

**Sermon File # 1109**

**Sermon Title: *I Believe Jesus Ascended and Is Coming Again* (sixth in a series on the Apostles' Creed)**

**Scripture Text: Revelation 19:11-21**

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**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

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## ***I Believe Jesus Ascended and Is Coming Again***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to Revelation 19:11-21, as we continue our series on the Apostles' Creed. We have considered the first five statements this summer:

- 1) *I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*
- 2) *I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,*
- 3) *who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,*
- 4) *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.*
- 5) *On the third day he rose again;* (Modern English Version)

Today we think together about the sixth assertion that says we believe that Jesus "ascended into heaven...is seated at the right hand of the Father, and...will come again to judge the living and the dead."

In the closing chapters of the last book in the Bible, we are looking at the climax of human, earthly history and the consummation of the Kingdom of God. The Book Of Revelation is apocalyptic writing, highly symbolic literature that conveyed God's truth about his sovereignty over history and his final

conclusion of earthly history with his judgment of unbelievers and his fulfilled salvation for believers at Christ's return.

The Second Coming of Christ is also prophesied in the introduction to Revelation (Chapter 1, verse 7), as well as in the four Gospels and the General Epistles. This event is referred to in the New Testament with the Greek word, *Parousia*, meaning literally "*presence, coming, or advent*" (*Arndt & Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*).

The Jews of the Old Covenant looked for the Day of the Lord as the first and the only appearing of the Messiah. They failed to see the need for a suffering servant, as portrayed by Isaiah. Instead, they looked to the Messiah to come with judgment upon their enemies, and the immediate inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth. For this reason, even the disciples of Jesus had difficulty understanding the necessity of suffering and death of their leader, whom they trusted was the Messiah. Even until the moment of Jesus' ascension they expected an immediate restoration of an apparent kingdom (Acts 1:6).

Those of us in the New Covenant know that Jesus fulfilled in his first coming his work of atonement, his finished his work of providing for our forgiveness of sin and becoming his redeemed children. After the cross and his resurrection, however, Jesus ascended/returned to heaven and then, through the descent of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost, has been at work to call his chosen people, his church, to himself. Christ also, through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, is continuing his proclamation of the Good News as his church obeys his Great Commission. This church age is the parenthesis of time that the New Testament calls "the last days."

Revelation tells us that God has been sovereignly at work in these last days, and that he is bringing this church age, Great Commission period to a close. This morning our text focuses on that close, with the glorious and yet terrible Second Coming of Christ. The Day of the Lord will be a day of both final salvation for believers and judgment of unbelievers, as stated in the Creed.

Follow as I read **Revelation 19:11-21**

To some extent every generation since the ascension of Christ Jesus has participated in the last days. And yet it is not inappropriate for us to live in wondrous expectation of the return of Christ. World events, particularly in the Middle East and in Israel, and the rapid growth of the gospel and even the heightened persecution of the worldwide church have reinforced my concern and quickened my interest. Believers are always to live in the expectation of the Coming of Christ and with a sense of the urgency, brevity and uncertainty of life. But these days I think we all want a fresh understanding of the promised return of the Lord Jesus. It seems that every successive generation has speculated that the coming of the Lord might be in their day, and yet we are not to speculate about the timetable, which Jesus himself said is futile (Matthew 24:36). Rather we are to live in the awareness of the

immanence of our Lord's return, either by his glorious return or of our being with him by means of our "home going," i.e., our death.

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is not meant to be the purview of a few so-called experts, who promulgate in popular fiction their theories about the sensational details of the end times. The Coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory is an important teaching meant to be understood and believed by all the church, and intended for our warning and encouragement. This is undoubtedly the way the churches in Asia Minor, which were the first to receive this Revelation, understood this teaching about the Second Coming of Christ.

If frequency of instruction is any measure of importance, we have reason to believe the Second Coming of Christ is one of the most important teachings in the Bible. Compare that the New Birth is mentioned nine times, baptism twenty times, repentance seventy, and yet the Second Coming is mentioned over three hundred times in the New Testament. Of course, the doctrine of salvation includes a lot more concepts than the New Birth, and frequency of reference is not an accurate way to determine relative importance of biblical doctrines. In any case, however, the fact should be established that God wants his people to understand Jesus Christ is coming again, and his coming demands readiness on our part, as well as encourages us to hope and persevere.

Our text today tells us that Jesus Christ is coming again, and when he comes this second time he will come, first of all, as...

### **A victorious Savior**

Once again, John is given a worship vision of heaven opened before him (see also Revelation 4:1), and he sees...

#### *A glorious Savior*

Jesus is pictured as a rider on a white horse, a victorious warrior with the name Faithful and True. Think how this vision of a triumphant Christ encouraged the persecuted yet worshiping church of the first century! The early church confessed together in this earliest creed, that Jesus "ascended into heaven...is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead." They remembered his ascension to heaven as the crucified and risen Lord. Because he had completed his mission to suffer and die to accomplish our salvation, he could now return to the right hand of the Father. But he would not be uninvolved with us. He has been reigning in the heavenly realms, giving us his Spirit and grace and in God's perfect, predetermined time, he will return as the Faithful and True.

In this fallen world, where often life's struggles and disappointments and the world's values seem more real than the life of faith, believers need to see Christ Jesus as the Faithful and True. We need a fresh vision of Jesus, that

he is the Victor over this world, and that he is faithful. Even when we cannot understand his ways, we must trust that he is always faithful to fulfill his promises and that he is faithful to always be with us. He is Truth itself—the truth of God and the way to truth about ourselves and the world around us (John 8:32; 14:6). Truth is not found in science or academics, but in the person of Jesus Christ, who tells us what we are and shows us what we can become and the way to a relationship with God. And Jesus is the way. To know him and to live in a relationship of trust in him is the only way to live an authentic life.

It is in worship that we fulfill the desire expressed by the Greeks who said to Philip, “Sir...we would like to see Jesus” (John 12:21). And as we worship Jesus we see him as the triumphant Savior. Paul reminds Titus that “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 2:13-14).

Again, Revelation is a book that encourages the suffering church to worship the sovereign Lord, who indeed is the conquering Christ, even though our circumstances may bedim our perception of his glory. I am always challenged by the example of those who trust Christ as the Faithful and True even through hours, days and years of intense suffering and persecution. Sometimes it may seem that God is absent and in our confused minds and emotions we may doubt God’s love and faithfulness. But if we worship him and see him as the Christ of the cross, we will be reassured he is the Faithful and True.

Our worship vision is of the triumphant Christ, as we see him on the white horse...

### *Suddenly appearing*

John receives this vision in the midst of worship. Wouldn’t that be a great time for Jesus to return? While we are bowed before him in worship, he throws back the curtain that has separated the eternal from this temporal dimension and we see him in all of his glory!

John says in his first letter, “But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

For obedient believers, this appearing will not catch us by surprise. This is one of the reasons, along with the weight of biblical evidence, that I do not believe in an “any moment rapture” of the church. Even the most vigilant Christian, who seeks to focus every thought on an instantaneous, unannounced rapture, could be taken by surprise by an any-moment, secret rapture. And Jesus gave many teachings to encourage us to not be caught by surprise, such as his parables about waiting for the master to return (Luke 12:35-48). The Apostle Paul countered the false teaching of those who said the return of Christ had already occurred. Paul said there would be events

and conditions that would signal that the Second Coming is immanent, such as the appearing of the man of lawlessness, the final Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

However, we are to live in vigilant expectation for the Lord's return, and are to prepare ourselves for the test of tribulation and for living in the very last days of human history, should God so order things. We should mark on our personal agendas, "Could be today!" if for no other reason than any day could well be our "Day of the Lord," when we go to meet him. And certainly, the final tribulation could be quickly upon us, and the final Antichrist could suddenly appear. In fact, almost every generation has speculated that they had identified the final Antichrist, and perhaps the way it's supposed to be. I think every generation is to live in the awareness of being in the last days. And, of course, because biblical history is linear and not cyclical, we know that the final days before the last Antichrist is closer than ever before!

On the other hand, unlike vigilant believers, unbelievers and slackers will be caught off guard completely, as Jesus taught in passages where he compared the day of his return with the days of Noah, when people were totally oblivious to the warnings about God's judgment (Luke 17:26-27). While obedient believers will be growing in readiness and preparedness, unbelievers will become increasingly oblivious to the signs and warnings of God's word.

John's vision is of the Savior, suddenly appearing, and...

### *Saving completely*

The great truth is that our Savior is coming to receive us, and to gather us to himself as his bride. Someone commented that although Jesus is coming as warrior and judge to unbelievers, he is not wearing armor, but rather a robe. He will be on his way to the wedding, the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10)!

As we read from 1 John 3:2, we will become perfectly like him in holiness, for we shall see him as he is. This will be our entire sanctification, our glorification complete. The "engagement period" will be over. All that we have as a foretaste and down payment, we will receive in full measure. We will experience the full consummation of our salvation.

We will then be...

### Those removed from the presence of sin

Now, because of Christ's death and resurrection, we by faith have victory over the *penalty* of sin. By the indwelling Holy Spirit we have victory over the *power* of sin. But when we see Jesus, we will be freed from the very *presence* of sin.

His robe is dipped in blood, the blood shed on the cross for our sins (verse 13). We still struggle against the downward pull of sin in our old,

unconverted sin nature. But then, when we see Jesus Christ, we will no longer have to struggle. The very presence of sin will be banished from his holy presence.

When Jesus comes, the antichrist and his false prophet will be thrown into the fiery lake (verse 20), and the devil, who has been “bound” during the church’s mission (20:1-3), will be finally thrown into the lake of fire (20:10). The blood on Christ’s robe also symbolizes his defeat of these enemies who attack us.

These verses fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 63:1-6. He has bound and will destroy the one who has been attacking us. Satan and his demons are our real enemies. People who attack and assail us are merely the dupes of the devil. But he will be bound, and the second and third persons of his evil trinity will be destroyed in hell.

We will be removed from the presence of sin, but also we will be...

Those who will be completely sanctified

Look at the eyes of the victorious Christ (verse 12)! His blazing eyes will burn out every remaining vestige of sin in our lives, and deeply hidden sin within our hearts and minds.

I recall my New Testament theology professor in seminary, Wayne Ward, who told about his boyhood in a small town in Arkansas, USA. In their house was a well known painting of Jesus, and Dr. Ward said the eyes of that painting seemed to haunt him. They followed him wherever he went in that room. All paintings of Jesus are fictitious and futile attempts to represent the One whose physical appearance is intentionally veiled in biblical accounts. Yet, testifies Dr. Ward, this painting gave him as a boy a God-consciousness that served as a needed corrective to his rebellious behavior.

Even now, nothing in our lives is hidden from his gaze. We need this awareness of his presence, and how he is grieved by all our sin, which is never hidden from his full scrutiny. The blazing eyes of Jesus light up the sinful guilt of those who make religious pretense, but whose hearts are far from him. As one New Testament scholar says, the blazing eyes of Christ indicate that he always knows the spiritual condition of the ungodly who claim to be members of the covenant community and yet are not truly in the faith (GK Beale, page 951, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC). But also, Christ sees the sin and guilt of the openly unbelieving and ungodly, who must face his judgment. This prospect should make us all want to make our calling and election sure and be certain that we do not miss the saving grace of God (2 Peter 1:10; Hebrews 12:15). Our prayer should always be, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:24-25). And, if we are in his grace, when we see Christ, his piercing eyes will make us totally clean and whole. This prospect of the Day when we will be made sinlessly perfect ought to encourage us to live on a higher plane right now, says John (1 John 3:3).

These verses describe the Warrior King Jesus, engaged in a bloody conflict with the kingdom of darkness. And we must not forget that while here on earth “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Thus, Paul admonishes us to put on the full armour of God, and to fight this battle with spiritual, and not with carnal weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4). In the vision of our text, Christ fights with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (verse 15 and Ephesians 6:17). As Eugene Peterson notes, the danger for the follower of Christ is not in spiritual warfare, but in *not* fighting the spiritual battles. And we depend absolutely on the Lord God, the conquering Christ, who trains our hands for this warfare (Psalm 144:1. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*).

When our Savior comes, we also will be among...

#### Those who will be fully blessed

Remember, when Christ comes to bring judgment on the unbelieving world, he will bring the consummation of salvation to those of us who believe in him and long for his appearing. He is on his way to the wedding feast described in the first ten verses of this nineteenth chapter. Paul describes the Second Coming of Christ as a glorious heavenly reunion (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). As I have noted before, weddings are great occasions for family reunions, and a time for meeting new members of the family brought together by the wedding. Jesus, when he comes, will be followed from heaven by angelic hosts, and also the hosts of his army, those who have preceded us to heaven (verse 14).

Every now and then, I read about reunions of fighting battalions, who come together to remember their camaraderie in days of battle. Occasionally there are such reunions over here in places like Normandy, France and Bastonge, Belgium. No doubt, they give thanks for support they received, and maybe even acts of heroism. That’s what our heavenly reunion will be like, when Jesus comes as our great hero in battle, and our great commanding officer.

But the greatest blessing of the Second Coming and the full consummation is alluded to in verse 12. “He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.” This seems strange to us who claim to know the name of Jesus, ever since the time when the Lord made himself known to Moses and the people of the Old Covenant as Yahweh. The name Jesus means Savior, and whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). In Scripture, to know someone’s name is to have access to that person, whose character is embodied in his or her name. But even though we now know Jesus in a personal relationship, we know him only in part. Looking to the glorious, blessed consummation of our salvation, Paul writes, “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). And to know Jesus is to be like him, and to share in all his attributes of perfect holiness and the blessedness of the riches of God.

There is no way that in our incomplete state of “being saved” that we can fathom the glories of Christ Jesus, whose judgments are unsearchable, his paths “beyond tracing out,” and whose mind is unknowable (Romans 11:33-36). The church father, Andrew of Caesarea remarked about “the incomprehensibility of his (Christ’s) essence” (page 310, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, NT Volume XII, page 310).

The Second Coming of Christ means he will come as our victorious Savior. But also, he will come as...

### **A mighty conqueror and righteous judge**

The Lord Jesus is pictured as the Warrior King who comes to bring final salvation to his elect, but also to bring judgment to those who have rejected him. Notice the opposites of the two pictures in this nineteenth chapter. First we saw him as the Bridegroom calling us to join him at the wedding feast. Now he is the warrior Judge, preparing to serve up his enemies as a grotesque dinner for vultures (verses 17-18). GK Beale calls this scene in verses 17-18 “a macabre parody of the invitation to the supper of the Lamb in verse 9 (See above reference, page 965). Notice that...

*His judgment will be sudden and fearful*

Billy Graham, in his book on Revelation, *The Approaching Hoof Beats of the Apocalypse*, says that the Battle of Armageddon will take place just before mankind annihilates itself. We certainly should support recent treaties and efforts to eventually eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the earth. Although some nations possess the nuclear capability to launch nuclear attacks and counterattacks enough to destroy the world many times over, God will have the last say. There will be a final anti-God rebellion, but God will send Christ to be the judge before human devices exterminate the world.

Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of wars, which will probably heighten in intensity before the final war. We all are aware of the strife in the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula and warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, and wonder what and if any kind of peaceful resolution can be reached. It seems that God alone can bring peace in what appears to be insoluble situations.

As much as we should pray for peace to enable the spread of the gospel in all nations, we cannot expect peace worldwide. In fact, we can, Jesus said, expect more wars. In 1988, Nancy and I looked out over the beautiful Plain of Megiddo, where so many battles have been fought. It isn’t difficult to see how things could happen quickly in that region of the world, which continues to be one of the centers of international conflict. Even though almost every generation has had its “Antichrist Candidate,” we are indeed now closer to his manifestation than ever before. It does seem that the Antichrist, who

promises to bring nations together in worldwide peace could, it seems, emerge at almost any time now.

But suddenly Jesus Christ will appear to reveal his power and mete out his judgment on all nations. Notice that he will destroy his enemies, not by nuclear power, but by his word (verse 15). By his word he created the world, and by his word he redeems those who believe in him. Finally, by his word he will destroy his enemies.

Also...

*His judgment will be irreversible and regrettable*

In most of the other judgment passages in the Scripture, as in the prophets, there seems to be a provision for repentance and averting the wrath of God. Before, it has not been too late to repent, not too late that is until this Second Coming. Isaiah says God waits and even longs to be gracious and merciful (Isaiah 30:18). But with the Second Coming he waits no longer. The finality of our text shows that the offer of God's grace is not inexhaustible and never ending.

As Paul says in Philippians 2:10-11, "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

For the unredeemed, this will not be a joyful, but rather a regretful and even dreadful admission. It will be too late to receive Jesus Christ as Lord, but everyone, including the enemies of Christ, will have to admit that he is Lord. The Lord, for the unbelievers, will be the dreaded judge and warrior.

His coming in judgment will mean that...

*Satan will no longer accuse*

Satan is the accuser of God's people. He is the one who seeks to condemn us before the Father. He is the deceiver and destroyer, and he is now bound with a "short tether" in these Last Days. Satan was dealt a fatal blow when Jesus atoned for our sins, and when Jesus comes again, the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire (20:10).

What victory and freedom we will enjoy, beginning with the Day of the Lord!

His coming in judgment also will mean that...

*We will understand the ways of God*

The ways of God are what theologians call theodicy. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines *theodicy* as the "defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil." Again, I am always stricken by the fact that those who say they doubt the existence of a good and personal

God are usually the ones who complain when they judge that he isn't controlling his universe as they think a good and personal God should. There is a lot of evil in this world, and we cannot know all the reasons why God permits these instances of evil and suffering. But the truth presented by the doctrine of the Second Coming is that all evil people will be finally judged, and all evil and suffering finally eradicated for the people of God.

It's easy for us, separated as many of us are from persecution and injustice done against God's best people, to think it less than worthy of a Christian to hope for God's justice and vindication of his people. But those who, like the thousands who at this moment are suffering for their faith, can hope for God's judgment and vindication. These who have suffered intensely under blasphemers who have mocked God, destroyed their homes and churches, and persecuted and even killed friends and family members, can see even the necessity of God's justice and judgment.

New Testament scholar Robert Mounce writes, "It is not true...that with the coming of the gospel age the God of the OT decided to prove to men that he really was a gentleman after all and so dispensed with any further recourse to judgment." Christ is the "rider on the horse" who will judge and punish all unbelief and sin, and will rectify all evil and unjust suffering and will vindicate all who have suffered unjustly (Page 348, *The Book of Revelation: NICNT*).

The Second Coming of Christ tells us that Jesus Christ is coming as victorious Savior and also as dreadful conqueror and judge.

### **Conclusion:**

There will be a vast difference between Christ's first advent and his Second Coming. As the great Presbyterian preacher, Clarence Macartney said,

*In Jesus' first coming, He was despised and rejected of men; in His Second, every knee will bow before Him.*

*In His first appearing, He was silent before His accusers at His trial, but when He returns, His voice will shake the heavens and the earth.*

*At the trial in His first coming, they mocked Him by putting a robe on Him. When He comes again, He will be wearing a robe stained by the blood of His enemies.*

*In His first visit to earth, His mocking enemies pressed a cruel crown of thorns upon His brow. When He comes again, He will be wearing many crowns designating His rule as King of kings.*

As there will be a difference in the first and second coming of Christ, so there will be a vast difference in his Second Coming for those who know him and look forward to his coming, and those who reject him and rebel against him.

The coming of the Lord will be either a glorious or a horrible event for you and me. We make the choice that makes the difference. And, the choice is yours how he will come to you, as Savior or as Judge. As Robert Mounce also noted (see above reference, page 349), The God of the Old Testament is the Christ of the New Testament, who is coming in fearful judgment of all unbelievers and unforgiven sinners. But he adds, "The good news is that man need not bear the just punishment due his sin but that Another has paid the price on his behalf. Only when man refuses forgiveness must he bear the penalty for his wickedness."

We are to be a fellowship of mutual encouragement. When Scripture teaches this doctrine of the Second Coming, there is the intent, not to satisfy curiosity about the details, but to encourage believers to hope and to persevere in hope. This is what the persecuted believers in Asia Minor needed.

Years ago, during the time the United States was involved in what seemed an interminable war in Vietnam, I recall a television news interview with a young military wife and mother, whose husband had been deployed for years in dangerous combat in Vietnam. The soldier's little preschool boy was standing beside his mother during the interview, holding a large framed photograph of his soldier daddy, seated with his wife and holding his little son. Interrupting the interview, the little boy said, while looking longingly at the photo, "I wish my daddy could step out of this picture."

We declare today as God's people that we believe Jesus ascended and is coming again in salvation and judgment. When he ascended to the heavenly realm, his bodily presence left the earthly realm and we picture him at the right hand of the Father. Now we long for our Savior to step out of the picture, out of the eternal realm into this fallen, broken world of darkness and to consummate his glorious reign. Paul, while living his last mortal days in a prison cell, was preoccupied with thoughts of Jesus' return, looking forward to the awarding of his crown of righteousness. He wrote that all can look forward to this crown who have "longed for" Jesus' appearing. Living with a longing for Jesus to step out of the picture of hope into the reality of the present is a sure way to live with a proper perspective on life's trials. Longing to meet Jesus is the way to prepare for meeting him. The Apostle John says the antidote to being ashamed before the returning Christ is to abide in him now (1 John 2:28).

Some of you are tempted to give in or to give up. You need to know Jesus is coming. If you would only realize that what you suffer now is little compared to the coming glory (Romans 8:18)! You need to know also that the time of this suffering and temptation is brief compared with the eternity that will begin when he comes. You and I need to hold on against the enemy and his temptations to be unfaithful, unforgiving, and indifferent to the cause of the Kingdom.

I hope we can all say today, "I believe Jesus ascended and is coming again," and can do so with joyful longing.

**Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. What has been your concept of the Second Coming of Christ, and have your thoughts been those of joyful anticipation or of dread and fear?
2. The imagery of Christ as the victorious warrior reminds us of our spiritual warfare. From our text and from passages like 2 Corinthians 10:4 and Ephesians 6:10-18, what are the weapons and armor we are to use in this warfare?
3. Salvation in Scripture is a dynamic concept, including what has happened to the believer already (justification), what is taking place now (sanctification) and what will take place in the future, when we see Jesus (glorification). What is the believer's hope when we see Jesus when he returns, or when we go to be with him in heaven?
4. What difference should this make in our thinking and living in the present, even in our difficult experiences?
5. How does worship enable us to endure faithfully in the present and to grow stronger in our hope for God's future victory?
6. The old gospel song, "We'll Understand It, All Bye and Bye," refers to the complete understanding we will have of God's ways that are now mysterious and even troubling to us now. What are some mysteries that you look forward to understanding when you get to heaven?
7. How has this study affected your prior understanding of the Second Coming of Christ?

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