

THE DAY CHRIST RETURNED

(A narrative)

It wasn't just an "ordinary" ordinary day. It was the *most* ordinary day...that day the Lord came back.

It would seem that Carl should have had at least *some* kind of premonition as he arose that morning.... but had he done so, then God's promise would have been a lie:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only (Matthew 24:36).

So, Carl arose as usual, still feeling a little tired and still not used to these early hours, even after two years. Carl worked for a dairy, delivering milk to area grocery stores.

He decided that he would try not to waken his wife, Marge. "She needs the rest," he thought, "what with running around after our active little daughter all day." As he got up quietly, he looked down at his still sleeping wife and smiled. Marge was a Christian, and she so desperately wanted him to accept Christ. In fact, they had had a long discussion about it just a few days ago. And then, following that, it seemed like last Sunday the preacher had preached right at *him*!

Of course, that wasn't actually true, he admitted with a smile as he started his breakfast. "After all, I wasn't the only one there. But I guess the shoe *did* fit. What was that he preached on? Oh, yes, he preached on Christ coming again."

Carl had enjoyed most of the sermon. He had especially enjoyed the stories of those who had tried to set the date of Christ coming – how some had donned white robes on the day set and had climbed to the tops of houses, trees, and mountains to be ready to meet the Lord. He had been impressed with the biblical proof that Christ *was* coming again, and that, according to the "signs" mentioned in the Bible, it *could* be most any time.

"I do think, though," thought Carl, as he chewed on his bacon and eggs, "that the preacher was being a little too dramatic when he said Christ could come in the next five minutes." And he smiled as he thought, "But He didn't."

"Of course, Marge and the preacher are probably right," he admitted as he put his dishes in the dishwasher. "I don't really know what I'm waiting on. Someday I'll take that step and become a Christian."

Just before he left, he peeked in on their sleeping daughter, Julie. Love welled up in his heart as he looked on her angelic face. Then he went to kiss Marge goodbye. As she returned his kiss sleepily, he smiled to think how happy she would be when he accepted Christ. "What are *you* smiling about?" she asked. "Oh, nothing," he said. And he went out the door.

Little did he know that he would never see them again.

For the next hour or so, Carl was too busy to think of much more than his job. After checking his load, he started his deliveries.

It was a beautiful day. This was one thing he liked about his job – he like to see the world wake up each morning. He liked to see it bright and fresh after a night's rest – and before it had a chance to become tired and soiled again. He also enjoyed the quietness. He got a chance to think between deliveries.

But for some reason, the preacher's sermon from last Sunday kept coming back to him. A Scripture he quoted suddenly forced itself into his mind:

For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking...
(Matthew 24:38).

He passed a church building and noticed the rice scattered around – evidence of a wedding the day before – and he thought again:

"...marrying and giving in marriage..." (Matthew 24:38).

He passed a home with a sign on the front door: "Night Workers. Please Do Not Disturb." And he thought of another verse from the preacher's sermon:

There will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left
(Luke 17:34).

He passed a bakery...and he thought:

There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:35).

As his route took him near the edge of town, he saw a group of farmworkers on their way into the field. And he thought:

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left
(Luke 17:36).

In spite of himself, Carl gave a little shudder and then pushed these thoughts to the back of his mind. "Why am I getting so morbid? If Christ hasn't come in two thousand years, why should He suddenly choose now? After all, I'm still strong and healthy, and I've got a lot of living to do... I should be thinking about *living*, not the *end* of everything!"

It really *was* a beautiful day. All the people he saw smiled and waved or said, "Good morning!" He thought, "On a beautiful day like today, it's hard to realize that there are so many troubles in the world – famine and war and sickness and death. On a day like this, it's simply good to be alive!"

And this, too, should have sounded a warning:

While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1st Thessalonians 5:3).

But it sounded no warning to Carl that day.

He continued on his way, loading the cases from store to store, the same as every morning.

But not quite the same...

There was really no advance warning at all when it happened. Generally, there is a feeling in the air when something is about to happen, but there was nothing. Many times, animals, with some sort of special "sixth sense" are nervous when tragedy is about to strike...but there was nothing.

Everything was as usual. There was no warning. Life – with all its good and its evil – was going on as usual.

And then it happened!

...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1st Thessalonians 5:2).

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:27).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1st Thessalonians 4:16).

Carl was passing a cemetery when it happened. The shout traveled through the atmosphere faster than the speed of sound or light. It was a

shout that penetrated to the core of the earth...to the depths of the ocean...to the center of a man's soul!

Carl drove his truck into a tree...but it didn't matter. He had never before heard the voice of God, but there was no question in his mind as to what this was. Neither had he ever seen Jesus, but again, somehow, he knew exactly Who this was and what was happening. "No! No! No!" his thoughts began...

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him (Revelation 1:7).

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2nd Thessalonians 1:7-8).

The sky was filled with color – the blue of the atmosphere was blotted out by the whiteness of the cloud, the glory of the angels, the appearance of fire – and all of this was almost blotted out by the magnificence of Jesus Himself!

Now the earth began to tremble – and its surface began to be filled with fissures. In the cemetery nearby, the graves began to open. The dead started to come forth from here, there, and everywhere. Their bodies were unlike anything Carl had ever seen. They were flesh, but *not* flesh. Solid, but *not* solid. For some reason, the word "imperishable" came to his mind. It was no surprise to him that some looked happy...and some did not. Carl could also feel that something was happening to him!

...an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed (1st Corinthians 15:51-52).

Carl was now running. He was not far from home, and his only thoughts were to reach that haven. He was in a daze. Faintly, he could hear the sound of a trumpet – a sound that chilled him to the bone. Suddenly, he was aware of many glorious bodies rising into the air.

It was hard now to keep his feet under him, for the tremors were increasing. In his head, he was aware of the most horrifying cry he had ever heard – a tearing, searing cry of a soul in agony. It was some time before he realized that this cry...*was coming from himself!*

He passed several standing dazed whose funerals he had attended. But this didn't surprise him. *Nothing* surprised him now.

He passed a funeral procession that had stopped in the middle of the road. The back door of the hearse was open. The lid of the casket was thrown back. It was empty!

He sped on. Around him the cries and wails and shrieks increased. And from above him came the sound of singing – a glorious refrain or rejoicing and triumph. But it brought no comfort to Carl's soul. He glanced up just once. Just a few were still rising into the air.

He ran and ran. He forced one foot after the other. He passed block after block. And suddenly...he was home!

He burst through the front door and began running from room to room. He shouted, "Marge! Julie! Marge! Julie! There was Julie's favorite doll on the floor. Marge's housecoat was still lying on the chair beside the bed. There was evidence of Marge's housework everywhere. He burst into the kitchen. The dishes in the dishwasher were still warm. It was almost as if...almost as if...

And suddenly he knew...

They were ready.

He raced back into the front yard and looked up, but now all was dark. He was alone...alone...alone...in his sin.

Suddenly the earth shuddered, and he realized that it was an old machine that had served its purpose – an old machine that was running down. He looked up again. The sun was running down too. Now he could stare at without squinting. It became dimmer and dimmer. There was a chill in the air. The stars and the planets became visible at midday. But nothing was motionless. It was all darting here and darting there. Everything was going crazy. The universe was literally flying to pieces!

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky

vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:12-17).

The thought finally struck Carl that he must now face God, and it filled his soul with terror. "No! No! No! I'm not ready!" he shrieked. "I must hide! I must hide!" Stumbling blindly, he made his way back into the house and down the steps into the basement. Huddling himself in the darkest corner, he continued to mutter, almost insanely, "I must hide! I must hide!"

But there was no hiding. Carl was at that moment riding on a huge burning ball streaking through the heavens. Just one small command from the voice of God, and this world was no more.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2nd Peter 3:10).

A moment of intense light. A moment of intense heat.
Then...darkness...then...silence.

When Carl raised his head again, he knew exactly where he was and why he was there.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad (2nd Corinthians 5:10).

Carl knew that he was with all the people who had ever lived upon the earth...and that all would be judged.

He knew, too, what his fate would be. His body and soul would be destroyed in hell, in the lake of fire.

...they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire
(Revelation 20:13-15).

Then, in his heart of hearts, he heard a name being called. It was his. It was his turn to receive sentence. He knew what it would be.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." . . . Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46).

CLOSING:

Of course, this story isn't true. It can't be. Christ hasn't come yet. But He *is* coming. And the wicked and the Carls of the world will not get to go to heaven with Him.

The apostle Paul warned the people of Athens:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Christ *is* coming. He could come *today*. When He comes, everyone will know it. When Christ comes, everyone will know where he stands.

Where do you stand?