

Star Struck

Title: Part 4 – Next Time Will Be Different

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Transition: Video Ends

We have been celebrating the coming of Jesus now for the past few weeks in this collection of messages called “Star Struck.” In the hustle and bustle of the season our goal has been to stop long enough to rediscover the hope, promise and expectation of Jesus coming for us.

For many of us, Christmas means overstuffed schedules, credit card debt, and skyrocketing stress. We struggle to find the connection between our holiday to-do lists and the story of Jesus’ birth. SO, this year we’ve been trying to change all of that as we reorient our hearts and lives around this event that changed all of history. We’ve been trying to regain some of the awe and wonder and mystery of it all.

Come on, has anyone been blessed by this over the past few weeks? All of this is building toward this coming Saturday night, or as we are calling it, “Christmas Eve, EVE!” I can’t wait to celebrate the birth of our Savior with you at 5 pm or 7 pm. I also hope you will bring some people with you that need to experience the hope and promise of Christmas too.

Hey before we get any further do me a favor and help me welcome everyone joining us on our app or social channels! If you are anywhere in the Bay Area I’d like to invite you to join us too for Christmas Eve, EVE on December 23rd at 5 pm & 7 pm. We’d love to be a part of your celebrations this year, we have a seat saved for you, BUT thanks for spending some time with us wherever you are today.

As we continue this collection of messages, I’m calling today’s message:

Next Time Will Be Different

At the end of “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” (How many of you have already watched Charlie Brown this Christmas season?) But at the end, Charlie Brown cries out in desperation, “Isn’t there anyone who can tell me what Christmas is all about?” How many of you know the scene I am talking about? Linus then walks out onto the stage, has the lights dimmed, and reads the familiar passage from Luke 2. BUT can you imagine what the audience response would have been if, instead of the passage in Luke 2, Charles Schultz had chosen the following Christmas text for Linus to present. This is from Revelation 12: (v.1-5)

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

“And that is what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

How many of you whenever you read the Christmas story as a kid made a pit stop in Revelation. Anyone? This is certainly not the traditional story, but this passage from the Bible’s last book provides unique insight into the birth of Christ over what we find in Matthew and Luke.

The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature. And the thing you need to know about apocalyptic writing is that it is an uncovering or unveiling of something bigger than what we can see. It's a literary technique, much like Ebenezer Scrooge's experience at Christmas. It shows a bigger picture.

Revelation is not only about war and despair. It's a message of transformation and justice, the victory of Jesus, and the failure of Satan and his evil empire. Jesus is the central figure in the book of Revelation, and in the middle of this letter comes a Christmas story. It's not like any Christmas story you may have heard. It's full of imagery and tells the story of Jesus' birth from a cosmic perspective. It's a story that shows the extent to which Satan would have loved to destroy Jesus and the gravity by which he failed. Herod didn't stop Jesus from being born and doing what He came to this earth to do and neither did Satan when they nailed Jesus to the cross 33 years later.

AND so, part of regaining the hope and promise and expectation of Christmas is not just what we celebrate 2,000 years ago, the long-awaited Savior, but it's also hopefully expecting when Jesus comes back again!

Look at what Jesus told His disciples the night before He was crucified. He said: (John 14:2-3)

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will COME BACK and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Did He go? Yup, 40 days after the resurrection, after being seen by hundreds, He gathered His followers for some final marching orders and ascended back into heaven. So, is He coming back? Absolutely!

SO, what I want to do on this final Sunday before Christmas is highlight some of the differences between the first coming of Jesus at Christmas and the second coming that is still to be in the future. What I want to do is just quickly mention three or four physical differences between the first and second coming, and then I want us to look at three profoundly different purposes. The purpose of Jesus coming at Christmas is very different than the purpose of His second coming.

If you are taking notes today grab your service guide or our church app and jot these down:

Jesus' first arrival happened slowly.

Why? Because He came into the world the way we all came into the world, by being born into it! Pregnancy takes nine months. Any mother can tell you pregnancy is a long, slow arrival. It's not instant. It's not like you get pregnant and then a week later you deliver. It's nine long months.

But why? Why did God choose to send His Son this way? Here's my opinion, because He's kind. He came to save us not scare us! There are a lot of ways God could have come 2,000 years ago and scared us all to death, but His goal was to save us, not scare us because nobody's afraid of a baby.

So, the first coming of Jesus happened slowly. Next time though, write this down:

Jesus' second arrival will happen instantly!

After you write that down, everyone look up here at me. Now everyone blink. Blink again. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:52:

It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, [What will, the second coming of Jesus, it will be in the blink of an eye] **when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.**

That's fast! A blink takes about a 10th of a second. That's how fast it's going to be when Jesus returns! One blink He won't be here, the next blink Jesus has returned for us. AND not only is it going to happen instantly the next time, but He's going to come back without warning. The Bible says it will be a normal day. People will be working or at school. Commerce will be happening and then without warning, 1 Thessalonians 5:2 says:

The day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.

A thief doesn't call you up and warn you. In fact, Jesus said this in Matthew 24: (v.43-44)

Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.

He will come when least expected. This is why if you ever hear anybody say it's going to happen on this date, if somebody tells you that, run! Jesus said, "No man knows the day or the hour, neither the angels nor the Son, but only the Father which is in heaven." Jesus is like, "I don't even know when I'm coming back." So, if Jesus doesn't know, you're not going to figure it out either! It could be tomorrow, it could be in a thousand years. We don't know.

What we do know is that throughout the New Testament we are told to be ready, be ready, be ready! We're not on the date and time committee. We're on the welcoming committee. So, be ready! I'll give you some application on this at the end.

BUT here's the second difference:

Jesus' first arrival was quiet.

Almost no one knew that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world had arrived. Most people were oblivious to it. It was a very quiet night only disturbed by the cry of a newborn baby amongst the animals. He was born in Bethlehem and Bethlehem was not a thriving metropolis. It's called the town of Bethlehem in the carols, right? It's really more like a village with around 300 people living there at the time of Jesus birth.

The Bible says in Luke chapter 2, the shepherds were told: (v.11-12)

"Today in the town of David [That's Bethlehem] **a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: YOU WILL FIND a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

Probably not many babies lying in a manger in a town of 300 people. But the point I want to make is this, at the first arrival of Jesus on earth, people had to find Him. Notice it says, "You will find Him." It wasn't like a big announcement to everybody, "The Son of God has arrived." It didn't happen that way the first time. It was very, very quiet.

But next time, write this down:

Jesus' second arrival will be loud!

The entire world will hear and hear about Jesus return instantly! It's going to be loud! It will not be quiet. It will be the greatest celebration in history as this chapter of our world's history ends. Time as we know it is moving towards this climax.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the Apostle Paul writes: (v.16)

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a LOUD COMMAND, and with the SHOUT of the archangel, and with the GREAT SOUND of the trumpet of God!

And to be honest, I don't even know what all that means, but it just means it's going to be loud. It's not going to be a Silent Night, Holy Night. It's going to be loud, and it will be something that everybody in the world will hear instantly! It's like when they accidentally issued an amber alert at 5 am, remember that a couple years ago? Everyone jumping out of bed at the same time... Jesus' second arrival will be loud!

Number three, third difference.

Jesus' first arrival was marked by a single star.

We talked about this last week. The Magi or wisemen followed a star or bright light of some kind to Bethlehem. We don't know a ton about these wise men. But we do know they came from the East. Most likely they came from Babylon where there would have been some very old stories and rumors and prophecies from the time Daniel spent in exile as a young man.

AND the star they followed is another mystery. It could have been a great conjunction of the planets; we do have some evidence of one around the time of Jesus birth. So, it could have been that or it could have been another astrological phenomenon like a comet, OR it could have just been a miracle of God putting some glorious light in the sky for them to follow. God could have just created a unique star for that event to guide the Wise Men.

But it was just one star and not everybody paid attention to it. What's one star among the millions in the sky? BUT when Jesus comes back the second time:

Jesus' second arrival will light up the entire sky!

It's not going to be one star. He's going to light up the entire sky! Turn to someone and tell them, "It's gonna be lit..." Let me show you some verses about how brilliant the second coming of Christ is going to be. It's going to be a light show in the heavens. Matthew 24:27, Jesus says this:

For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

In other words, nobody's going to miss this! Jesus says, "That's how bright it's going to be when I come back." Tampa Bay is like the lightning capital of the world; we know all about this. BUT not only is He going to bring light when He's coming back, Jesus says He's bringing all His angels with Him! Look at Matthew 25:31, Jesus said:

"The Son of Man will come in all his glory. All the angels will come with him."

Come on, that's going to be impressive! We don't even know how many that is, but all of the angels will be with Him. Revelation 19 says, *"The armies of heaven will be following Him."* This is going to be overwhelming. This is going to be a spectacular sight in the sky. The armies of heaven will be following Him. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 says this, *"The Lord will appear with burning fire from heaven..."*

I don't even know, again, what that means, but there's going to be some kind of brightness. Paul compares it to fire from heaven but it's going to be so bright, so brilliant, with all the angels, all the armies of heaven coming, nobody's going to miss this! A lot of people missed the first Christmas, the first coming of Christ. But come on, nobody's going to miss the second coming of Christ!

One more difference and then I want to show you how God has a different purpose for each coming and why this all matters. But, write this down, at:

Jesus' first arrival, only a few people honored Him.

Think about it, when Jesus first came only the shepherds, the Wise Men and a couple people at the temple honored Him. Most people were totally unaware that the Son of God had come to earth. And even when Jesus grew up and began His public ministry, began teaching, healing, and performing miracles, people still didn't believe Him until after the resurrection.

In fact, the Bible says, *"He came into His own people, but His own people did not receive Him."* They didn't receive Him. They rejected Him. They eventually put Him on a cross and killed Him. So, the first time, only a few people honored Him. BUT when He comes back, at:

Jesus' second arrival, everyone will honor Him!

Christians, Jews, Muslims, non-religious, even atheist will declare that Jesus is in fact the Lord! Everyone will honor Him when He comes in all His glory. The Apostle Paul writes this in Philippians 2: (v.9-11)

Therefore God has highly exalted him [That's Jesus, because He died for us God exalted Him] **and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that 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.**

That's a done deal. When Jesus returns, every celebrity that you can think of will kneel and say, "Jesus is Lord." Every politician, every global world leader will kneel and say, "Jesus is Lord." Every skeptic, every agnostic, every atheist will kneel and say, "Jesus is Lord." Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Come on let's awe and wonder at the future coming of Christ and all that it holds! For hundreds of years God said I'm gonna send a Savior, I'm gonna send a Savior, I'm gonna send a Savior but only a remnant was watching when Jesus was born. AND before this same Jesus ascended back into heaven He said, "I'm coming back for you, I'm coming back for you, I'm coming back for you" and for 2,000 years the church has waited and wondered. But make no mistake, when Jesus returns with the angels and the armies of heaven there will be no doubt that He... is... God! This is the hope of Christmas.

Now, those are all physical differences. How things will physically be different when Jesus returns. But in the time we have left I want to explain the different purposes, because why Jesus came the first time and

why He's coming back the second time are completely different. You need to know this. You need to understand this, and I'll show you why. Number one:

The first time Jesus came, He came to save the world.

The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16. You've seen athletes write it under their eyes on the football field. You've seen it on t-shirts. Maybe if you've been out west have seen it on every In-N-Out drink cup. Literally billions of people have heard John 3:16 because it's Christmas in a nutshell. So, let's read it together out loud:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [Great job, now listen to verse 17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

This is why we celebrate Christmas. At the very first Christmas, the angels come, and they announce to the shepherds, remember this from week 2, they said, *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*

Well, this is the Good News, a Savior has been born! That's why He came the first time. He came to save us because we couldn't save ourselves, we can't even solve our own problems let alone save ourselves. He came so that we could know Him and so that we could live in Him and so we could go to heaven and be with Him forever.

Unfortunately, many people say, “No thanks, God. I don't need a Savior. I'm just going to save myself. I'm going to be my own god. I don't need a Savior.” You know what keeps people out of heaven? Not sin. It's pride! Pride is what keeps people out of heaven. Pride says, “I don't need God in my life, I don't need a Savior. He sent one, but I don't need Him...” and because of that, the next time Jesus comes back, He's not coming to save.

Write this down, the first time, Jesus came to save the world:

Next time, He's coming to judge the world.

When Jesus comes back, He will either be your Savior or He will be your judge. It's your choice, but He's coming back to judge the world. God is not just a God of love. He's a God of justice, which means if something's not fair, He's going to correct it, and if something's not right, He's going to punish it. And if there's evil out there, He's going to defeat it.

Look at Acts 17:31: **God has set a day that he will judge all the world with fairness, by the man he chose long ago. And God has proved this to everyone by raising that man from the dead!”**

Who's the One God raised from the dead? Jesus! Jesus is going to be my judge and your judge. Why? Because He was first our Savior! He's going to find out if you accepted or rejected His salvation. Did you humble yourself or were you prideful?

Here's the way the Apostle Paul writes about this in Romans 2, he says: (v.6-8)

God will reward each of us for what we have done. He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honor, and life that lasts forever. But he will show how angry and furious he can be with every selfish person who rejects the truth and wants to do evil.

That's my choice. It's not anybody else's choice. It's my choice and it's your choice. When Jesus comes back, will He be your Savior or will He be your judge?

Here's the next one, notice the different purpose here.

The first time Jesus came, He came to die for our sins.

That's why He came the first time. That's the Good News. He came to die for our sins so I don't have to die for them and so you don't have to die for them. I deserve to pay for all the things I've done wrong. You deserve to pay for all the things you've done wrong. But God loves us so much that He came to pay my penalty and your penalty.

Ephesians chapter tells us this, Paul writes: (v.5)

His UNCHANGING PLAN has always been to ADOPT us into his own FAMILY by sending Jesus Christ to DIE for us.

Leave that verse up there for a minute I want us to understand some of the key words. "His unchanging plan..." This means before God created the entire universe, God had already thought about you. God created the universe because He wanted to create the earth, so He could sustain human life, so He could create you. God wanted a family.

BUT only God's family is going to be with Him in heaven. So, notice these words. First is "die." Jesus came to die for you the first time. Why? So, next word, so He could "adopt," right? So, He could adopt you into God's, last word, "family" because God wants a family.

The first time Jesus came, He came to die for our sins. But what's He coming back for the second time?

Next time, He's coming to gather His family.

He's coming back to gather His family and take us all to the new heaven and the new earth. In Matthew 24, Jesus says: (v.31)

And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

We are talking billions of people, from all over the world and from all times, all a part of God's family.

BUT here is what we have to understand, not everyone will be in God's family. Everyone is created by God. Everyone is loved by God. Doesn't matter who you are, what you've done or what you believe, you're loved by God. And God has a plan and purpose for everyone's life. BUT not everyone will be in His family. WHY? Because not everyone accepts His Son as Savior.

The only way you get into the family is by being adopted into it. How? When you say, "Jesus I accept you as my Savior and Lord, I put my hope and trust in what you did for me on the cross..." When you do that you are in the family. You don't work for it. You don't earn it. You're never going to deserve it. It's just a free gift of God's grace. BUT you have to accept it!

One more difference from the first coming to the second coming:

The first time Jesus came, He came in humility.

It's hard to find a humbler beginning than to be born a baby in a barn in the middle of nowhere. Hard to beat that one. Jesus didn't come in royal robes as King of kings and Lord of lords. He didn't come with a big procession of angels. He just came humbly.

Paul tries to capture this in Philippians chapter 2, he says: (v.6-8)

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

For God to become a human being would be a humbling experience. And then to serve humanity and be willing to die for humanity, that's how much God loves you. He came in a very humble way. BUT when He comes back at the end of history, He's not coming in humility:

Next time, He's coming in all His glory.

When He comes back, He's coming back in all His glory! When He comes back, He's coming as King of kings and Lord of lords! AND because He's King of kings and Lord of lords, when He comes back, the Bible says He's going to wipe out all evil.

I think that means the most to me because as a pastor, every single day I deal with the effects of evil in people's lives. I see the pain that the evil of other people, and the evil in ourselves, causes. If there were no evil in the world, there'd be no suffering in the world, there'd be no sorrow, no sadness, no sickness, no stress. It's all because we've gone our way instead of God's way.

BUT when Jesus comes back, I made a list, He's going to end all:

Atrocities, all aggression, all bloodshed, all bondage, all brutality. He's going to end all corruption, cruelty, darkness, dehumanization, all dictators, disasters. He's going to end all enslavement, evil, hate, harassment, all inhumanity. He's going to end all injustice. He's going to end all killing, maliciousness, manipulators, molesters, murderers, oppression, racism, tyrants, violence, war. He's going to end all greed. He's going to end all illness, all hopelessness, all betrayals, all cancer, all deafness, all death, all deformities, all defects, all dementia, all depressions, all disappointment... are you getting the picture?

SO, to the King, give your worries! To the King, lay your burdens down! He is the hope your heart needs! Bring all you are to Him! Let Him heal your broken heart! Amen!

So, as we get ready to celebrate Christmas, let's also have that same sense of expectation in our hearts about His second coming. That no matter what happens in your life, you know the end of the story, that God is going to save your life because you have trusted Him. Live with deep hope and a spirit of expectation. That's the practical application of all this. To live with deep hope and a spirit of expectation.

The Apostle Paul urges and encourages us to live with this hope and expectation in Philippians 3, he says: (v.20-21)

But our homeland is in heaven, where our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is; and we are looking forward to his return from there. When he comes back, he will take these dying bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer all else everywhere.

We don't know what 2024 is going to hold. I don't know what the future holds. BUT I know the One who holds the future! And He has promised He is coming back for us!

He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn, but whenever He comes, there will be special favor for His servants who are ready. Are you ready? Are you ready for Him to come back?

If you're in God's family, you've got nothing to worry about! You don't need to be afraid or worry about the future. You don't need to be uptight about the future, because regardless of what happens between now and then, we know how it ends! You know the end of the story, so you can face the future with confidence!

At the first coming of Jesus, the Wise Men brought gifts to Jesus. Listen to me church, at the second coming of Jesus, He's bringing gifts for those who put their trust in Him. Will you pray with me?

[PRAYER TIME]

Questions:

- How would everything we just talked about change the way you live your life and the things that you think matter?
- What are you betting your life on?
- How many more Christmases are you going to go through before you accept the Savior?

Salvation Prayer