Jesus has already returned!

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(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

The preterist view of eschatology holds that Jesus has returned already.
And it does so for several very good reasons.

Jesus promised to return before his generation had all passed on.

He made this promise on at least three separate occasions:

Matthew 10:23:
But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

Matthew 16:27-28 (ESV):
27 *"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*
28 *Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

Matthew 24:30, 34:
30 *and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*
34 *Verily I say unto you, <u>This generation shall not pass away</u>, till all these things be accomplished.*

Here is the gospel of Mark's version of Matthew 16:27-28:

Mark 8:38 – 9:1 (ESV):
38 *"For whoever is ashamed of me … , of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*
9:1 *And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."*

Note that in each of the above cited passages Jesus employs the phrase: "*Verily* [or *truly*] I say unto you …".
Whenever encountering this phrase the reader should sit up and take special notice.
Why so?
Because the Greek word ἀμην (*amēn*) here rendered *verily* or *truly* serves in this context as an emphasis marker which introduces a statement of pivotal importance — one that is essential for interpreting the entire passage.
(See the Bible Hub entry for Strong's G281 [*amēn*]: https://biblehub.com/greek/281.htm.)

Jesus tied his return to the fall of Jerusalem

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 – 25; Mark 13; Luke 21) is all about Jesus returning on the clouds as Judge — to judge the (Roman) world, with a particular focus on the nation that had crucified him.
Importantly, Jesus in this Discourse ties his return to the fall of Jerusalem.
He warns his first-century followers to be watchful, lest they be caught up in that judgment.
They are to urgently flee Jerusalem when they see certain signs.
See Matthew 24:15-20; Luke 21:20-24.

From now on you will see!

Matthew 26:64:
Jesus saith unto [Caiaphas], Thou hast said [it]: nevertheless I say unto you,
Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power,
and coming on the clouds of heaven.

This promise differs from those above (on page 1) in that here, Jesus promises to be seen not at some unspecified time in the future, but "henceforth" (ASV), "from now on" (ESV, NET, NIV 2011).
He will be "seen" to be seated in heaven and coming on the clouds.

But how would the Jewish leaders see Jesus thus?
Answer:
In events soon to transpire, they will begin to PERCEIVE that he was truly the One he had claimed to be.
That he was the Son of Man and messianic King foretold in Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 110.
And that he was now ruling at God's right hand, and was about to judge them!

The following would provide indisputable proof:
Miraculous signs at Pentecost (Ac 2:3-4); the apostles' boldness (Ac 4:13); further signs and wonders (Ac 5:12; 6:8); Stephen's vision (Ac 7:56); the mass-turning of the Gentiles to Israel's God; finally, the calamities to befall their own nation, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem and loss of their temple.
But in all these events Jesus himself would not literally be seen by the Jewish leaders.

"Seeing" in Matthew 26:64 is to be understood in the sense of *perceiving*.

New Testament authors, without exception, expected a first-century Parousia, resurrection, and judgment

The apostolic Church took Jesus at his word!
They believed his promises; they believed he would return in their lifetimes.
This expectation can be seen on virtually every page of the New Testament epistles.
Consider the following, from five different New Testament authors:

1 Corinthians 1:7 (my translation):
so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 4:5b:
The Lord is at hand.

1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17:
15 *… we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord …*
17 *then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up …*

1 Timothy 6:14:
that thou keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Hebrews 10:25, 37:
25 *not forsaking our own assembling together, … but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.*
37 *For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.*

James 5:7-9 (ESV):
7 *Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. …*
8 *You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*
9 *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

1 Peter 4:5, 7, 17 (adapted from the ASV):
5 *[they] shall give account to him that is ready to judge the living and the dead.*
7 *But the end of all things is at hand: …*
17 *For the time is come for [the] judgment to begin at the house of God: and if it begins first with us, what shall be the end for those that obey not the gospel of God?*[1]

[1] 1 Peter 4:17 (Greek text): τὸ κρίμα (*to krima*) = THE Judgment. This is an anaphoric article which points the reader back to a judgment already mentioned — that of the living and the dead in 1 Peter 4:5.
The following translations include the definite article: CJB, Darby, DLNT, GW, JUB, LEB, NABRE, NEB, NOG, YLT.

1 John 2:18:

Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.

Other NT References:

Philippians 1:6, 10; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:2; 2 Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; Jude 1:14-15.

New Testament authors — under divine inspiration — all expected Jesus to return soon.
Were they mistaken?
Or is it rather the post-apostolic Church that is wrong — its leaders, creeds, hymns, and confessions?

Objection 1:

Acts 1 tells us that Jesus will return bodily and visibly, the same way he left.

Acts 1:9-11 is commonly taken to mean that Jesus will come back exactly as he left — in his physical, resurrection body. As he ascended bodily, so also will he descend bodily.

But it is doubtful whether that is what the angels intended.
Their meaning is rather that Jesus would return in the way the apostles saw him enter heaven (1:11).
In other words, the focus should be on the manner of his entry and return: IN A CLOUD (1:9).
Just as Jesus was seen to enter heaven in a cloud, so would he return in a cloud.
Indeed, this seems to be how the author of Acts himself understood the angels — see Luke 21:27.[2]

Moreover, no ordinary cloud is intended, but rather the Shekinah, the Cloud of God's presence and glory.
Jesus ascended in the Shekinah, entering the very presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:24).
He was "taken up in glory" (1Tim 3:16, ESV), and with that same GLORY he would soon return (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Tit 2:13; 1Pet 4:13).

Jesus was Daniel's *son of man* figure who ascended "with the clouds of heaven" into Yahweh's presence to be invested with divine authority (Dan 7:13-14).
And that's also how Jesus would return:
On/with the clouds, with divine authority, as the Judge (Mt 26:64; Rev 1:7).

[2] It seems likely that the angels in Acts 1 are actually rebuking and correcting the disciples. The disciples wanted Jesus back with them as before, but they needed to understand that he was now in heaven at God's right hand, fully glorified. His future return would be personal but not physical (cf. 1Cor 15:50). To come on the clouds (or in a cloud) is to come in divine glory. That is how Jesus entered heaven, and that is how he would return.

Objection 2:

The book of Revelation has not yet been fulfilled, for it depicts Jesus' return, the Resurrection, and the Final Judgment.

This objection is 100% wrong:

1. The entire content of Revelation is bookended by clear time statements telling us precisely when John's visions were to be fulfilled:

   Revelation 1:1, 3 (adapted from the ASV):
   [1] *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: …*
   [3] *Blessed is he that reads [aloud], and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.*[3]

   Revelation 22:6, 10:
   [6] *And he said unto me, … the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.*
   [10] *And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand.*

   Therefore, every one of John's visions, without exception, concerned first-century events.[4]

2. Jesus himself promises, throughout Revelation, to come back "soon".
   And he urges his first-century followers to maintain their Christian profession until he does so.
   For he was coming to judge their enemies — the false teachers within the churches, and their persecutors without.[5]

   Revelation 2:16 (ESV):
   [To Pergamum]: *"Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."*

   Revelation 2:25 (ESV):
   [To Thyatira]: *"Only hold fast what you have until I come."*

   Revelation 3:11 (ESV):
   [To Philadelphia]: *"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."*

[3] Revelation was intended to be read aloud in the recipient churches, before their assembled congregations. With persecution imminent and martyrdom likely, church members would be "blessed" by Revelation's message and strengthened in their resolve. The relevance of Revelation to first-century Christians cannot be overemphasized.
[4] Revelation is to be dated early, ca. 64 AD, since it foretells Nero's persecution (64-68 AD) and the Jewish-Roman War (66-70 AD).
[5] Jesus' coming would bring relief to his persecuted first-century followers (cf. Lk 18:7-8; 2Thes 1:7; Jas 5:7-11). The Christians of Asia had long been persecuted by local Jewish groups (Rev 2:9; 3:9). But Roman persecution was about to break out. Nero's inquisition — depicted in Revelation as "the beast" — began around November 64 AD.

Revelation 22:7, 12, 20 (ESV):

[7] *"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*

[12] *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."*

[20] *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."*

3. The whole point of Revelation is to <u>reveal</u> that which could not be seen by mortal eyes.
   Revelation itself is the *apokalypsis* — the "uncovering", "unveiling", "revealing" — of Jesus Christ (1:1).
   Revelation shows him enthroned in heaven, orchestrating events on earth.
   Revelation was given to help people rightly interpret the momentous events soon to break out.
   For Jesus would be "seen" (1:7) only as John's prophecies were fulfilled.
   As judgment was meted out — on the Beast (Nero), on the Harlot City (Jerusalem), and on the entire Roman world — Jesus' heavenly authority would be manifested.
   His divine glory would be revealed: he was Lord, and he was the Judge.
   Everyone would "see" (perceive) that this was so!

4. The book of Revelation shows the fulfillment of Jesus' Olivet Discourse.[6]
   It foretells, among other things, the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem.
   For Jerusalem is the "great city" of Revelation — the Harlot City (11:8; 16:19; 18:10, 18).
   She is contrasted with Christ's faithful Bride — <u>New</u> Jerusalem, the Church, the people of God.
   The dramatic destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was "the sign of the Son of man in heaven" (Mt 24:30).
   It demonstrated that Jesus was in heaven co-ruling with Yahweh (Mt 26:64; cf. Ps 110:1-2; Dan 7:13-14).[7]

5. Revelation is further concerned with the coming of God's eternal kingdom:
   Jesus was ushering in his kingdom with irresistible power, just as he had promised in the gospels (Rev 11:15-18; cf. Mt 16:28; Mk 9:1; Lk 21:31).

6. But what about the Resurrection and the Judgment of the Dead, as shown in Revelation 20:11-15?
   Answer: According to John, these were contemporaneous with the judgment of the living (Rev 11:18).
   They transpired following the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet (Rev 11:15; cf. 1Cor 15:52).
   Resurrection entailed the release of souls from Hades, not the raising of bodies from earthly graves.[8]
   And the Judgment itself took place before the throne of God in heaven.
   Neither the Resurrection, nor this Judgment, were visible to mortal eyes: we just have to take John's word for it!

7. Similarly with Satan's punishment: we just have to accept that Satan is now in hell (Rev 20:10), despite appearances to the contrary.

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[6] In fact, it is probably right to regard Revelation as John's extended version of the Olivet Discourse, now about to be fulfilled.

[7] Of course, along with Jerusalem the entire first-century Roman world was judged (Rev 22:12; cf. Mt 16:27; 25:31-46). The <u>living</u> and the <u>dead</u> were both soon to be judged (Rev 11:18; Ac 10:42; 2Tim 4:1; 1Pet 4:5) — the extent of the former encompassing all those nations where the gospel had been proclaimed and rejected (Mt 25:31-46; cf. Mt 24:9, 14).

[8] Right at the start of Revelation, Jesus declares that he has conquered death and acquired the keys of Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). The implication being this: Jesus is about to unlock these realms and release their inmates!

Objection 3: If there's no future Parousia, what hope do we have?

Answer: Lots of hope!
For starters, we go directly to heaven when we die.
As to the world's future, the preterist view is far more optimistic than traditional views.
Most Christians have a doom and gloom view of the future:
The world is irrevocably wicked; things can only get worse; everything is soon going to be burnt to a crisp; our only hope is to be raptured out of this mess.
Anyway, you get the picture — modern Christianity is to all intents a doomsday cult.

But the truth, thankfully, is much better.
Preterism insists (from Scripture) that the world has a bright future.
For an explanation as to why we should be optimistic, see my article on this website:
Preterism — an antidote to Christian pessimism.

For more on the nature and timing of Jesus' Return, see the following articles on this website:

1. *New Testament Expectations*.
2. *The Nature of Jesus' Return*.
3. *Revelation's Relevance for first-century Christians*.
4. *Revelation: A Preterist Interpretation*.
5. *Judgment of the Sheep and Goats*.