

Return of Christ

Cedar Springs Baptist Church

What We Teach

We believe that hope is essential for life. It is so important that Paul places it with the highest virtues of faith and love (1 Cor 13:13). We need faith: something to believe. We need love: something to do. And we need hope: something to live for. This is our hope.

The Glorious Appearing

We believe in the personal, bodily, and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The angels told Jesus' disciples, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Paul declares, "the Lord himself will come down from heaven" (1 Thess 4:16) and John adds, "when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

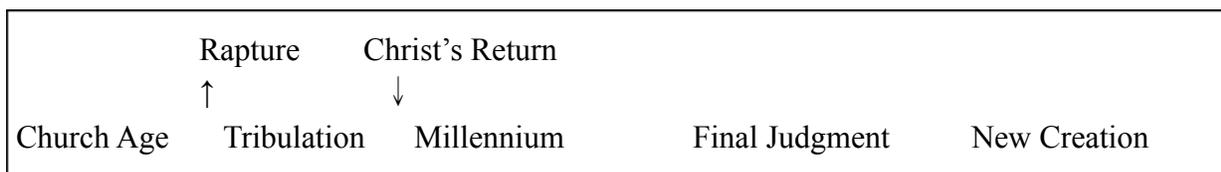
We believe that Jesus will return at any moment. No one knows when he will appear (Mark 13:32), but he will "come like a thief" (2 Pet 3:10) "at an hour when you do not expect" (Matt 24:44).

We believe that Jesus will return to consummate his kingdom. Jesus first came to earth as a suffering servant who established his kingdom through word and deed and by dying on the cross for our sin. He will return as a conquering king whose "eyes are like blazing fire" and whose mouth sends "a sharp sword...to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev 19:11-16).

Jesus will consummate his kingdom and bring "salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb 9:27). He will "come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matt 16:27). So "we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13).

We believe that Jesus will return before the millennium.

Timeline of the Future



Our church has historically taught a dispensational view of the end times in which Jesus raptures the church before the seven-year Great Tribulation and then returns to rule for a thousand years before putting down a final Satanic revolt and ushering in the new creation. This remains our view, though we understand the rapture, tribulation, and millennium are the most contested aspects of eschatology. We do not wish to make the premillennial, pretribulational return of Christ a test of fellowship.

Nevertheless, we expect that Jesus will come in secret to rapture his church from God's wrath which he will pour out on the world during the Great Tribulation (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10). The Great Tribulation is a seven-year period in which the Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel at the beginning, break it in the middle, and then unleash unparalleled persecution upon Israel and its supporters in the latter half (Dan 7:15-28; 9:24-27; Matt 24:4-29; Rev 6-19; Jer 30:7).

Before the tribulation begins the church will be "caught up together...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17; cf. 1 Cor 15:51-52; John 14:3). While the tribulation is raging on earth we will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). This judgment is for rewards rather than for salvation, for we are saved by Christ's righteousness and not our own effort (1 Cor 3:10-15). We also will join Christ for the "wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7-10) and prepare to return with Christ to this earth.

The Great Tribulation will climax in the Battle of Armageddon, when the beast and the false prophet gather the kings of the earth to resist the rule of Christ. Jesus will return on a white horse leading the armies of heaven, and he will throw the beast and false prophet "into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" and slay everyone else "with the sword that came out of his mouth." Jesus will lock Satan in the Abyss and will reign with us on this earth for 1,000 years (Rev 16:14, 16; 19:11-21; Zech 12:1-9).

After this millennium of peace Satan will be released from the Abyss and will deceive the nations into making one last stand against Jesus and his kingdom. God will send fire from heaven to devour them and he will throw the devil himself into "the lake of burning sulfur" (Rev 20:1-10). His kingdom now firmly and finally consummated on earth, Jesus will prepare to judge his enemies.

The Final Judgment

We believe in the everlasting, conscious punishment of the lost. Everyone who has ever lived must appear before God for final judgment (Rom 14:10). Those who demonstrated by their lives that they trusted Jesus alone for their salvation will find their names written in the book of life (Rom 8:1, 33-34; Heb 7:25; 9:24-28; Matt 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom 2:6; Gal 5:6; Jas 2:26). But "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:11-15).

Scripture uses the most loathsome images to describe the horrors of hell: it is a lake of fire crawling with worms, and the only sounds that pierce the darkness are shrieks of pain and gnashing of teeth (Isa 66:24; Rev 20:10; Mark 9:48; Matt 3:12; 8:12; 25:41). Since Scripture can only use items from our experience to communicate something we have never seen or heard, we may assume that hell is even worse than these images convey.

Scripture does not teach that those who go to hell receive a second chance to repent and be saved. Hebrews declares that “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb 9:27). Jesus warned people against dying in their sins (John 8:24) and he told a story about a rich man in hell who wanted to leave his agony but could not (Luke 16:24).

Scripture declares that those sent to hell will suffer “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46). Not only are the devil, beast, and false prophet “tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev 20:10), but also “there is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image,” but “the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever” (Rev 14:11).

We believe in the everlasting joys of God’s children dwelling with their Savior on the new earth. When Jesus returns to our world he will come to stay. He will defeat Satan, sin, and death, and when “he has put all his enemies under his feet” he will then make himself “subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

Jesus will reward his followers for their lives of obedience. Those who faithfully served Jesus will receive commensurate rewards, while those who served selfishly and poorly will see their works go up in flames (Matt 5:11-12; 6:19-21; 25:23; Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor 3:14-15).

Jesus will restore creation to its original goodness and consummate it to that higher place it was always intended to go. He will live with us forever and “wipe every tear” from our eyes. “There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:3-4). He will give us indestructible, “spiritual bodies” (1 Cor 15:42-49) and the absolute certainty that we will never fall and ruin this world again (Rom 8:30; Jude 24; 1 Cor 1:8; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 5:4). We will live forever with Jesus on this new earth, praising him, loving each other, and celebrating the beauty of an unspoiled creation and the finest of human culture (Isa 60:3-11; 65:17-25; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-22:5).

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).