

The Personal, Bodily, Second Coming Christ Opening Argument

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The Meaning of “Parousia”

The New Testament frequently uses the Greek word “parousia” in reference to Christ’s second coming. In Matthew 24 alone, it is used four times (vss. 3,27,37,39). It means arrival and *personal presence*. It implies arriving and remaining in the company of others. “Parousia” is found twenty-four times in the Greek New Testament. Of these, seventeen refer to Christ’s second coming. One refers to the coming of the “Man of Sin” (2 Thess. 2:9). The other six were used of other people and events that actually occurred in the first century. It is therefore helpful to examine the historical cases where the word was used in order to better understand its significance in relation to Christ’s second coming. So, let’s look at all six examples.

1 Cor 16:17-18

*17 I am glad about **the coming** of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.*

*18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.
(NKJ)*

Paul did not rejoice in the trip that these three men made from Corinth to where he was staying. He rejoiced in their arrival, and their continued presence with him. It was through Paul’s being in their company that he was refreshed by them, not in their traveling.

2 Cor 7:6-7

*6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by **the coming** of Titus, 7 and not only by **his coming**, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.*

(NKJ)

Again, Paul was not comforted by the trip Titus made. He was comforted by his arrival, and fellowship they had together in each other’s presence, as Titus informed Paul of the Corinthians’ desire and zeal for him.

2 Cor 10:10

*10 "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but **his bodily presence** is weak, and his speech contemptible."*

(NKJ)

In this verse, Paul was stating what his opponents said about him. They acknowledged that Paul's epistles were "weighty and powerful." But, they claimed that his personal "presence" was not so, nor his preaching. In other words, they thought his teaching was much more powerful in writing than in person.

Phil 1:25-26

*25 And being confident of this, I know that **I shall remain and continue with you all** for your progress and joy of faith,*

*26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by **my coming** to you again.*

(NKJ)

Verse 25 clearly explains what "parousia" means in verse 26. The idea is not only arrival, but remaining in their company.

Phil 2:12

*12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in **my presence** only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;*

(NKJ)

This verse is probably the clearest of them all. Notice that Paul used "parousia" in contrast to "absence." In all six occurrences of "parousia" that clearly speak of historical events or situations, all support the idea of physical presence, or being in the company of another, usually with the idea of arrival included. This is precisely the concept implied by the use of the same word for the second coming of Christ. His coming is to be PERSONAL, to be received into the company of the saints. That is, the saints will then be in His presence.

The preterist idea of an invisible coming of Christ is completely precluded by the meaning of the word that describes His coming. When Paul wanted to convey the idea of a non-bodily "presence" he used the words "pareimi pneuma" (present in spirit – cf. 1 Cor. 5:3). In contrast, the word "parousia" is always used of physical arrival and presence.

Coming Again "In Like Manner"

The Apostles received a promise from the two angels who appeared at Christ's ascension. This promise is the basis for our hope. In the following passage, I have highlighted certain statements that are essential to a proper understanding of this promise, and have commented on them afterward.

Acts 1:1-12

1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

3 to whom **He also presented Himself alive** after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;

5 "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

9 Now when He had spoken these things, **while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.**

10 And **while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up**, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? **This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.**"

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

(NKJ)

According to the two angels, Jesus' second coming will be "in like manner" as His ascension into heaven. This begs the question, in what manner did Jesus ascend into heaven? The answer is in our text. Jesus was with the Apostles in person, in His resurrected state. Verse 3 says they saw Him "alive" for forty days prior to His ascension. The idea that Jesus was "alive" points back to the empty tomb, and implies that He was with them bodily. Verse 9 indicates that the Apostles observed Jesus' ascension into the sky until a cloud obscured Him from their view. From this historical narrative we know without question that Jesus ascended in full view of His Apostles in person, visibly, bodily. There is no other way to interpret this text. The angels told them that "*this same Jesus*" would be coming back "*in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven.*"

This is of course a prophecy. But, it is not so easily allegorized, as preterists are fond of doing. The words "this same Jesus" can refer to none other than the whole person of Christ, as the Apostles witnessed Him after His resurrection – with hands and feet that still bore the marks of His crucifixion. These were the very scared hands that Jesus raised when He "blessed them" immediately before ascending to heaven (Luke 24:50). The words, "in like manner" connect the prophesied event (the second coming) with the historical event they all witnessed (the ascension). We are left with no alternative than to accept that Jesus' second coming will be bodily, in person, in the full view of believers, just as His ascension was bodily, in person, and in the full view of His Apostles, until He was obscured from their sight by the cloud. This agrees with other statements of

Scripture which indicate Jesus' coming will be visible to both believers and unbelievers alike. For example, Jesus said, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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**" (Matt. 24:30 NKJ). And again, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and **every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen**" (Rev. 1:7 NKJ).

The Connection to Jesus' Resurrection

Because of the promise of the angels, the kind of "presence" of Jesus in His second coming is inherently linked to His resurrected state. The Bible states plainly that Jesus was raised in the same physical body that hung on the cross. The Gospels take great pains to spell this out in unmistakable language.

Luke 24:37-43

37 But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.

38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

39 "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

40 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

41 But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?"

42 So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb.

43 And He took it and ate in their presence.

(NKJ)

The purpose this exchange was clearly to prove to them that He was not merely "a spirit." To prove this, Jesus showed them His hands and feet was so they could see the physical scars from the crucifixion. Notice Jesus' interaction with Thomas regarding His crucifixion wounds.

John 20:24-29

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

(NKJ)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about the resurrection of His body, the very same body that was pierced. And it was this resurrected body that the disciples watched as He ascended into heaven until obscured from their view by the cloud. In the very next chapter Peter preached that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of the Father. Peter got this from the prophecy in Psalm 110:1. *“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”* This is one of the Psalms Jesus explained to the disciples on the Sunday of His resurrection (cf. Luke 24:26-27,44-45). Jesus ascended into heaven in the same body that bore the marks of the crucifixion. He is seated at the Father's right hand. And *“this same Jesus ... will come again in like manner”* as the Apostles saw Him go into heaven, visibly, in person, bodily. That is also what the Greek word “parousia” means. It simply cannot refer to the mystical invisible “coming” proclaimed by preterists.

The question preterists cannot answer is, *“What happened to Jesus' resurrected body?”* How could *“this same Jesus”* have come again in AD70 *“in like manner”* as the Apostles saw Him go into heaven, when no one saw Him? Any diminishing of the nature of the second coming of Jesus in person must necessarily diminish the nature of His resurrection. And that calls into question the Gospel itself.

The Testimony of the Early Church

I think it is appropriate to quote Ignatius, personal disciple of John's, and bishop of the church of Antioch. The following excerpt was written after Ignatius had been arrested by the Romans, and was being transported by Roman guards to Rome to become food for the lions at the Coliseum. As they came to each town along the route to Rome, many Christians came out to bid farewell to this famous Christian Bishop of the early second century. Ignatius composed several farewell epistles to various churches during his final journey before going home to be with Christ. The following excerpt is from his epistle to the church in Smyrna, led by his friend and fellow disciple of John's, Polycarp. (Polycarp also became a martyr not many years later).

The theme of the excerpt below was an exhortation for the Smyraean church to resist the Gnostic heretics. The Gnostics not only denied the resurrection of the body, but also the personal bodily return of Christ at the end of the age. I chose this passage because Ignatius commented on our text from Acts 1, and made essentially the same arguments I have presented in this paper.

Chapter III

“And I know that He was possessed of a body not only in His being born and crucified, but I also know that He was so after His resurrection, and believe that He is so now. When, for instance, He came to those who were with Peter, He said to them, ‘Lay hold, handle Me, and see that I am not an incorporeal spirit.’ ‘For a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.’ And He says to Thomas, ‘Reach hither thy finger into the print of the nails, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side;’ and immediately they believed that He was Christ. Wherefore Thomas also says to Him, ‘My Lord, and my God.’ And on this account also did they despise death, for it were too little to say, indignities and stripes. Nor was this all; but also after He had shown Himself to them, that He had risen indeed, and not in appearance only, He both ate

*and drank with them during forty entire days. **And thus was He, with the flesh, received up in their sight unto Him that sent Him, being with that same flesh to come again, accompanied by glory and power.** For, say the oracles, 'This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen Him go unto heaven.' But if they say that He will come at the end of the world without a body, how shall those 'see Him that pierced Him,' and when they recognize Him, 'mourn for themselves?' For incorporeal beings have neither form nor figure, nor the aspect of an animal possessed of shape, because their nature is in itself simple."*

Chapter IV

"I give you these instructions, beloved, assured that ye also hold the same opinions. But I guard you beforehand from these beasts in the shape of men, from whom you must not only turn away, but even flee from them. Only you must pray for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance. For if the Lord were in the body in appearance only, and were crucified in appearance only, then am I also bound in appearance only. And why have I also surrendered myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to the wild beasts? But, I endure all things for Christ, not in appearance only, but in reality, that I may suffer together with Him, while He Himself inwardly strengthens me; for of myself I have no such ability."

Ignatius instructed his readers to pray for those caught up the mystical teaching of the day. He thought it was difficult but not impossible for those deceived by the ancient Gnostic mystics to repent from their heresy and embrace the truth. After reading Ignatius' remarks, I was convicted by the Spirit of my own failure to pray for Sam Frost and those of you who have been entangled in a similar snare of modern mysticism — preterism. As I submit this paper, I am determined to rectify this oversight. As Paul said, *"if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will"* (2 Tim 2:25-26 NKJ).