also. "Wow, I have never seen anything like that!" Totally captivating. And when Christ comes to every eye, it's going to be like that. It is going to be utterly captivating to them.

Now listen, so if it's not a weather forecast saying, well, it's going to be partly cloudy that day, what is it? What is this saying? And this is to me, utterly thrilling. What we're going to do, we're going to take some time to trace a theme through Scripture and what we're going to find is this, that in Scripture, these references to clouds indicate the clouds are a manifestation of the presence and the glory of God himself. The clouds manifest the presence and the glory of God. When Christ returns, it will be a manifestation of the supernatural presence and glory of God and when you trace this through Scripture, it is utterly undeniable that that is what's happening. And so we're going to go through a half dozen passages rather quickly here to just show you this over the course of the progress of biblical revelation and biblical history.

So I want you to turn back to Exodus, the book of Exodus chapter 13. Exodus chapter 13, we'll look at three texts just in the book of Exodus alone. Exodus chapter 13. When God led the nation of Israel through the wilderness, by day he did so by a pillar of cloud. Exodus chapter 13, beginning in verse 21 we read, "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people." God, as he was delivering the people from Egypt, as he was leading them through the wilderness, he manifested his presence by a pillar of cloud. His glory was expressed, his glory was made visible by this pillar of cloud that was in the midst of the people Israel.

Look at chapter 16, Exodus chapter 16 in verse 9. The people had been grumbling about the food that they wanted, and we read in Exodus chapter 16 verse 9, "Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, "Come near before the LORD,"' there's that word "come" again. You're over there, move from there to here. Come here. Get closer. "Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling." Verse 10, "And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud." God told them to draw near and he made his presence known. God, who is an invisible spirit, God made his presence known. He manifested his presence and his glory in a cloud to the people that they could see.

Now, if you go to Exodus chapter 40, a key time in the history of Israel, at the dedication of the tabernacle, the tabernacle being the temporary movable tent-like structure that was used as the meeting place of God until they arrived in Jerusalem and ultimately built a temple centuries later. Look at this in Exodus chapter 40 verse 34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was

not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys." So in this crucial time of transition from Egypt into the Promised Land, the presence of God was manifested as you see the cloud emphasized repeatedly in those five verses. The cloud filled the tabernacle with glory. The cloud led them during the day. Everything about the presence and the glory of God was expressed in the presence of that supernatural cloud.

Now, that's not all. That's not the only place that we see this. If you'll turn to the book of 1 Kings, in 1 Kings chapter 8 at the dedication of the temple by Solomon. 1 Kings chapter 8. So in the meeting place of the tabernacle, the cloud appeared and filled it with the glory of God. Now we're going to see in the temple, the permanent structure, permanent for a number of centuries anyway, the permanent structure of the temple which would there be the meeting place of God, in 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 10 and 11 we read this, "And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD." This cloud that manifested, that revealed, that unveiled, so to speak, the presence of God himself was so supernatural, was so powerful that the priests had to leave because they could not stand in the presence of that cloud. This was no ordinary cumulonimbus or whatever those different forms of clouds are, been a long time since I studied those things. This was no puffy white piece of cotton floating around. This was something that was overwhelming to those that were exposed to it.

Now, in like manner, go to Matthew chapter 17. Matthew chapter 17. We see the glory revealed in the cloud in the wilderness. We see it in the tabernacle. We see it in the temple. We see it also in the transfiguration. In the transfiguration. Matthew chapter 17 verse 1, "after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him," the law and the prophets represented by the two of them. "And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when, behold," pay attention, mark this and don't let this fact escape your understanding, "behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified." The cloud that shrouded the whole event there was something that was terrifying to the disciples. They fell on their faces in light of it. The cloud at this supernatural manifestation of the glory of Christ in a manifestation far brighter than the sun, infinitely more significant than a solar eclipse in a few days from now in our general area, so overwhelming that you can't look at the sun with natural eyes and what we're seeing is something greater than that and a cloud involved in the manifestation and the display of the glory of Christ in a manner that is utterly terrifying and they fell on their faces and Christ graciously says, "Get up and fear not," but for our purposes, the cloud and supernatural glory, the cloud and a supernatural, fearsome, remarkable, unique display of the presence of God.

We see this throughout biblical history and as I've said to you before, when you read the book of Revelation, I don't think enough people appreciate and understand this, the book of Revelation assumes that you know your Bible. It assumes that you have read Scripture and become familiar with the great themes that are woven from Genesis through up until Revelation is written. It assumes that you know this so that one or two words can be a shorthand reference for a full biblical theme as we see right here. Jesus is coming with the clouds, and we're not to be carnal people that associate this with our day-to-day view of the sky, we're to be biblical, spiritual thinkers that say, "This is speaking about the glory of God in an unmistakable, spectacular, supernatural way."

And if that wasn't enough to persuade you of the significance of the return of Christ with the cloud, turn to the book of Titus in your New Testament, chapter 2. The return of Christ will be a manifestation of the power and the infinite supernatural glory of God. We read in Titus chapter 2, beginning in verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age," which he's about to contrast with the next coming event which is still future, verse 13, "waiting for our blessed hope." What is our blessed hope? What is the certain coming event upon which we rest all of our aspirations? "The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Our blessed hope is the coming of Christ and that coming of Christ will be an unveiling, it will be an appearing of his glory in a supernatural way.

And so, beloved, in all of these instances, going from the tabernacle to the transfiguration at all points in between, we have the pattern of biblical history that tells us the cloud is manifesting. I'm not talking about our weather. In association with God, clouds are both revealing the presence of God and also in a sense, veiling it. No man can look on God and live, Scripture tells us, and so the supernatural clouds tell us that God is here, Christ is here in supernatural fashion in a way that goes beyond his presence with us now here, you know, two or three gathered together, there I am in their midst but it's invisible. The fullness of his glory isn't made known in the same way that his return will make it known. Think about it in another way and just in terms of what our expectations are. One of the things that I love about living in the Midwest are the strong thunderstorms that we get from time to time, and another thing that I love about the Midwest is that people in the Midwest love the thunderstorms and so people go out on their porches. You know this. Probably many of you do this. When there's a storm, a really serious storm rolling in, I love to get out there and watch it. I like to see those dark clouds just starting to expand and they start to roll and you hear the distant thunder ever stepping closer to you. Flashes of lightning and the boom of the thunder and just the overwhelming power that is revealed just in a Midwestern thunderstorm and that's entrancing to me and has been since I was a kid. We know something by the place in which we live, we know something about how clouds reveal and manifest power that is greater than we are, power that literally can make the earth shake. And we know that just in natural experience. Well, beloved, think then with me of what we've seen in clouds from Scripture, blinding light at the transfiguration, an overwhelming presence such that the priests had to leave the temple because they couldn't bear to be with the cloud of glory, and we get a tiny taste of

what's to come at the return of Christ when he comes with clouds. In a far greater way than the most violent thunderstorm any of us have ever seen, in a far greater and infinitely greater way, supernatural clouds will accent this return of Christ. Somehow the presence of clouds, great, mighty, powerful, frightening, threatening clouds will manifest the coming of Christ. They will accompany the coming of Christ. They will heighten the sense of glory at his return. They will magnify the display of his glory. He's coming with the clouds. You know, God help us that we never read that verse in the same way again. God help us to see that when it speaks of Christ coming with the clouds, this will be an occasion unlike any other. This will be an occasion of fear and worship and glory to Christ unlike any other.

Now, beloved, as we prepare for the Table here, the rest of the book of Revelation unfolds for us the details of what that will be like. It describes the fullness of the glory of the second coming. But understand something really crucial, don't miss something of great infinite importance. The second coming, the future coming of Christ, will be in glory and it will be triumphant, all right? The glory of the second coming will be a triumphant glory but, understand this and go back to Revelation 1, going back to Revelation chapter 1 and we tie immensely, infinitely important biblical themes together here. The glory of the second coming will be triumphant, but that second coming is predicated on the glory of the first coming, which was a different kind of glory altogether. In the second coming, glory, power, manifestation, every eye will see Christ unmistakably a victorious warrior as he returns, wonderful to contemplate. But this second coming occurs only after his first coming thousands of years earlier, when he came in a different kind of glory, when he came in humility, when he suffered at the cross. When we see the glory in the first coming, he manifests his glory in humility and in humiliation and in apparent defeat at the cross, and we see the glory of Christ in his self-sacrifice as he lays himself down for the sins of his people. The second coming assumes and incorporates that, and I'll show you that from Scripture. I'm not just making this up. I'm not smart enough to make something like that up.

We're in verse 7, right, Revelation chapter 1 verse 7. What has just gone before us in what we have studied in recent days from this pulpit? Verse 4, "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us," and here it is, my friends, tonight, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood." This crucified and risen Christ loves us and has made his glory known in his first coming and in verse 7, our verse for tonight, "he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." He loves us, he freed us, he loosed us, he set us loose from our sins by his blood. He was pierced for our transgressions. As Scripture is describing his coming with the clouds, it links it inextricably with his first coming when he laid down his life on the cross. It would be one thing, it would be one thing to glorify Christ throughout all of eternity if all that we had was his first coming and his penal substitutionary atonement for us on the cross. That would be enough to glorify him forever that in love and humility and voluntary self-sacrifice he took on the wrath of God on our behalf in love because he loves us to deliver us from our sins What a great Savior! What a wonderful King and

Lord is Jesus as measured by the unspeakable self-sacrifice in his first coming. That would be enough. Look at it the other way. If all that we had to glorify Christ was his second coming, that this worldwide universal event that everyone will see, that no one will be able to ignore or deny when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, when he comes in a supernatural manifestation associated with a cloud of glory, overwhelming, powerful, booming, majestic glory, and we knew him only on that basis, our hearts would be humbled and broken before him by the manifestation of that of such exquisite, eternal, infinite greatness.

Beloved, don't you see? Don't you see that when you join the two of those together, that all we can really do is just fall silent before him? That while we don't physically leave the presence like the priest did at the manifestation of the glory of God, we do send out our pride, say, "Leave, get, beat it." We leave behind, we send away our foolish words and our worldly thoughts and our earthly affections because we realize that we are in the presence of one who is magnified before us through the word, by the Spirit, by his person, by his work, we're lost in wonder, love, and praise. In his first coming, Jesus Christ came as a suffering servant for his people. In his second coming, he comes from there to here as a conquering King. The perfect servant, the perfect King joined in one person. Son of God, Son of man, joined in one person. All of these things should cause us to fear Christ, to glorify Christ, to come to this Table with a repentant spirit, a humbled spirit, because here at this Table, we look back at the first coming and we remember the one who was pierced through for our transgressions. Here at this Table, we remember him who made our peace with a holy God through his blood. We look back and remember that shed blood this evening. Suffering servant, conquering King. We look back and remember as he instructed us to do, and yet, at the same time, based on the explicit instructions of Scripture to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, we realize that there's more to this. This isn't simply a past remembrance, this is a promise of more to come for the people of God.

Every time we take Communion, this is true, what I'm about to say, but tonight, with what we've seen from God's word, we realize that we stand on holy ground here. We stand on holy ground between the first coming as we take the elements and remember his body and blood shed on our behalf, we stand between that past event and the second coming, still future. We remember the cross and the glory of the cross. One day we will see the glory in a different way in clouds of glory when the fullness of salvation is at hand. Praise be to God. Praise be to Christ. What a privilege to be on the receiving end of his grace and mercy and the object of his saving work on our behalf. Amen.

As the men come to serve the elements to us, men, please come, bow with me in a word of prayer and let me just give you a reminder, as we like to do at Communion.

Father, we are so in awe of Jesus Christ. How could it be that the conquering King would be the one who was the sacrifice for our sins, and that he did that on his own initiative? O Christ, we honor you, we glorify you, we praise your holy name and we thank you for paying the price of our redemption and we remember that at the Table here this evening. Help us to receive these elements in a worthy way.

To those of you in the room, I just say this briefly, if you are a repentant Christian, we invite you to share in the elements of this Table. If you are not a Christian or if you are not repentant, we ask you to let the elements pass and not slander the glory of Christ by pretending to partake in that which remembers him while you're living in rebellion to him.

Father, bless our singing. Make Christ ever real to us by faith in these moments of the elements just ahead.

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