

## THE CHURCH'S BEST KEPT SECRET

### INTRODUCTION

Series reminder for those new this time.

Revision from last two weeks :

We've seen the problem we face – an uncertain world

And that how we cope with the uncertainty is driven by our perspective on God

GOD IS NOWHERE or GOD IS NOW HERE

We've seen that God is involved in human history – it is His-Story

He has a plan and we're part of it

Current events occur within eternal context

History is leading somewhere – signs suggest what might happen

Are we there yet? Can watch the signs and get ready

Now need to consider what might happen next.

### FUTURES THINKING

People have always been curious about the future

Popularity of horoscopes, tarot, fortune-telling

Interest in soothsayers, e.g. Nostradamus

Big area of business – thinking about the future so that we can make right decisions today

Futures Studies, lots of different approaches, e.g. :

- Scenario planning
- Visualisation techniques (rich story-telling, storyboarding, scenario painting)
- Trend-watching
- FAR
- Futures literacy

Basic concept captured by Plato :

“The trouble with the future is that more things might happen than will happen”

Lots of alternative futures, cp science fiction stories, parallel universes.

Need to try to determine which are more likely.

Can divide alternatives into :

- Possible futures (all options that might occur, however unlikely)
- Probable futures (subset of all possible futures, more likely to happen)
- Preferable futures (what we would like to happen)

The aim of futures studies is to characterise the various alternatives, and see what needs to be done to move our preferred future(s) into the probable zone – i.e. make it/them more likely.

### THE POWER OF CHOICE

First diagram shows a range of alternative futures emanating from today.

They deliver a range of possible outcomes within a range of timescales. Some outcomes are good or very good, others are bad or disastrous, many are unknown or unknowable.

We don't know which one will actually occur.

So we make a decision, choice, action, to respond to the situation and try to improve things so we move towards a good outcome.

Second diagram, top half – our decision/action closes off some possible futures. We try to remove the bad options, but inevitably also shut off the possibility of some good outcomes.

But our choices also create new possible futures, some of which are good, bad or unknown.

The aim is to make a series of choices which move us towards our goal, our preferred future.

This always has to be done in an environment which is changing as a result of :

- Choices of ourselves and others
- Chance events
- The context within which we live and work

Also important to recognise that God is involved in this move towards the future :

All history is His-Story, including future history

## GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE FUTURE

He has a preferred future, somewhere he wants the future to go

He is able to influence events and circumstances towards his desired future

What is his desired future? He has shared it with people, but it is ...

### THE CHURCH'S BEST-KEPT SECRET!

God's aim for the future is that his son Jesus should return!!

Amazing!

The church has always known this, and it's in all the creeds, e.g. :

Apostles Creed : "He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead"

BUT it seems to be something we don't talk about. Why?

## WHO SAYS SO?

Lots of Bible passages plainly say that Jesus will return, e.g. :

- Jesus himself : John 14:1-3; Matthew 16:27; Matthew 26:63-64; Revelation 22:20
- Angels : Acts 1:9-11 (the same Jesus in the same manner – reverse video?)
- Paul : 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17
- John : Revelation 1:7
- OT prophets, e.g. Zechariah 14:1-5
- (and me!!)

## WHO AND HOW?

The Bible seems to be clear that someone is coming at some point, and it is called "the second coming of Jesus". But there are different views on what this really means. Look at four of these, and compare them with the Bible verses – which fits best??

1. Substitutionary – This refers to when the Holy Spirit came to the church at Pentecost, the second coming of a member of the Godhead to man.
2. Spiritually – When each person comes to a personal faith in Jesus he comes to them
3. Individually at death – When a Christian dies Jesus comes to them to welcome them to heaven
4. Literally – The man Jesus Christ will return from heaven to earth as a literal human being.

My view : option 4 is best fit.

## SO WHAT – DOES IT MATTER?

Yes – because the return of Jesus is a central event in Biblical future history.

- It is the **context** within which we are currently living – all we do as Christians should be in the light of his return, leading up to it, “hastening the coming of the Lord”
- It’s the **consummation** of His-Story – the point of it all so far, that Jesus will return to right all wrongs and bring the kingdom of God to fulfilment (when the King comes)
- And the **catalyst** for what comes next – the new beginning starts when he returns.

And whichever option you choose to believe, it’s all about Jesus himself anyway!

## FINAL CONCLUSION

The Bible is clear – we will all meet Jesus at some point in the future, whether at or after our deaths, or maybe before we die.

When we meet him, he will judge our actions and choices :

- Matthew 25:31-46 : A cautionary tale – sheep and goats, not everyone gets into heaven, only those who Jesus says he knows

We can be sure now, not left wondering whether we are a sheep or a goat. Can choose now to follow Jesus and let him be involved in every aspect of your life as Lord and Master.

Philippians 2:10-11 says that eventually at the end of history when Jesus returns, “At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”.

Everyone will eventually recognise him as the King of the universe, and bow to him in submission. Christians are those who beat the rush, who don’t wait until it’s obvious and too late, but bow the knee now, and confess Jesus as Lord now.

If he’s coming back you can wait to meet him then, or meet him today!!