

Any 2,000 Year Old Disciples Alive Today?

By [Charles Coty](#)

As I listened to the sermon Sunday morn, I was immediately struck by the impact and foreshadowing of the following verse:

- *And it had been revealed to him [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Luke 2:26 (NKJV)*

Just as the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not taste death before witnessing the advent of Christ, Jesus, near His ministry's end, through the revelation of the self-same Spirit, made a similar prognostication regarding the certainty that some of His devout followers would not die until they witnessed His return.

- *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Matthew 16:27-28 (NKJV)*

Although Jesus made it clear that He was unaware of the exact day or hour of His return, ([Mt 24:36](#); [Acts 1:7](#)) He made certain to warn His followers of the season. He employed *time referents* ([Mt 24:34](#)) as well as the analogy of *childbirth* ([Mt 24:8](#); [1Thes 5:3](#)), thus readying *them* (not us) for the last day's events ([Acts 2:16-21](#); [Heb 1:1-2](#); [James 5:3](#); [2Pet 3:3](#)) that would befall that sinful and adulterous *first century* generation ([Mt 23:34-36](#)).

The Gospel of Mark recorded it this way:

- *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Mark 8:38-9:1 (NKJV)*

I've read the commentaries and I've perused my [Reformation Study Bible's](#) footnotes. I've listened to the explanations that Jesus is supposedly referencing His transfiguration, His ascension, the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost or all three. Saying they wouldn't die for the next 6 days (transfiguration) to two months (Ascension and then Pentecost) seems that this profound proclamation could hardly be worthy of Jesus' "*Assuredly I say to you*" emphasis. Not much of a stretch to make such an emphatic statement that only some of them would still be alive for another 60 days! The reality is that all but Judas were still very much alive many years after the inauguration of the Church at Pentecost. (At this point it may be noteworthy to consider the fact that [Christ's entourage](#) consisted of about 100 and was rarely confined to the twelve)

I never cease to be amazed how strong paradigms can be. It seems that only hardened presuppositions can force such weak interpretive conclusions. But I don't cast stones here. I was in the same boat for 33 years before I allowed these passages to penetrate my defense mechanisms. The Word is clearly active and alive and pierces to the core of our very being—and if we allow it, it will reform our minds—even possibly causing us to come to some unpopular conclusions. ([Jn 15:18](#); [Heb 4:12](#); [Rom 12:2](#)) Truth will indeed [set us free](#) but it may also set us apart from the majority whose mission seems to be conformation to the status quo and to the "[private interpretations](#)" of man. It should be a mark of the spiritually mature that a passionate pursuit of truth can coexist within the context of peace and unity. But I digress.

Comparing Matthew 16:27-28 with the Olivet Discourse

The above two texts state that Jesus was to come in *glory*, with His *angels*, with *rewards* (judgment) and with *power* in *His Kingdom*. Compare this to the [Olivet Discourse](#) passages of Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. You may be amazed to find out that all the constituent elements of the Olivet are contained in these "some standing here will not taste death" passages. Therefore, as long as reason triumphs over presupposition, it is logical to assume that Matthew 16:27-28 refers to Jesus' return. Coming to this realization may put us in a very uncomfortable situation, where we recognize that our paradigm may be in conflict with Scripture.

1) Christ was to come in <i>glory</i> Matthew 16:27; Luke 9:26	1) Christ was to come in <i>glory</i> Matthew 24:30
2) Christ was to come with <i>angels</i> Matthew 16:27	2) Christ was to come with <i>angels</i> Matthew 24:31
3) Christ was to come in <i>judgment</i> Matthew 16:27	3) Christ was to come in <i>judgment</i> Matthew 24:28-31; 25:31-34
4) Christ and the kingdom were to come in <i>power</i> - Mark 8:38	4) Christ and the kingdom were to come in <i>power</i> - Luke 21:27-32
5) Some of the disciples were to <i>live</i> until His coming - Matthew 16:28	5) Some of the disciples were <i>to live</i> until His coming - Luke 21:16-18
6) Some of the disciples were to <i>die</i> before His coming - Matthew 16:28	6) Some of the disciples were to <i>die</i> before His coming - Luke 21:16
7) Christ would be ashamed of the disciple's <i>generation</i> - Mark 8:38	7) All of this would occur in the disciple's <i>generation</i> - Matthew 24:34

So now what are we to do? This changes the equation a great deal and Scriptural reorientation takes time. But don't lose heart. Truth will not only bring us closer to Jesus, but it will yield the peace of God in due time. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus seems to be more concerned with our reaction and acquiescence to the truth when it is presented than the fact that for a season we may have languished in error.

We are emboldened by the faith of Simeon and yet those (yours truly) that by the same faith in the Spirit's revelation, who believe that Jesus was faithful to do exactly as He promised, are considered outside the mainstream. How have we traveled so far? Why don't we take Jesus at face value, and why are those that do, considered to be in error or worse, heretical? Could it possibly be because we misunderstand the New Covenant promises in much the same way as the first century Jews, who mistakenly developed expectations of the Messiah becoming their physical earthly deliverer? The Kingdom was not and is not [flesh and blood](#) but much of the verbiage identifying the New Covenant promises seems to be erroneously translated into the physical realm i.e. *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."* (Rev 21:4)

Jesus did not offer clandestine words about his parousia and the consummation of that which was inaugurated at His death/resurrection. He told His followers that He would come within a generation ([Mt 24:34](#)) before His disciples had finished going through all the cities of Israel ([Mt 10:23](#)) and before they all died (Mt 16:28). As the generation wore on after Jesus' ascension, and as the [destruction of Jerusalem](#) in [AD 70](#) became ever so [imminent](#), we see the language intensify with time phrases like *"at hand"* ([1Pet 4:7](#)), *"soon"* ([Rev 1:1,3](#)), *"in a very little while"* ([Heb 10:37-38](#)) and *"it is the last hour"* ([1John 2:18](#)). Why would these time texts grow

in this sense of near term inevitability if they were not pointing to an impending event but one that was yet thousands of years future?

In the Bible's last chapter of the last book we see this sense of imminence ever so clearly in the following phrases: "*things which must soon take place*" (Rev 22:6); "*I am coming soon*" (Rev 22:7); "*for the time is near*" (Rev 22:10); "*Behold I am coming soon*" (Rev 22:12); "*surely I am coming soon*" (Rev 22:20). Peter, in dealing with the last days scoffers who apparently were causing the faithful to lose heart (2 Pet 3:3-4), felt the dissension caused by those that insisted that Jesus' "delay" (37 years from Jesus' "This Generation" proclamation) was entirely too long. What did he tell them? How were they comforted in their distresses? "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness...*" In other words, Jesus was right on schedule. Matter of fact, 2Pet 3:9 implies exactly the opposite of what has been traditionally reasoned—as though by one stroke of the pen, Peter renders his own and all other time references, irrelevant.

My Dream for the Next Quarter Century

My hope is that within the next 20-25 years, we will begin to appropriate the New Covenant promises that were still future to the NT authors and recognize the timely faithfulness of our Savior. Today it's in vogue to believe the promises given to the first century faithful are finally imminent. But why now, if Jesus' return was supposed to be within a generation of His crucifixion? After nearly 2,000 years how can *shortly* all of a sudden mean *shortly*? Is it possible for something to be "*at hand*" in every generation since the promise was given? Please excuse my facetiousness but are some of Jesus' disciples still living today?

Believe it or not, the Mormon church combines two passages from Scripture, Matthew 16:28, "*there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*", and Jesus' statement in John 21:23 "*If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?*", with two from their documents, one in the *Book of Mormon* (3 Nephi 28:4-6, 28-31) and the other from *Doctrine and Covenants* (Section 7:1-3), into the belief that the Apostle John is still alive today.

Bill McKeever from the [Mormonism Research Ministry](#), dedicated to the task of challenging the claims of Mormonism since 1979, made the following observations:

Joseph Smith claimed the Apostle John (as well as Peter and James) appeared to him and Oliver Cowdery and bestowed upon them the Melchizedek priesthood. Just when this took place is not exactly known although LDS historians insist that it had to have taken place after Smith claimed to have seen John the Baptist on May 15, 1829. Mormon historian B.H. Roberts estimates that it took place sometime between May 15, 1829 and April of 1830. Not only is the time in which John made his appearance a matter of debate, but the manner in which John appeared also seems to be one of confusion among LDS leaders.

Tenth LDS Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith states that Peter and James appeared as resurrected beings, but John is not so described. He wrote, "*There is a statement in the Gospel of John, written of his gospel account, which intimates that the Lord gave him power to remain until the second coming. There is a revelation in the Doctrines and Covenants, Section 7, which confirms this thought*" (*Answers to Gospel Questions* 3:93).

McKeever continued:

How these mere men could maintain this longevity is explained in verses 37 and 38. Here, the writer inquires of the Lord how these three are able to live so long. Verses 38-40 state: "*Therefore, that they might not taste of death there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not suffer pain nor sorrow save it were the sins of the world. Now this change was not*

equal to that which shall take place in the last day; but there was a change wrought upon them...And in this state they were to remain until the judgment day of Christ."

Although I find this belief so bizarrely consistent with other facets of Mormonism, I do however, commend them to the degree that they at least attempt to synthesize the Biblical text. John 21:23 cannot be used as a proof text that he (John) survived until the parousia, but I do find the exchange between Peter and Jesus rather interesting since it must have at least been plausible that the disciple whom Jesus loved might live to witness Jesus' [cloud coming](#) return.

Instead of today's typical belief in a 2,000 year gap, separating the date of Jesus' prophecies from His anticipated return, this text seems to be consistent with the expectation that some of Jesus' hearers would live to "see" His coming. "*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 mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*" (Rev 1:7) And lest we lose sight of this verse's context, it should not go without notice that verse one and three of Revelation's first chapter set the tone for all that was "soon" to take place, for the time was "near":

- *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, Revelation 1:1 (NASB)*
- *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. Revelation 1:3 (NASB)*

I trust that we will eventually approximate the faith of Simeon. How can we begin to gain this kind of confidence in the Lord? I think faith is incremental and cumulative. First, by believing that Jesus was faithful to the direct recipients of the "this generation" promises. Realizing that the "*timing*" of His coming dictated the "*nature*" of His coming, is a giant step forward. Allow the full weight of the imminent language to begin to crush and rebuild your paradigm. Is it possible that we, like the first century Jews, have mistaken the nature of the parousia (return with a consequential presence) because we choose to ignore or trivialize His timing?

Based upon my experience, I realize that presuppositional reconstruction can be unnerving and disorienting but I can say with assurance that it will ultimately lead to peace and provide greater confidence in the inspired Word of God. For we can be certain that the One who was faithful to "them" will be forever be faithful to us.

If we are to encourage one another to know God's will, we must know His Word and be dedicated to the truth of it regardless where it leads or how uncomfortable it makes us feel. As the body of Christ continues to go through the maturing process, I hope that we will, to a greater degree, commit to "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*" (2Tim 2:15) Sadly, theology is oftentimes viewed with disdain as though diligent study's only byproduct is division. True, it surely can separate because truth is by its very nature divisive, but without it we will never truly know God and therefore be the kinds of ambassadors we are called to be.

I trust you will continue to hide these things in your heart as I humbly submit these thoughts.

If you'd like to see Matthew 16:27-28 [exegeted in detail](#), [Michael Sullivan](#) of www.TreeOfLifeMinistries.info, does a masterful job—you may be surprised how solid the evidence really is.