

Could the Church Have Missed the Second Coming?

by Stephen Kline

Obviously, Jesus has not returned, so how could preterists say that the Second Coming has already occurred? This is a common objection to fulfilled eschatology and a fair objection which needs to be dealt with. In order to deal with it, please bear with me as I try to illustrate from a television show that I enjoy watching once in a while.

Anyone else a fan of "All In the Family", starring the famous character Archie Bunker? I remember an episode which gives a perfect illustration of how easy it is for folks to collectively accept a certain paradigm and then the truth which stares them right in the face just flies right over their heads.

In this episode, Gloria came home with a riddle for the family. Here is the riddle: A man and his son were driving home. They were involved in a serious car accident and the man was killed instantly. The son was seriously injured and was rushed to the hospital for surgery. Upon seeing the boy, the doctor said "I can't operate on this boy. He is my son". How is this possible?

Archie, Edith and Mike were stumped and took turns trying to answer the question. Was the boy adopted and one was his adopted father and the other his real father? Was it a step father? No one could come up with the answer.

Finally, later in the episode, Edith figured it out. The Doctor was the boy's mother.

Gloria was the one telling the riddle so she already knew the answer. But Mike was shocked that the answer was so obvious yet he totally missed it because he had been conditioned to think that only men can be doctors. And, of course, Archie just couldn't accept the obvious truth right in front of him because he couldn't change his paradigm.

Now perhaps most of you already figured out the riddle before you read far enough to see the answer. But even if we have long been accustomed to understanding that women are Doctors too, I'm sure we've all been there in one way or another on other issues. We get so conditioned to believe a particular way on something, that it just doesn't occur to us that there could be another answer or another way to look at something, and then when someone suggests another possibility, we are shocked that something so obvious never entered our own mind until someone else said it.

I was there about 8 years ago when I first started looking into fulfilled eschatology. The only way I knew to think of the second coming was to understand it as a literal bodily

return to bring about the end of human history and to set up a literal kingdom, headquartered in Jerusalem, and rule the world. So when I saw that there were these clowns out there teaching that Jesus had already come back, it sounded so absurd because there's no way that happened 2,000 years ago.

Where is Jesus? Why can't we see him? Why is he not giving press conferences on TV and issuing decrees as he rules the world? Those are literally the first questions I asked when I started questioning preterism. It sounded so absurd, yet it was so absurd that I just couldn't help asking some questions to find out why folks could believe such nonsense.

I had been raised in a paradigm believing that Jesus was going to descend from the sky as a literal human body and rule the world from a literal throne in a literal rebuilt Jerusalem. That's how I was conditioned to think. Yet I learned about the invisible judgment comings of God in the Old Testament and how these events were called "the Day of the Lord" and that this was what was going to happen to Jerusalem in that generation before they all died. The lights went on in my head and I felt like Mike Stivic in that Archie episode where it dawned on him that the doctor was a woman—and that's how the boy could be her son.

The answer so simple and staring us all in the face, yet it has flown right over our heads for centuries because somewhere along the line, the church started assuming that it must be a literal physical coming. So generation after generation was taught that and just assumed it to be true, so no matter how many prophecies were interpreted as past events, it never even dawned on anyone that maybe, just maybe....EVERYTHING was a past event and we are operating under a wrong paradigm.

Now WHY did the church start teaching a literal future bodily coming? That's the million dollar question. I can give you my opinion, for what it's worth and maybe I'm right, maybe I'm not.

My opinion is that after the prophesied events all came to pass, there was no longer any need to dwell on these prophecies, because they were all fulfilled, so it was time to move on. Just as after World War 2, they no longer needed to focus on planning for the Normandy Invasion because it already happened, was a success and the war is over, now it's time to make a new world. After 70 AD, the church was then focused on evangelism and apologetics and kingdom building. They had little need to preach on prophecy because they understood it was fulfilled and irrelevant now to their message, so they weren't spending their time trying to draw up charts and timelines and trying to harmonize Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation.

In addition, as the Jewish believers began to die out and the church ceased to be primarily Jewish and became primarily Greek and Gentile, the church was primarily populated by folks who had little training in the Old Testament. Whereas the Jewish believers had spent their lives going to synagogue and hearing the scriptures preached from childhood, these gentile believers had spent their lives worshipping pagan gods and had come to Christ from those false religions. So they didn't have much training in the Old Testament prophets nor the prophecies of the judgement. So as time went on, and they became farther removed from AD 70, they began to look at these scriptures from a woodenly literalistic Greek mindset, rather than understanding them from the context of a Hebraic way of thought. So they began to assume a literal return of Christ and yet had no reason to question it because they were preoccupied with tending to the work at hand and not trying to map out the future.

So with no one taking the time to put the subject up for discussion because, unlike today's prophecy hucksters, they were trying to advance the kingdom and not sell sensationalistic books, the church just began and continued to ASSUME a future coming of Christ, and this assumption carried over from generation to generation. As a result, people knew of no other way to conceive of the coming of Christ other than an earth burning, time ending event.

So well-studied, spiritual men would see 70 AD fulfillment for many prophecies, yet it just never clicked in their minds that ALL prophecy may have been fulfilled because they just *assumed* their paradigm of an earth burning time ending event which had not happened yet, so it must be future. So they all ended up like Mike, Archie and Edith, trying to figure out how the boy could be the Doctor's son when his Dad was already dead, while oblivious to the fact that the Doctor could be his mother.

Unfortunately, at this part of the story, at least, most Christians are like Archie Bunker. When the truth is told to them of the true timing and nature of Christ's coming, rather than welcome the new paradigm and allowing the lightbulb to click on in their heads, they want to stand there and argue with it instead.