

A Faith to Live By...

Sermons on the Apostles' Creed

7. "He will come again to judge the living and the dead..."

One might easily argue that it is this clause of the creed rather than any of those preceding it that the touchstone of proper Christian faith is reached. Lest that appear as a rather odd claim, let me clarify in what sense it might be so. It might, after all, be tempting to see this clause as an awkward and slightly embarrassing bolt-on to the basic option, and one that we would much prefer to submit to the editor's red biro or the delete key in any redrafting of the creed for our



personal use. Doesn't it, someone might well ask, entail frankly ridiculous notions of Jesus descending from the stratosphere like some displaced cosmonaut or homeward-bound drone, hoping for a gentle landing and, in the meanwhile, fielding the attentions of hosts of eager believers all travelling in the opposite

direction to "meet him in the clouds"? What's that all about? And how can we even begin to take it seriously? And then, moving on, there's the whole thing about a final judgement which seems okay as a scene out of Dante or Giotto, but is hard to imagine actually occurring and, in any event, makes us uncomfortable in our tolerant, liberal age, it being so, well ... *judgemental!*

Well, setting aside for now the dubiety of a circumstance in which what we are capable of imagining or what we find 'comfortable' being set up as a reliable index of reality, it must nonetheless frankly be admitted that the subject of this week's study has sometimes been subjected to unnecessarily unhelpful treatments, literary,



visual and other sorts. And I hope at least to provide if not 'comfortable' readings, then at least ones shorn of some needlessly complicating and problematic aspects and associations and possessed of something resembling intellectual respectability.

This is how it ends...

But, to return to the particular claim in hand, in what sense might this clause, with all its colourful (mis)-readings and (mis)-representations,



be held to bring us to the touchstone of faith? Well, in the sense that with it our attention is finally shifted from the past and the present towards the future. And, while Christian faith certainly has roots sunk deeply in the soil of the past, and while it is without doubt also a matter of supreme relevance to our understanding of and living in the present, it is above all *forward-looking* in its take on reality and in its dynamic. Unlike some eastern religious and philosophical versions of things, Christian faith does not entertain the idea that history is fundamentally a recycling of experience in which the same patterns and options return again and again, the same-old same-old, with little hope of escape or of anything radically new occurring. It does, of course, recognize that in nature and in the ways in which the patterns of



nature shape the patterns of human life (which, even in the age of imported foodstuffs, air-conditioning and 24 hour shopping, remains significant in some measure) there are things that go around and come around, and it embraces and celebrates these in the patterns of liturgy and the Christian calendar. But on the larger scale, it insists history is linear, not a perpetual cycle without identifiable beginning and end. History, Christian faith

insists, can and should be *narrated* – rehearsed as a story which, like all good stories, has a beginning, a middle and an end. And while the beginning and the end may need to be handled with care when we come to speak and write about them (they

necessarily lie way beyond any experience we can have or have had or will have) they can nonetheless be spoken of; appropriate things may be said about them, albeit in ways that stretch our imagination, as parts of a story which involves God as well as the world. And *how* the story ends, how it *will* end, is vital to the shaping of Christian faith and its disposition towards the present as well as the future.

And that's what the clause we are looking at this week is about. *This*, it tells us, is how the story will end, and not in some other way. Not in some meaningless, purely accidental entropy (the dissolution first of biological, then chemical, then physical systems, forces and processes) but at a time appointed by God, and in an ending which is no mere ending, but is itself a new beginning, a *transformation* of the cosmos rather than its gradual return to chaos and nothingness. And its transformation in the hands of a good and faithful creator who is sovereign, and whose sovereignty manifests itself in goodness and love and mercy towards what he has made. In the Old Testament this hope and expectation is cast simply as the Day of the LORD, the day when Israel's God, Yahweh, would finally step in to come and dwell among his people, bringing heaven and earth together, and putting the earth right in order to make it fit for that indwelling. As we saw in the previous study, for Christians the reality of the situation has moved on and become clearer, as Jesus is now understood to be the one into whose hands all things in heaven and earth have been committed, and the God who is coming, therefore, is none other than the God revealed most fully and finally in Jesus. In fact, in Jesus, God has *already* come, has already dwelt among his people, has already judged their sin. In Jesus God has already done the decisive thing that changes everything, and his return will be no radically new initiative, therefore, but the finishing of what he has begun. So, there are no



'spoiler alerts' where the Christian story is concerned! The ending is already known, already clear in its outline and character – because the main player in that ending is to be Jesus, and it's in his hands that the whole thing rests. And it is living life daily

in the light of that hope and expectation that shapes Christian discipleship from first to last, or should do so.

Odd comings and goings

We saw in our study of the ascension that in an important sense it was not the withdrawal of Jesus from the disciples into a remote absence, but his transition from one form of presence to another. Having been present with them in flesh and blood terms, being where they were, spending time with them, all this was vital to what Jesus had to do and did do. He participated in our 'space-time reality' and shared to the full in the benefits and the costs and limitations of that, not simply for the sake of sharing in it (as though it were an 'experience' not to be missed!), but in order to redeem and transfigure it from within. But being 'in the flesh' had its drawbacks, one of which was, of course, that Jesus could only be in one place at once, only be with a certain number of people at once, only be doing one thing at once. What the disciples came to realize was that, with his withdrawal to be 'with the Father', he was certainly not absent, but rather able to be with them in a far more intimate way – in precisely the way that God was 'with' them in fact. So, they went back initially to the Temple – the most concrete symbolic focus of God's presence – and



worshipped him there and, when they were eventually driven out of the Temple, they went out into every part of the known world (we shouldn't forget, even though the book of

Acts concentrates on the Mediterranean, that the apostles went deep into Africa and Asia too) fearlessly proclaiming the gospel in the confidence that Christ himself was with them 'in person' wherever they were, and 'to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20).

And what exactly was to happen at 'the end of the age'? Well, all sorts of things; but one thing was, again, that God would 'come to be present' with his people. Of course, God is always present everywhere, uncircumscribed by the limitations of our creaturely existence. But God's presence is not obvious or immediate. It is invisible

and intangible, known by faith rather than sight, and easily mocked or derided as unreal by those who choose to do so. And, furthermore, even God's lordship, his sovereign authority and power are, for now, veiled and ambiguous rather than apparent or obvious – again, a matter of faith rather than demonstration or deduction. And for Jesus to be 'with the Father' means, of course, that his own presence and lordship are also of a similar sort and apprehended by similar means.

The analogy has been used, unsurprisingly, of the sorts of 'presence' we get these days by means of remote communication – email, skype, texting and the rest. It's real enough, and we come to rely on it and live with it; but it lacks the full-blooded reality of engaging with someone face to face, someone in the room with us, their body



"When I said I like face to face meetings, I meant on Skype."

language as well as their words communicating a deeper and richer set of meanings. And what the Old Testament seems to look forward to at the 'end of the age' (which is, of course, the same as the Day of the LORD), and what Christians certainly came to look forward to, was a 'coming' of God to be with his people in which both his presence and his lordship would be of a quite different sort, an unveiled sort which would be apparent to everyone and anyone, and without any loss of intimacy (the way in which God knows us better and is closer to us even than we know and are close to ourselves) there would be a more solid, concrete form of God's presence which could be shared and enjoyed by all. For Christians, who already had things to say about an embodied reality of God, this naturally meant the expectation of a new 'coming' of Jesus, now in a way which was not less substantial, but more so, but which would, in a transformed world, be no bar to his being 'with us' always, his presence shared and enjoyed by all.

The fact that we cannot really even imagine such a circumstance is hardly surprising. After all, it will pertain in a world quite different from the one we know now, and our capacities for understanding and imagining alike are tied (for the most part

helpfully!) to the ways things work in the world we know. But this hope – that Jesus would ‘return’ (or ‘appear’) to be present to us in a world wholly transformed by his presence, and in which both his presence and his lordship would be known, acknowledged and enjoyed by all, was one of the earliest expressed Christian hopes. In 1 Corinthians 16:21 the apostle Paul drops a fragment of Aramaic into the middle of his Greek prose, indicating almost certainly a bit of liturgy or a familiar Christian ‘meme’ dating back to the time when the church was still Aramaic speaking: *Marana tha* – ‘Our Lord, come!!’ It’s a prayer for the return of Jesus, expressing that longing, that yearning for his return in glory and dominion which will mark history’s end and the world’s new beginning, and in and amidst which Jesus will be known once more ‘face-to-face’. The Day of the LORD at the ‘end of the age’, in other words, has now become the Day of Jesus and his ‘coming’.

Of angels, trumpets and pie-in-the-sky

It’s time to grasp the nettle and deal with questions about the nature of that return, and in particular imaginative and colourful versions of it based on Paul’s words in 1



Thessalonians 4:15-17: ‘For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will

descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are left will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever’. Taken at face value, this does seem to confront us with the prospect of some peculiar (and implausible) bits of choreography. But it has been (and remains) the bedrock of certain strands of Christian expectation. So, what should we do with it?

First, we should set alongside it some other things that Paul says about Christ’s return. So, for example, in Philippians 3:20-21 he writes: ‘our citizenship is in

heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself'. And then, again, in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53: 'What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable. ... We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality'. All three texts encourage and require us to use our imagination, of course, and we need to take care not to read any of them 'literally', but as imaginative pointers to the reality Paul is trying to evoke, a reality that necessarily lies beyond his or our natural range of experience or understanding. All three texts, though, point identifiably to certain things that we can *grasp* if not understand: first, Christ will be present in person; second, Christ will be exercising dominion; and third, everyone and everything will be transformed by his presence and dominion, from 'perishable' to 'imperishable'.



Now, the Greek term *parousia* which appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 is there typically translated as 'coming', which fits the imagery of the context nicely. Christ 'comes' in a very visible way, descending on the clouds. But the term can equally mean 'presence', and we should note that in other parts of the New Testament yet another term is used with reference to the circumstance of the Day of the Lord – *phaneroō*, the verb meaning 'to appear'. That Christ 'comes', that he is suddenly 'present' in a new way and that he 'appears' are certainly not incompatible states of affairs of course, but the latter two do not fit quite so neatly with, let alone compel, the imagined aerial antics of 1 Thessalonians 4. So, for instance, in the first letter of John we read: 'And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears (*ean*

phanerōthē) we may have confidence and not be put to shame at his presence (*parousia*) ... Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been made apparent (*ou pō ephanerōthē*); but we know that when he appears (*ean phanerōthē*) we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 2.28, 3.2).

Again, the themes of Jesus' personal presence and the transformation attendant upon it are central, as is the importance of beginning to live already, in the here and now, as though he were already present. Because in another sense he *is*, and what



the language of 'appearance' reminds us is that what may seem to us like a 'coming' or a 'return' is also in practice an unveiling or manifesting of what is already the case. Jesus is already 'present', albeit not bodily, and he is already Lord of all things in heaven and

earth. But whereas for now these things are ambiguous and hidden, on the Day of the Lord they will be laid bare in the transformation of all things.

Paul, too, can use the same imagery. So, for example, in Colossians 3, in urging believers to have their sights set already on things that are 'above' (i.e. the things of God and God's kingdom) rather than fixed on the things of this world, he writes: 'So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ... When Christ appears (*phanerōthē*), the one who is your life, then you too will appear with him in glory' (Col. 3:1, 4). As Tom Wright puts it helpfully: 'The promise is not that Jesus will simply reappear within the present world order; but that, when heaven and earth are joined together in the new way God has promised, then he will appear to us - and we will appear to him, and to one another, in our own true identity'. What we call heaven, we should remind ourselves, is not a 'place' within the created cosmos but is God's 'place' (however we choose to imagine that), the creator's own 'place', quite distinct from, yet closely related to our world and already intersecting it in all sorts of ways. God's promise, Wright reiterates, is that 'One day the two worlds will be integrated completely, and

will be fully visible to one another, producing that transformation of which both Paul and John speak' (*Surprised by Hope*, 148-9).

What, then, are we to make of Paul's vivid account in 1 Thessalonians, with its seeming insistence that Jesus will 'come' from somewhere 'up there', and believers, furthermore, be taken up to meet and greet him in mid-air? We've already noted that this account, too, affirms the basics which seem to be consistent across various New Testament texts – that Jesus will be personally present in a new way, and that his presence will be the occasion for (or perhaps occasioned by) a radical transformation and renewal of things such as that pictured in other texts as a 'new creation', the regeneration of the whole cosmos by a fresh initiative of the one who created it in the first place, and one in which God's reality and creaturely reality will come together in a wholly new and unimaginable way. Compared with this, the scooping up of believers (and, in some versions of Christian theology, thereby their removal from the world) to meet Jesus halfway seems not just odd but strangely unsatisfying as a prospect (even if there's pie). Can we take it seriously? Need we do so?

Well, of course, taking a text like this *seriously* and insisting on reading it *literally* are two quite different things. By far the most helpful interpretation of this text that I have read recently is that offered by Tom Wright, and I shall simply summarize it here. Paul, he reminds us, was two things: first he was a Roman citizen, and second he was a Pharisee steeped in the Jewish scriptures. And, if we are going to understand what Paul is doing in this otherwise very odd few verses, we need to remember both those things. In effect, Wright suggests, Paul is deploying a form of imaginative rhetoric (something which Jewish interpreters have always loved doing) to refer us to a circumstance that lies far beyond the scope in any case of any straightforward, literal mode of description. And in doing so he borrows from two biblical texts (i.e. texts from the Jewish bible or our Old Testament) and one familiar social and political situation, allowing them to intermingle and their meanings to cross-fertilize and ferment to suggest some things about the significance of the longed-for Day of the Lord when Christ would 'come' or 'appear', and heaven and

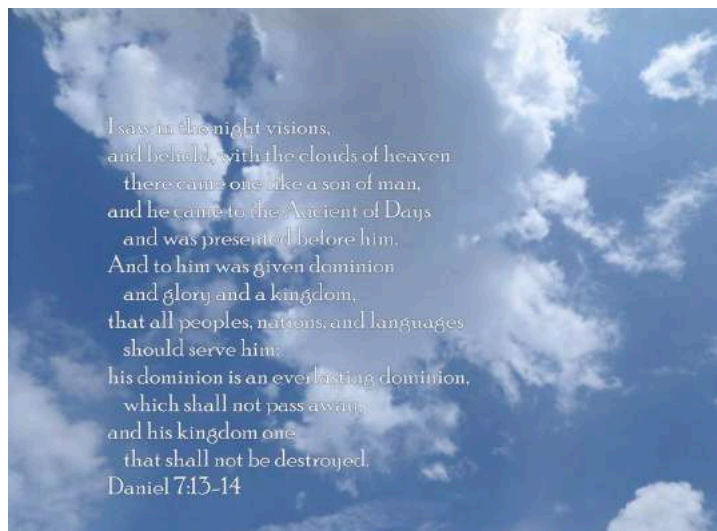
earth be joined together. First he refers to a particular use of the word *'parousia'* which, as we've seen, crops up in 1 Thessalonians 4. It was used in particular, Wright points out, to refer to the approach or arrival of a royal or imperial person



(the King/Queen or Emperor) on a formal visit to a colony or one of their territories. And, when such a visit was imminent, rather than simply waiting nervously behind the city gates, the habit was for

the citizens of this royal visitor to flood out of the settlement and meet him or her before they actually arrived, welcoming them and accompanying them on the final stage of their journey. This was basically a mark of respect, of homage, of explicit acknowledgment of the dominion of the one drawing near. Second, in the Jewish bible the classic text associated with the coming Day of the Lord, when God would show up in person to put the world to rights, was Daniel chapter 7 in which 'one like a human being' is elevated into the clouds of heaven and given entitlement to sit

with God in his glory. In its Old Testament context, this figure was symbolic of the righteous and faithful in Israel, who persevered in their faithfulness to the LORD despite the persecutions and predations of pagan invaders and occupiers. Jesus, in his ministry, applied this same



I saw in the night visions,
and beheld, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him:
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.
Daniel 7:13-14

symbolism to himself, as the one true Israelite who would be faithful all the way to the end. Paul, Wright suggests, is playing with the text, both evoking its association with Jesus and applying it to the faithful believers of Thessalonica who we know had been suffering persecution (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; the whole of chapter 3).

So, in his image of Christ in the clouds at his 'coming', and of believers going out to greet him (like the citizens of a Roman colony at the Emperor's approach) and being



drawn up into the clouds themselves, Paul is suggesting several things, none of which require smoke and mirrors, or even wires and pulleys. First, the one who is coming or going to appear 'at the end' is the Lord himself, the one who has dominion over all things. And, even though that dominion may be veiled for now, it will be

very apparent when he arrives, with all the power and authority of empire in his train. And that Lord is none other than Jesus. Second, he will come 'from' the place where he has been seated at the Father's right hand, a place in the clouds where he shares in God's glory. And, those who rush out to meet him will themselves, having been faithful in their allegiance to the gospel, like the faithful of Daniel 7, be 'taken up into the clouds' - vindicated for their perseverance to the end. But, let's note, in terms of the political analogy - the point of going out/up to greet Christ is not for him now to lead them away to some other world. It is precisely for them to welcome and accompany him as he comes to be with us in ours, and in coming utterly to transform it. This is no essentially other-worldly vision offering 'pie in the sky', but a potent demand to reimagine the implications of Christ's lordship over all things in heaven and on earth once the wraps are taken off! And that means a drastic change to the way we think about the same world here and now, and its value to us and to Christ, and how we should be living in it.

The third text that Wright thinks is being alluded to in Paul's bit of 'outrageous' playing with texts in 1 Thessalonians 4 is the account in Genesis 19 through to 32 where Moses, having ascended to the top of Mount Sinai to meet with God, comes back down the mountain again, emerging from the smoke or cloud which covered the top, accompanied by trumpet blasts and the deafening voice of God in the form of thunder, and brings the law with him on tablets of stone. This was the (slightly rocky) beginning of God's covenant with Israel, and perhaps Paul wants to

underline that the one in whom the same law is now written, as the prophet Jeremiah has it, on tablets of flesh rather than stone, ingrained in his very being and empowered to ingrain it in ours, the one whose life and death fulfils the first covenant and is the foundation of the new covenant, is the very one who will 'come down' to us to exercise his dominion over all things. And, if this text was indeed in Paul's mind as he penned 1 Thessalonians 4, it provides a convenient segue-way to the second part of our creedal clause; because when Moses came down from the mountain carrying the law, he found Israel already in an ungodly mess, and the first thing he had to do was to exercise God's judgment and get that mess sorted out.



... to judge and living and the dead

On the whole, the idea of a coming judgment at the end of the age is one the church doesn't make much of, perhaps feeling slightly awkward and uncomfortable about the notion, and realizing that it's unlikely to win friends and influence people either within the church or outside it. And, when it is mentioned, the whole thing tends to be laden with negative connotations and treated as something unfortunate to be dealt with briskly before being shut away again in the cupboard reserved for beliefs we're not really sure what to do with, and would probably prefer not to have to deal with at all. To some extent that's to do with the choreography and the props attendant on most artistic ways of picturing the whole thing – with a cosmic assize at which the righteous are filtered out for special treatment and the rest (usually the vast majority) are ushered through the door marked 'guilty as charged' and handed over to some unspeakable fate to be meted out by demons and goblins specially trained in methods of torture that make for some colourful and harrowing paintings. To some extent it's to do, I think, with unhelpful mischaracterizations of the God who will yield the judgment. And to a considerable extent, I'm fairly sure, it's to do with most of us being compelled to recognize that if judgment has something to do



with injustice, violence, arrogance, greed, lying, cruelty, oppression and a whole host of other nasty behaviours finally getting their come-uppance, none of us has clean hands, and none of us should be picking up stones, let alone having the gall to throw the first.

But in Scripture the coming, promised judgment of God is not something to be feared, mentioned only in hushed tones,

and if at all possible avoided. On the contrary, it is something good, something to be yearned for, celebrated and looked forward to. And it's not just human beings, but the whole of creation that is pictured as celebrating the coming judgment. 'Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth', enjoins the psalmist, 'break forth into joyous song and sing praises. ... Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD'. Why? Because 'he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity' (Ps. 98:4, 7-9). There's not much sense of awkwardness or discomfort there! The judgment of God is unequivocally good and is seen as a necessary part of what it would mean for God to be present with his people in a radically new way, a way which involved bringing heaven and earth together so that they overlap and integrate fully with one another. Because God is the holy one, and sin and evil of all sorts are things so opposed to him that he cannot bear them in his presence. As I said in a sermon a couple of weeks ago, evil is not a mere irritant to God, or something he has decided to have nothing to do with. Evil is better thought of as something utterly toxic to God, the very opposite of all that God is and stands for, and its presence is something he suffers and bears for the time being, but cannot allow to remain, and it can have no place in his kingdom - not a trace of it; for even a trace would poison and compromise and foul things, rendering them unfit for God's habitation together with us.

So – the belief in a final judgment of sin, an occasion when God will finally set the world right, expunging from it all trace of evil, is essential to biblical faith because what is at stake in it is precisely our understanding of God’s own character as sheer goodness and holiness, and God’s promise that, at the end of the age, heaven and earth will be joined, God dwelling together with us and we with God in a wholly new and unprecedented way. For that to happen the world itself will have to be wholly transformed, all that is good in it taken up and made new, all that is wrong with it redeemed and made good, and all trace of evil in it purged and made null and void. And that process, however we envisage it, will involve wickedness, exploitation, injustice and all the rest being shown in their true light and dealt with accordingly. And, if we find it hard to sympathize with the idea of judgment as something to be celebrated, we need only think of the most recent horror perpetrated upon the helpless or defenceless or vulnerable by someone abusing their power – whether that be cases of historic sexual abuse or the use of chemical weapons on civilian populations or whatever (the examples are plentiful) where we have been left outraged, and feeling deep down that somewhere someone needs to be brought to justice and the demands of justice satisfied. In such a circumstance, we might suppose, judgement would indeed be welcome.



Well, of course, in the complicated and messy moral and spiritual world we live in, such straightforward drawing of lines between good and evil, perpetrators and victims once we look at them closely are not always easy to draw, and certainly not with too thick a pencil. Again, none of us has entirely clean hands, and all of us live in glass houses susceptible to stone-throwing. But, as an imperfect indicator, that sort of moral outrage at least points to an underlying moral reality in which the triumph of good over evil, in our world, in our institutions, in our lives and relationships, can only be a good thing and something worthy of celebration. For the

Jews of the Old Testament, such a prospect was good news in a very immediate sense, as they (at one time or another in their history) found themselves the victims of invasion, injustice and oppression, persecution, whether at the hands of wayward rulers or at the hands of other nations. And their hope for God's coming was one pictured vividly and colourfully in terms of a courtroom scene where God would exercise judgment over the nations and vindicate Israel, or those within Israel who had been faithful to God's call and commandments. For them, the message that God's coming at the end of time would see God's justice and goodness sweeping through the land and finally established was indeed something to be looked forward to, something to be joyful about rather than afraid of, something to celebrate rather than seek to avoid.

There is irony here too, of course. Because even as we look forward to the day when God will so transform the world that evil will at last be excluded from it, judged not fit to enter the kingdom, as having no place in the new creation, we live with that abiding recognition that we ourselves are caught up in, implicated in, complicit in all manner of things – in our personal lives, in our relationships, in our institutions – that have at least a foot (and perhaps more than just a foot) in the camp of evil and its machinations and its manifestations. And we may suspect that the news that evil is to be judged and dealt with when God comes, that the transformation of the world to accommodate his coming will and must involve evil being dealt with and destroyed, while *good* news overall, may have some uncomfortable implications for us, that the shift from 'perishable' to 'imperishable' as Paul refers to it may involve some adjustments to us that are initially hard and perhaps even painful to live with.

For Christians, though, the coming of God at the end of the age is the coming of Jesus at the end of the age, and it is Jesus into whose hands the 'judgment' will be placed. Jesus – the one who has himself shared in our immersion in the world with its trials and tribulations and temptations and who knows what it is to struggle with those. Jesus – the one who we know is passionately committed to us, who is for us rather than against us, who offers us forgiveness in order that we may go and sin no more. Jesus – the one who has himself borne the judgment for our sins, and in whose

life of obedience sin itself has already been judged and put to death. Jesus – the one who is the first fruits of the new creation, by being united with whom we are already ‘put right’ with God, even though we continue to sin. Jesus – the one who sends his Spirit to convict us of sin’s reality, and to empower us to begin to anticipate the judgment here and now, as we bear witness to Jesus’ lordship, and as we seek to conform our lives, part by part, to the shape of that lordship, and so begin already the uncomfortable process of putting sin to death, refusing its seductive approaches, refusing it the handholds in our lives that it craves, and excluding it from God’s world.