

This We Believe

“The Second Coming”



Statement 11

Statement of faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America

“We believe in the personal premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this “Blessed Hope” has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the Believer.”



His Place

3079 East 16th Avenue
Post Falls, ID 83854
208.777.9654
www.hisplace.org

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Unless otherwise noted all scripture quotes are from the *New International Version* of the Holy Bible.

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QUESTIONS

1. What are the practical implications of believing that Christ is coming again?
2. When He does come, how will it be different than when He came to earth the first time?
3. It is easy for us to get distracted and lose perspective on eternity. How can we “encourage” each other and help maintain our focus on eternity?
4. If you knew Jesus was coming back this week, what would you “for sure” do? Does that indicate anything about our current values?

There is perhaps no time in human history when there has been so much fascination with the future. In the 19th century most people, whether farmer or merchant, imagined that the world would continue for their children very much like it had for them. But change occurred so rapidly in the 20th century that we became used to change or even fascinated by it. An entire new occupation arose as “Futurists” became not only popular, but almost a necessity for those needing to understand the future in order to stay ahead in the business world.

In the midst of all the excitement and wonder there is also great fear. The technological and medical advancements create very real moral dilemmas and physical dangers. There is the possibility of more sophisticated crime, the loss of personal rights and privacies and even mass genocide. In the midst of great dreams and hopes there are some real nightmares.

In addition, men and women became increasingly fascinated by the concept of life after death. And there are all kinds of predictors and “testimonies” of what the future holds for those who die. What does the future hold?

The Bible talks a lot about the future. There is much we know and there is also much that we do not know. There are some pretty good scholars and theologians who have significant disagreement in many of these areas. And let me emphasize, they are still brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is very important in any discussion of eschatology (the study of the future) to remember that while there is significant disagreement among evangelical believers on some of the details of “when” and “how” the Lord may come, there is no disagreement on “if” and “why” He will come. That means that the bottom line is still the same. He is coming and we need to be living with an eternal perspective.

With that in mind let’s begin our discussion of statement eleven in our statement of faith.

“We believe in the personal premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this ‘Blessed Hope’ has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer.”

Let’s take those items one by one and then ask, “So what?”

THE RETURN OF CHRIST IS PERSONAL

(Matthew 16:27, 24:1-25:46, 26:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 12:40,17:22-37, 21: 5-36; Acts 1:4-11, 3:20; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10,2:10, 3:13, 4:13-5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 6:14-14; 2 Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9; 2 Peter 1:6, 3:3-12; 1 John 2:28; Jude 14; Revelation 1:7,16:15, 19-22)

WE BELIEVE CHRIST IS COMING BACK IN PERSON

*“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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 1:9-11***

The prophecies about Christ’s return are not about a spiritual presence of the Lord. They are about the actual literal return of Jesus Christ—in person. In the Old Testament there are many prophecies about the Messiah coming. Prophecy stipulated that the Messiah must be of the tribe of Judah (**Genesis 49:10**), of the house of David (**Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 33:21**), born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14**), in Bethlehem of Judea (**Micah 5:2**), that He must die a sacrificial death (**Isaiah 53:1-12**), by crucifixion (**Psalms 22:1-21**), rise again from the dead (**Psalms 16:8-11**). It also said that He

Eternity gives us a focus and purpose. It is important to understand that Christ is coming and we want to be ready. However, we want to be purposeful, not distracted. For some, the discussion of eschatology can lead to a fixation of watching current events to try and pinpoint specific times, dates, or persons spoken about in prophecy. This can lead to becoming pre-occupied with details that the Bible is not too specific on. Every few years there is a new fixation resulting in panic or distraction from the real business of being kingdom builders. Invariably in such cases some teacher gets wealthy or famous, believers panic, and the name of Christ is ultimately discredited.

Eschatology is not about fascination with the signs of the end of the age, who the anti-christ is, speculation about the European common market, the celestial anomalies, or even Y2K. It is about how we live, why we live, and who we live for. It’s about the Savior who was promised in Genesis, who interrupted history by coming to earth and redeeming His own on the cross, who rose bodily from the grave, and has promised to come and take us home. It’s about wanting to spread that news to all who will hear so they too will join us in eternity. It’s about living as members of the kingdom. There is a time coming, and we believe it could be any time, when Christ will come and establish His kingdom forever.

What if it is today?

ward to Christ's coming is the motivation to live pure lives. The Savior we look for is a Holy God who died to rescue us not only from the penalty of sin, but also from its overwhelming power in our lives.

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." **1 John 3:2-3**

Someone has wisely asked, "How would it change our lives if we knew that Christ was coming this year?" What if we knew He was coming this month, or this week? What if it were today? Living in light of eternity means that we live with eternal perspectives, eternal values, and eternal priorities, because eventually all of what is here will be gone and only what is eternal matters.

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."
Colossians 3:1-4

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."
1 Corinthians 3:11 –15

would come to earth on the clouds of heaven (**Daniel 7:13**), as judge and Lord. We read in **1 Peter 1:10-11** that the prophets themselves did not clearly understand the two different advents of Christ. It was difficult for them to understand how Christ could be both the suffering servant and the conquering King.

Having the advantage of looking back through history, we now see that many of the prophecies were fulfilled in the first coming (advent) of Christ, while many remain to be fulfilled when He comes again. The New Testament verifies that Jesus' claims to be the Messiah based on fulfilling the prophecies regarding his birth, life, death and resurrection. It also clearly points us to the future fulfillment of the rest of the prophecies when He will come again.

Jesus' second coming will be like the first coming in that it will be real and personal, but there is a significant difference in the way he will come as well. The first time Christ came, He came as the suffering servant and the perfect sacrifice for our sin. The second time he comes He will come as the conquering King and righteous judge.

"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."
Matthew 16:26-27

"...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time--He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords."
1 Timothy 6:14 (NAS)

"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and

on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which 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. Revelation 19:11-16

Like the first advent, His second coming is indeed personal. Unlike the first advent it will not necessarily be peaceful. Jesus will come to welcome His children and finalize their redemption by taking them to be with Him, but He is also coming to judge and to condemn those who are not.

The second point of this statement declares that . . .

THE RETURN OF CHRIST IS PRE-MILLENNIAL

We need to take a little time here and define the three primary positions regarding the millennium.

POST-MILLENNIALISM

The word means "after the millennium", the 1,000 year reign of Christ. This view of the future understands the millennium to be a present spiritual reality in the hearts of believers, but its most notable tenet is its' assertion that the millennium will be brought about gradually as the gospel is preached throughout the world in this age. The power of the Gospel will be so pervasive as to bring the world to a place of substantial peace and harmony after which Christ will return, setting up his kingdom and creating a new

Lastly, statement 11 teaches us that...

THE RETURN OF CHRIST IS PRACTICAL

What we believe about the future impacts the way we live today. While there may be disagreement on when and exactly how Christ will return, the fact that He will return carries tremendous significance.

First, the promise of His return brings great comfort. This world is not all there is. For the unbeliever, this world is as good as it gets. For the believer, this world is as bad as it gets. There is tremendous peace in knowing that the final outcome is established. God is in control, and we know who wins! We live in a world that is tainted, even dominated by sin. We sometimes live in fear of crime and injustice. There is violence all around, and there is the pain of broken families, incurable diseases, growing hostility to God's truth, and the results of our own sinful failures. But just as the agony of the disciples at Christ's death was transformed into joy at the resurrection, so the pain of this life and sin will be transformed by the joy of the coming of our Savior.

"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

The second great significance for us who look for-

tribulation, I believe that the Bible teaches that we must live ready. In other words, Christ coming is imminent—it could occur at any time.

Every generation has thought that Christ would come in their lifetime. It could be today.

“According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” **1 Thessalonians 4:15-18**

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.” **Mathew 24:36-41**

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

heaven and a new earth. Support for this passage is taken from passages such as the parable of the mustard seed (**Matthew 13:31-32**), which they would say teaches the gradual spread of the kingdom on earth. This teaching was quite prevalent at the turn of the 20th Century, but the great world wars brought serious confusion and doubt that the world would gradually and consistently move towards peace.

AMILLENNIALISM

This word means no millennium. In very simplified form, the proponents of this interpretation believe there is no earthly reign of Christ after his second coming. These people believe that the millennium or kingdom of God is a spiritual reality which exists currently as the rule of Christ in the hearts of the believers. These people would say that the Old Testament prophecies for Israel have been fulfilled spiritually in the church and that the consummation of history will come about after a time of great apostasy and a period of tribulation.

PRE-MILLENNIALISM

Pre-Millennialists believe that the 1000 year reign in **Revelation 20** is a literal physical reign of Christ on the earth. The earth will experience the beneficial rule of Christ and the absence of Satanic influence until the very end of the period. Most Pre-Millennialists would view the kingdom of God as having begun at the first advent and being culminated by his second coming and the establishment of the millennial kingdom.

The official position of the Free Church is the pre-millennial return of Christ.

A third significant truth declared in statement eleven is that...

THE RETURN OF CHRIST IS IMMINENT

This doctrine states that the return of Christ could be at any time. It might be helpful here to try and build some

background by building somewhat of a timeline.

First, Christ made it clear that the kingdom of God was inaugurated in his first coming. He declared “**The kingdom of God is at hand**” (**Mathew 4:17**). Jesus talked much about the kingdom and often used parables to describe it. In **Matthew 13** we find a number of parables that explain some things about the current status of the kingdom.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

During this present time there is a varied reception of the truth of God. The truth of the Gospel sometimes falls on hard ground, sometimes on thorny ground, sometimes on rocky, and sometimes on very fertile ground, producing fruit.

PARABLE OF THE TARES

During the present age of the kingdom there will be (and are) some false professions of faith. Along with the parable of the sower, this parable indicates that some may look very much like they are saved, but they may not be. All of this will not be sorted out until the time of harvest at the end of the age. In **Matthew 7:15-27** Jesus taught the same thing, warning that there will be many who somehow thought they were part of Christ’s family and kingdom, but were unfortunately mistaken.

PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

This parable teaches the continual growth of the kingdom from a very small beginning to a large, even global, movement.

PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

During this time evil sometimes mixed with the good in the kingdom of God. It is very difficult to distinguish and can even become pervasive.

HIDDEN TREASURE

Because this parable talks about the treasure being

certain things happen. The man of lawlessness must first be revealed, but for him to be revealed the one holding him back must be taken away. It is interesting that two pronouns are used. In verse 6 a neuter pronoun is used so that some “thing” that restrains the man of sin must be removed. In verse 7 a masculine pronoun is used so that some “one” must be removed first. My belief, and that of many others, is that the person who restrains evil is the Holy Spirit and the thing is the church. Since the Holy Spirit indwells believers, if the restrainer is to be removed, then either the believers must go with Him or He must be removed from the believers. Since the Bible teaches that believers cannot be “disindwelt” by the Holy Spirit, the conclusion is that the church or the believers are removed before the man of sin is freed to be as sinful as possible.

MID-TRIBULATION

This view is similar to the pre-tribulation view except that the proponents of this view believe that the great tribulation is really the last half of the 7 year tribulation period. This period is the time where natural disasters are actually replaced by the unique divine intervention of God. The seventh trumpet announces the wrath of God described in **Revelation 16**. Therefore, the church is removed before the time of God’s wrath.

POST-TRIBULATION

Those holding to a post-tribulation view teach that the church will be present during the tribulation period and that immediately after the rapture is the second coming of Christ.

The Evangelical Free Church’s position is pre-millennial, and all three of these positions are pre-millennial. I lean strongly toward the pre-tribulation rapture but there are great men and women who believe otherwise.

Whatever conclusion that you come to regarding the

am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” **John 14:1-3**

Christ will establish his earthly kingdom for a literal 1000 year reign of peace. During this time Satan and the other fallen angels are chained, to be loosed once more at the end of this millennium and lead one final rebellion before being judged and cast into the lake of fire for eternity (**Revelation 20**). At this point the current heavens and earth are destroyed and Christ creates a new heaven and earth (**Revelation 21**). His kingdom will be completely established and He will rule for eternity.

What does all this have to do with the “immanency” of Christ’s return? Again we must discuss some terms.

Among evangelicals there is no debate about the fact that Christ is coming again. There is, however, some significant debate over the timing of the rapture. There are 3 primary positions regarding the rapture.

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

PRE-TRIBULATION

Those holding to a pre-tribulation rapture believe that the church will be removed prior to the tribulation. There are a number of arguments used to support this view. Two of the more significant ones are listed below.

The tribulation is called “the great day of his wrath” (**Revelation 6:17**). In **1 Thessalonians** Paul tells these believers that they are not appointed to face wrath (**1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9**).

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 sets up a significant chronological sequence. The day of the Lord cannot come until

hidden, some feel this parable is about the nation of Israel, currently hidden as to its national identity and blessing from God, but nevertheless bought by Christ and part of His kingdom.

PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

This parable speaks of the church, those redeemed at great price—the precious blood of Christ.

THE DRAGNET

At the end of this age, there is a judgment and a final permanent separation of the saved from the unsaved.

What we see today is the kingdom of God existing and growing much like Jesus described in those parables.

In other places in the New Testament we are given some signs that indicate the beginning of the end of the age. They describe a change in the current status in the kingdom. In **Matthew 24** there are nine signs that are given.

1. False Christ's (**24:5**)
2. Wars and rumors of wars (**24:6**)
3. Famines (**24:7**)
4. Pestilences (**24:5**)
5. Earthquakes (**24:7**)
6. Martyrs (**24:9,10**)
7. False prophets (**24:11**)
8. Increased wickedness and lack of love of God (**24:12**)
9. The Gospel preached to the entire world (**24:14**)

Another feature signifying the end of this present age will be the growing apostasy within the professing church. In **chapters two and three of 2 Peter** we see that false teachers within the church will lead people to deny the deity and sovereignty of Christ (**2:1**), departure from the written Word of God towards personal opinion (**2:2**), independence from authority (**2:10**), claiming authority over angels and demons (**2:10-12**), moral debauchery and turning from actually living the truth (**2:2-22**).

The Bible describes that inside and outside the church, there is increasing wickedness including moral decay and increased neglect of God's revealed Word and will. While Christ's kingdom is expanding, there is increased opposition. Eventually God Himself calls a halt and personally intervenes in human history.

In **1 Corinthians 15** and **1 Thessalonians 4** we read about the resurrection of the dead in Christ and in **1 Thessalonians 4** we are told that those who are alive at the time will be "caught up" to meet Him in the air. This "taking up" is commonly called the "rapture" of the church. While that term is not found in the Bible it is a term used to describe this truth that those alive will be "caught up in the air".

Before Christ sets up His eternal reign, there is also a time of great trauma coming on the earth. The Bible speaks of it as the "tribulation". There is some confusion about this time and some of that comes from the confusion of the term "tribulation". In its simplest definition tribulation simply means trouble or difficulty. The Bible teaches that because of sin mankind will always encounter trouble or hardship in life. It is actually part of the curse that God pronounced because of Adam and Eve's sin (**Genesis 3**). In the midst of Job's trial he declared that "man is born into trouble" (**Job 5:7**). Even Jesus promised his disciples that in the world they would have tribulation or trouble (**John 16:33**). These times of trouble are a part of life in a "fallen" world.

In contrast to these general troubles, the Bible speaks about a future time of tremendous disasters and even divine judgments unlike any time in the previous history of mankind. Early in the Old Testament and through the prophets God predicted a time of tremendous tribulation. Jeremiah predicts a time when there will be a partial return of Israel to the promised land to be followed by a time of trouble (**Jeremiah 30:1-10**). According to **Daniel 9**, this time of trouble is actually divided into two three and one half year periods, with the last three and one half being a time of

"great tribulation."

In the New Testament Jesus describes this tribulation in **Matthew 24:15-29**. **Revelation 6-18** describes the unfolding of this chapter of history as a scroll with seven seals to be opened. Each seal is a progression in the judgment of God, and increased disaster and torment on the earth. This time of tribulation will be so severe that if Christ does not return and intervene, all of mankind will be destroyed.

*"For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible." **Matthew 24: 21-24***

Finally, in the last chapter of human history, Christ does return and intervene. He comes again in great power and glory to judge the earth, to establish His kingdom, to usher in eternity, and to put an end to history or time as we know it. At His first coming the reception of His rule was voluntary. At His second coming it will no longer be a matter of choice.

*"...For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" **Romans 14:10b-11***

He also comes to fulfill his promise to reclaim His own and to welcome them to the place that He has prepared for them to be with Him for eternity.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I